

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

Commission on Public Schools



Committee on Public Secondary Schools

**Report of the Visiting Team for
Arts at the Capitol Theater**

Willimantic, CT

April 30, 2017 - May 03, 2017

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STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

THE DISTRIBUTION, USE, AND SCOPE OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Committee on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report to be a privileged document submitted by the Committee 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 this school in terms of 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 committee.

STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

The Committee on Public Secondary School's Standards for Accreditation serve as the foundation for the accreditation process and by which accreditation decisions are made. The seven Standards are qualitative, challenging, and reflect current research and best practice. The Standards, written and approved by the membership, establish the components of schools to ensure an effective and appropriate focus on teaching and learning and the support of teaching and learning.

Teaching and Learning Standards

Core Values and Beliefs About Learning

Curriculum

Instruction

Assessment of and for Student Learning

Support Standards

School Culture and Leadership

School Resources for Learning

Community Resources for Learning

CORE VALUES, BELIEFS, AND LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

Teaching and Learning Standard

Effective schools identify core values and beliefs about learning that function as explicit foundational commitments to students and the community. Decision-making remains focused on and aligned with these critical commitments. Core values and beliefs manifest themselves in research-based, school-wide 21st century learning expectations. Every component of the school is driven by the core values and beliefs and supports all students' achievement of the school's learning expectations.

1. The school community engages in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by current research-based practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning.
2. The school has challenging and measurable 21st century learning expectations for all students which address academic, social and civic competencies. Each expectation is defined by specific and measurable criteria for success, such as school-wide analytic rubrics, which define targeted high levels of achievement.
3. The school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations are actively reflected in the culture of the school, drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in every classroom, and guide the school's policies, procedures, decisions and resource allocations.
4. The school regularly reviews and revises its core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as district and school community priorities.

CURRICULUM

Teaching and Learning Standard

The written and taught curriculum is designed to result in all students achieving the school's 21st century expectations for student learning. The written curriculum is the framework within which a school aligns and personalizes the school's 21st century learning expectations. The curriculum includes a purposefully designed set of course offerings, co-curricular programs, and other learning opportunities. The curriculum reflects the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The curriculum is collaboratively developed, implemented, reviewed, and revised based on analysis of student performance and current research.

1. The curriculum is purposefully designed to ensure that all students practice and achieve each of the school's 21st century learning expectations.
2. The curriculum is written in a common format that includes:
 - units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, and skills
 - the school's 21st century learning expectations
 - instructional strategies
 - assessment practices that include the use of specific and measurable criteria for success, school-wide analytic and course-specific rubrics.
3. The curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through:
 - inquiry and problem-solving
 - higher order thinking
 - cross-disciplinary learning
 - authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school
 - informed and ethical use of technology.
4. There is clear alignment between the written and taught curriculum.
5. Effective curricular coordination and vertical articulation exist between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.
6. Staffing levels, instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and the resources of the library/media center are sufficient to fully implement the curriculum, including the co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities.
7. The district provides the school's professional staff with sufficient personnel, time, and financial resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research.

INSTRUCTION

Teaching and Learning Standard

The quality of instruction is the single most important factor in students' achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations. Instruction is responsive to student needs, deliberate in its design and delivery, and grounded in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. Instruction is supported by research in best practices. Teachers are reflective and collaborative about their instructional strategies and collaborative with their colleagues to improve student learning.

1. Teachers' instructional practices are continuously examined to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations.
2. Teachers' instructional practices support the achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations by:
 - personalizing instruction
 - engaging students in cross-disciplinary learning
 - engaging students as active and self-directed learners
 - emphasizing inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking
 - applying knowledge and skills to authentic tasks
 - engaging students in self-assessment and reflection
 - integrating technology.
3. Teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student by:
 - using formative assessment, especially during instructional time
 - strategically differentiating
 - purposefully organizing group learning activities
 - providing additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom.
4. Teachers, individually and collaboratively, improve their instructional practices by:
 - using student achievement data from a variety of formative and summative assessments
 - examining student work
 - using feedback from a variety of sources, including students, other teachers, supervisors, and parents
 - examining current research
 - engaging in professional discourse focused on instructional practice.
5. Teachers, as adult learners and reflective practitioners, maintain expertise in their content area and in content-specific instructional practices.

ASSESSMENT OF AND FOR STUDENT LEARNING

Teaching and Learning Standard

Assessment informs students and stakeholders of progress and growth toward meeting the school's 21st century learning expectations. Assessment results are shared and discussed on a regular basis to improve student learning. Assessment results inform teachers about student achievement in order to adjust curriculum and instruction.

1. The professional staff continuously employs a formal process to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations based on specific and measurable criteria for success, such as school-wide analytic rubrics
2. The school's professional staff communicates:
 - individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students and their families
 - the school's progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to the school community.
3. Professional staff collects, disaggregates, and analyzes data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement.
4. Prior to each unit of study, teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed.
5. Prior to summative assessments, teachers provide students with specific and measurable criteria for success, such as corresponding rubrics, which define targeted high levels of achievement.
6. In each unit of study, teachers employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments.
7. Teachers collaborate regularly in formal ways on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments.
8. Teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure students revise and improve their work.
9. Teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.
10. Teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, including all of the following:
 - student work
 - common course and common grade-level assessments
 - individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations
 - standardized assessments
 - data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions
 - survey data from current students and alumni.
11. Grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's

core values and beliefs about learning.

SCHOOL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Support Standard

The school culture is equitable and inclusive, and it embodies the school's foundational core values and beliefs about student learning. It is characterized by reflective, collaborative, and constructive dialogue about research-based practices that support high expectations for the learning of all students. The leadership of the school fosters a safe, positive culture by promoting learning, cultivating shared leadership, and engaging all members of the school community in efforts to improve teaching and learning.

1. The school community consciously and continuously builds a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility for learning and results in shared ownership, pride, and high expectations for all.
2. The school is equitable and inclusive, ensuring access to challenging academic experiences for all students, making certain that courses throughout the curriculum are populated with students reflecting the diversity of the student body, fostering heterogeneity, and supporting the achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations.
3. There is a formal, on-going program(s) or process(es) through which each student has an adult in the school, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations.
4. In order to improve student learning through professional development, the principal and professional staff:
 - engage in professional discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning
 - use resources outside of the school to maintain currency with best practices
 - dedicate formal time to implement professional development
 - apply the skills, practices, and ideas gained in order to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
5. School leaders regularly use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning.
6. The organization of time supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students.
7. Student load and class size enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students.
8. The principal, working with other building leaders, provides instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations.
9. Teachers, students, and parents are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership.
10. Teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning.
11. The school board, superintendent, and principal are collaborative, reflective, and constructive in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations.

12. The school board and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school.

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Support Standard

Student learning and well-being are dependent upon adequate and appropriate support. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of coordinated programs and services. These resources enhance and improve student learning and well-being and support the school's core values and beliefs. Student support services enable each student to achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations.

1. The school has timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies for all students, including identified and at-risk students, that support each student's achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations.
2. The school provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services.
3. Support services staff use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student.
4. School counseling services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
 - deliver a written, developmental program
 - meet regularly with students to provide personal, academic, career, and college counseling
 - engage in individual and group meetings with all students
 - deliver collaborative outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers
 - use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21st century learning expectations.
5. The school's health services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
 - provide preventative health services and direct intervention services
 - use an appropriate referral process
 - conduct ongoing student health assessments
 - use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21st century learning expectations.
6. Library/media services are integrated into curriculum and instructional practices and have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
 - are actively engaged in the implementation of the school's curriculum
 - provide a wide range of materials, technologies, and other information services in support of the school's curriculum
 - ensure that the facility is available and staffed for students and teachers before, during, and after school
 - are responsive to students' interests and needs in order to support independent learning
 - conduct ongoing assessment using relevant data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21st century learning expectations.
7. Support services for identified students, including special education, Section 504 of the ADA, and English language learners, have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
 - collaborate with all teachers, counselors, targeted services, and other support staff in order to achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations
 - provide inclusive learning opportunities for all students

- perform ongoing assessment using relevant data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21st century learning expectations.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Support Standard

The achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations requires active community, governing board, and parent advocacy. Through dependable and adequate funding, the community provides the personnel, resources, and facilities to support the delivery of curriculum, instruction, programs, and services.

1. The community and the district's governing body provide dependable funding for:
 - a wide range of school programs and services
 - sufficient professional and support staff
 - ongoing professional development and curriculum revision
 - a full range of technology support
 - sufficient equipment
 - sufficient instructional materials and supplies.
2. The school develops, plans, and funds programs:
 - to ensure the maintenance and repair of the building and school plant
 - to properly maintain, catalogue, and replace equipment
 - to keep the school clean on a daily basis.
3. The community funds and the school implements a long-range plan that addresses:
 - programs and services
 - enrollment changes and staffing needs
 - facility needs
 - technology
 - capital improvements.
4. Faculty and building administrators are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget.
5. The school site and plant support the delivery of high quality school programs and services.
6. The school maintains documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
7. All professional staff actively engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and reach out specifically to those families who have been less connected with the school.
8. The school develops productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning.

School and Community Summary

School and Community Summary

Established in 2004, and located in the Capitol Theater in busy downtown Willimantic, Connecticut, Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) is a full-day, comprehensive, arts magnet high school serving grades 9-12. ACT offers an integrated approach to instruction, infusing standards-based academic courses with a variety of arts disciplines, and providing differentiated instruction to address individual learning needs. Students study with certified academic teachers and professional artists in this small, arts-focused learning community. Each grade is limited to about 35 students, making this an intimate, focused, artistic learning environment.

Arts at the Capitol Theater is run by EASTCONN, a regional educational service center. EASTCONN's other schools include another magnet school (Quinebaug Middle College), three clinical day treatment programs (Northeast Regional Program, Southeast Regional Program, and Educational & Vocational Program), and an Autism Program.

An extended-day schedule from 8:45 a.m. to 4:25 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and from 8:45 a.m. to 1:07 p.m. on Fridays, allows students to take 12 classes per semester and fully immerse themselves in the performing arts, whether on stage, or behind the scenes. Arts at the Capitol Theater provides a student-centered approach in a rigorous, arts-infused program that takes into account each individual student's talents and interests, so that motivation for learning remains high. The curriculum and performance-based programming at ACT provide interdisciplinary education in the arts and academics that enhance learning for all students.

Areas of artistic study include acting, audio/video production, creative writing, dance, and theater production (set design, lighting design and costuming). The Capitol Theater itself includes three theaters, a set design and construction shop, audio/video editing suites, classrooms, dance studios, a costume shop, computer-aided drafting equipment, and a cafe.

Arts at the Capitol Theater includes students from 38 sending towns with the total enrollment of 130, for the 2015-2016 school year. The school population has remained stable over the past five years with an average of 137 students. The ethnic, racial and cultural composition has remained constant with 17% Hispanic students, 2.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 1.5% Asian students, 9.3% African-American students, 65% Caucasian students and 4.6% students of two or more ethnic backgrounds. The average dropout rate for the past two years has been 3.6%, the quarterly average daily student attendance 93.5%, and the average attendance rate among teachers 99.8%. The graduation rate is 96.4%.

There are 20 teachers at ACT, creating a ratio of 6.25:1. Individual teachers carry an average load of 82 students with an average class size of 10. Students attend school for 180 days and for a minimum of 1,260 hours of instruction for the year.

Students are recommended for a level (standard, college prep, or honors) for some of their academic classes. English, math, 9th and 10th grade science courses, World History, and US History are each offered in three levels. Advanced Placement Statistics or college course work are additional options. ACT students have access to pre-college academic support, in partnership with Quinebaug Valley Community College and Eastern Connecticut State University. This allows qualified upperclassmen to participate in college classes and earn college credit at no cost while attending ACT. All ACT students are enrolled in 12 courses each semester; half their course load is in the performing arts.

ACT offers five majors from which students can choose a path of study: acting, A/V, creative writing, dance, theater production. Each major has its own required program courses in which students can choose from. Many upper level arts courses require prerequisites. There are also courses within each major any student can take, regardless of their major. This encourages students to experience art forms in different areas.

Over the last three years, 57 percent of graduates attended four-year colleges, with 19 percent enrolling in two-

year colleges and 24 percent pursuing other options including entering the workforce. Working in collaboration with students' sending towns, ACT students have been able to participate in workforce transition programs such as Job Corp and Summer Youth Employment.

ACT has established several school/business partnerships. The Windham Area Interfaith Ministry is located two buildings down and has provided students with several community service opportunities including clothes and donation sorting and a community garden co-op. Video students are able to get real world experience in the field by filming commercials and training videos for EASTCONN as well as working with local Willimantic businesses to create commercials and advertisements. The school has a relationship with the Willimantic Public Library, and student have been able to utilize their resources for research-based projects and papers. Project READ, a collaboration between ACT, the Willimantic Public Library, and Eastern Connecticut State University promotes literacy in the community.

Students talents and achievements are recognized in a variety of ways at ACT. A student of the month program highlights a student that staff members recognize as going above and beyond expectations and modeling the school's core values. The National Honors Society recognizes junior and senior students that maintain an 88% average. Eligible students apply to be members and are selected based on their characteristics of Leadership, Character, and Service. Each quarter students who achieve honor roll and high honors are recognized by posting the list of students in the lobby and on Schoology. Students earning honors for quarters 1-3 are recognized in May with an honors breakfast and awards ceremony.

In addition to academic achievement, many of students are recognized for their artistic talents in a variety of writing competitions, film contests, and our professional level performances throughout the year. Each year ACT celebrates seniors' academic and artistic accomplishments on Senior Day with senior awards and testimonials given out by each department.

Core Values, Beliefs and Learning Expectations

CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS

The students, teachers, parents and community members of Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) school collaborate to promote an education in arts and academics that inspires intellectual exploration, creative expression, and personal motivation in students. Through intensive, rigorous educational experiences in our caring and safe environment, our students learn to understand deeply the imperative that is our philosophical foundation:

Respect Yourself *Respect the Work *Respect the Community

The ACT Community *believes* that:

- arts education enhances academic learning;
- academic learning strengthens artistic endeavors;
- real-world application of learning embeds knowledge;
- effective teaching and learning involves effective collaboration;
- diversity is a strength that must be actively embraced in learning.

The ACT Community *is committed* to:

- educating the whole person - intellectually, creatively, physically, emotionally;
- respecting individual differences, talents, and life experiences;
- preparing students for productive lives as artists and as citizens;
- elevating personal and artistic standards through education;
- making connections among arts, academics, and life.

The ACT Community *provides*:

- a respectful, safe environment in which students explore their creative potential;
- opportunities for students to explore new areas of learning and personal expression;
- a professional perspective and preparation for life in the arts and in the world;
- purposeful, effective integration of arts and academic curricula;
- unique, authentic learning experiences and assessments.

The learning community of Arts at the Capitol Theater School has identified the following learning expectations for all students:

ACADEMIC LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

The ACT graduate:

- displays ability to **integrate the arts** and creative expression across curricular disciplines.
- **writes** effectively, with clarity, purpose, and understanding for an appropriate audience.
- demonstrates appropriate **communication** for a variety of purposes and audiences with accurate content, clarity, and confidence.
- applies effective strategies for **problem solving** by gathering information, analyzing and interpreting data, thinking critically, and communicating strategies.
- demonstrates skillful and **creative expression** in the arts and evaluates character and aesthetic qualities in art forms.
- demonstrates appropriate **reading and listening** skills for a variety of purposes.

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

The ACT graduate:

- takes **responsibility** for their words and actions.
- demonstrates **collaboration** skills as a member of a team, is able to teach others new skills, and exercises **leadership** qualities and **negotiation** skills.
- understands and applies concepts of lifelong physical, mental, and social **health**.
- demonstrates a professional perspective and preparation for **post-secondary** success.

CIVIC EXPECTATIONS

The ACT graduate:

- demonstrates **ethical** behavior and **respect** for diversity.
- demonstrates an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of **citizenship** in the school, the community, and the world.
- understands and respects the need for standards of **self-discipline, accountability, integrity, and ethics** in a civil society.

Introduction

Introduction

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is the oldest of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. Since its inception in 1885, the Association has awarded membership and accreditation to those educational institutions in the six-state New England region who seek voluntary affiliation.

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees which supervises the work of four Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public Schools which is comprised of the Committee on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Committee on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), and the Committee on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (CPEMS), and the Commission on International Education (CIE).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public secondary school member institutions, CPSS requires visiting teams to assess the degree to which the evaluated schools align with the qualitative Standards for Accreditation of the Committee. Those Standards are:

Teaching and Learning Standards

Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

Curriculum

Instruction

Assessment of and for Student Learning

Support of Teaching and Learning Standards

School Culture and Leadership

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 Committee's visiting team, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-study, the valid recommendations of the visiting team, and those identified by the Committee 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 Accreditation 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 the Arts at the Capitol Theater Magnet School, a committee of five faculty members, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all 26 faculty teachers and staff in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people.

The self-study of Arts at the Capitol Theater Magnet School extended over a period of 18 school months from the spring of 2015 to the winter of 2017. The visiting team was pleased to note that parents and members of the student council were involved with the steering committee providing revisions and editing to the research.

Public schools evaluated by the Committee on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their alignment with the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's core values, beliefs, and 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 Committee, Arts at the Capitol Theater Magnet School also used questionnaires developed by The Research Center at Endicott College 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 Team

A visiting team of nine members was assigned by the Committee on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Arts at the Capitol Theater Magnet School. The visiting team members spent four days in Willimantic, Connecticut, reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students and parents, shadowed students, visited classes, and interviewed teachers to determine the degree to which the school aligns with the Committee's Standards for Accreditation. Since the members of the visiting team represented classroom teachers, guidance counselors, library/media specialists, school administrators, and central office administrators, (*Chair: Cite only those groups who were actually represented*) diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Arts at the Capitol Theater Magnet School.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- Eighteen hours shadowing nine students for a half day
- a total of thirteen hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- individual meetings with nine teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers

Each conclusion in the report was agreed to by visiting team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting team are included with each Indicator in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the visiting team's judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better align with Committee Standards.

This report of the findings of the visiting team will be forwarded to the Committee on Public Secondary Schools which will make a decision on the accreditation of Arts at the Capitol Theater School.

Standard 1 Indicator 1

Conclusions

When the community began to design the Arts at the Capital Theater Magnet School, parents, community members, and teachers worked together to focus their vision around core values and beliefs about learning. During 2009-2010, they engaged in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by research provided by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The school community, consisting of faculty, students, and the parent advisory group (PACT) conducted a formal plan to identify its core values and beliefs about learning and best practices by reviewing core values and beliefs of other arts and non-arts based schools. In September of 2010, the entire school accepted the core values and beliefs document. Students are drawn to the school because of the deep commitment to its core values expressed in the statement: "Respect yourself, Respect the community, Respect the work." The deep connection between and among students and faculty is obvious throughout the school as the members of the school interact in a respectful and collaborative manner. This deep commitment to the core values and beliefs of the school ensures that the school and community remain committed to their core values and beliefs.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- panel presentation
- teachers
- students
- community members
- Endicott survey

Standard 1 Indicator 2

Conclusions

The school has measurable 21st century learning expectations for all students which address academic, social and civic competencies that are clearly defined by school-wide analytic rubrics that identify high levels of achievement. The school's learning expectations are available to students and are disseminated throughout the school in student handbooks, posted in the classroom and shared with parents. Rubrics are used to measure arts integration across disciplines, arts literacy, effective writing, reading/literacy, and effective communication. These rubrics are specific and identify high levels of achievement. A senior capstone project is in place which assesses student attainment of these expectations. Although the school has begun to gather evidence, as yet there is little formal data collected that measures the success for all students. The majority of the student community stated that their courses are challenging and they see an informal connection between their learning and the school's expectations. As the school, staff and students become more experienced in understanding the connection between the learning expectations and student achievement, the students will be able to better demonstrate their skills and competencies.

Sources of Evidence

- teacher interview
- teachers
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 1 Indicator 3

Conclusions

By design, the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations are at times reflected in the culture of the school, drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in every classroom, and guide the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocations. The ACT curriculum is based on integrating the arts and academics with cross-disciplinary courses that conjoin with intellectual exploration, creative expression, and personal motivation, reflecting the school's core values. As a performing arts magnet school, ACT attracts students with similar interests creating an innovative and unique culture. The school has made significant effort to support the social, cultural, gender diversity of students. (e.g. the Sexuality and Gender Alliance and the Anti-Bullying Initiative). ACT frequently allows the student body to choose specific curriculum which allows for exploration and motivation adhering to the school's beliefs and 21st century learning expectations. It is evident that ACT demonstrates ethical behavior and respect for diversity in correlation to the school's academic, social, and civic expectations. There is obvious respect demonstrated between and among the students and faculty and a deep commitment to the community as well. All students perform mandatory community service, as well as perform at community events. Throughout the school there is clear evidence of cooperative learning, which according to the self-study is the basis of instruction at ACT. Occasionally students are able to, with assistance from their course teacher, construct their own assessments specific to areas of interest allowing students to take full responsibility for their learning. The underlying culture of the school instills the core values, beliefs, and expectations for all, and that culture drives decision making for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- student shadowing
- teachers
- students
- school leadership

Standard 1 Indicator 4

Conclusions

The school has not yet adopted a formal review and revision process in regard to its core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as on district and school community priorities. Although there has been some data collected through multiple intelligence surveys, no school-wide formal process has been established. While students informally showcase the core values, it is not evident there is a system in place to review and revisit these beliefs and learning expectations. Although school leaders and faculty have certainly looked at data and had conversations about learning expectations, a formal and structured process for revision including faculty, parents, and administrators is still in process. Despite the lack of data collected, there appears to be meaningful discussion happening among faculty in relation to core value and learning expectations. A formal revision process will ensure that the school remains committed to its core values and beliefs and that the students achieve the 21st learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- facility tour
- teacher interview
- teachers

Standard 1 Commendations

Commendation

The core values and beliefs which reflect the school's intellectual curiosity and diversity

Commendation

The respectful and enthusiastic interaction between students and staff which demonstrate the school's core values and beliefs

Commendation

The development of the analytic rubrics which measure the 21st century civic, social, and learning expectations

Commendation

The inclusive process used in the development of the original core values, beliefs, and the 21st century learning expectations

Standard 1 Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a formal process to review and revise the core values, beliefs, and learning expectations on a regular basis

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to ensure that all decisions regarding curriculum and assessment reflect the core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations

Recommendation

Design and implement a plan so that the entire school community understands the clear connection of 21st century skills and school-wide assessments

Standard 2 Indicator 1

Conclusions

Some curriculum is designed to ensure that students practice and achieve each of the school's 21st century learning expectations. Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) has identified the 21st learning expectations and each academic and arts department assumes responsibility. Most courses have a common format for curriculum maps. Formal curricular documents are available to a limited number of courses. Teachers at ACT are asked to submit updated curriculum maps at the beginning of the school year. Frequently students were observed engaging in meaningful work that aligned with the 21st century learning expectations. Curricular documents, however, do not accurately reflect the extent and depth of the learning objectives. While some courses offerings go beyond what is identified in the curricular maps, some courses have been unable to meet the course objectives due to limited prior content mastery by students coming from sending schools. The Endicott survey reports that teachers, students, and parents believe that the ACT's formal curriculum ensures that all students practice and achieve 21st learning expectations. The limited number of curriculum maps and comprehensive formal curriculum limits the ability to ensure that all students are meeting 21st learning expectations. Since these learning expectations are not formally recorded, some students may not be meeting all 21st learning expectations. When all curriculum is purposefully designed to ensure that every student has sufficient opportunities to practice each of the school's learning expectations, the school will be able to ensure that every student can achieve each of the school's 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- student shadowing
- panel presentation
- student work
- teacher interview
- teachers
- students
- Endicott survey

Standard 2 Indicator 2

Conclusions

A limited number of curricular documents are written in a common format that includes units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, the school's 21st century learning expectations, instructional strategies and some assessment practices that include the use of specific and measurable criteria for success, such as school-wide analytic or course-specific rubrics. The limited number of completed curriculum maps include 21st learning expectations and some instructional and assessment strategies, however do not include units of study. The limited number of completed formal curriculum documents have units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, yet instructional and assessment strategies are not consistently included. Given that courses at ACT are in constant flux to meet the needs of its population, not all courses have the curricula in place, making the organization around key themes, concepts and essential questions unclear; as such, it is difficult to ascertain how some courses utilize vertical articulation to ensure how the themes, concepts and essential questions build upon one another as students progress from one course to another. When curricula documents are in place for all courses at ACT, students become more efficient problem solvers. When the formal curriculum documents are completed and all courses have comprehensive units of study, diverse instructional strategies and specific measurable criteria integrated into all assessment practices, students will be assured a curriculum that supports their achievement of the school's learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student work
- teacher interview
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 2 Indicator 3

Conclusions

The available formal curriculum documents begin to emphasize depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry, problem solving, and higher order thinking skills; provides cross-disciplinary, authentic learning experiences both in and out of school, and informed and ethical use of technology. The limited curriculum maps and formal curriculum do not consistently reflect the diverse cross-disciplinary learning, higher order thinking, and inquiry and problem solving opportunities that are evident in classrooms and student work samples. For example, in one class, students solved a math problem relating to bone length by thinking logically to create the steps rather than following predetermined steps of an example. The limited professional development time allocated for curriculum review has made it challenging for some teachers to write and revise current curriculum documents. School-wide goals have recently focused on cross-disciplinary learning opportunity integration, however, documentation in the curriculum is inconsistent. While some curricular documents do not fully emphasize the informed and ethical use of technology, the new ACT Research and Writing guide does address bias in sources, and avoiding plagiarism. When all curriculum fully emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving, higher order thinking, cross-disciplinary learning, authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school, informed and ethical use of technology, then student learning outcomes will improve.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- panel presentation
- student work
- teacher interview
- students
- parents
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 2 Indicator 4

Conclusions

The written curriculum inconsistently mirrors the taught curriculum because of the limited number of formalized curricular documents. In some areas the student work goes beyond the descriptions written within the curriculum maps. In other courses, the limited course offerings results in some students being inappropriately placed into courses. To accommodate students, teachers are then tasked with providing remedial support for students. Academic teachers stated that courses often do not complete expected content standards each year. Structures to ensure that the written curriculum mirrors the taught curriculum have not been formalized. While some teachers collaborate during common planning time, many teachers are teaching a singleton course and therefore collaboration is limited. Other teachers reported that there is limited collaboration between departments. The teacher observation program helps to monitor the implementation of the curriculum to ensure that the written curriculum mirrors the taught curriculum. In some classroom observations, student work showed alignment to the taught curriculum. When the written curriculum consistently mirrors the taught curriculum, student learning outcomes will improve.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- student shadowing
- student work
- teacher interview
- students
- central office personnel
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 2 Indicator 5

Conclusions

There is ineffective coordination and vertical articulation between and among academic areas within the school. The structure of the magnet school program makes it challenging to vertically articulate the curriculum between the 38 sending schools and ACT. A challenge within the school is the lack of curriculum integration between the arts and the academic areas. ACT was originally begun as a conservatory program and the creation of a high school dedicated to the arts is still in development. A current school goal is to strengthen that integration. Within the school, vertical articulation of the curriculum is limited. The often vague or incomplete curriculum documents do not specify the taught curriculum. Often units of study within courses cannot be accomplished because of the need for remediation of critical foundation skills. Persistence of the problem often continues through the four years at ACT because a formal curriculum review cycle has not been developed. On alternative days, teachers have opportunities to collaborate between and among many academic areas. Coordination and vertical articulation between and among all academic areas within the school will increase the effectiveness in implementing the curriculum for all students.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student work
- teacher interview
- central office personnel
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 2 Indicator 6

Conclusions

Staffing levels, and instructional materials, are adequate; however, facilities, technology, equipment are insufficient in some areas, and the resources of the library/media center and corresponding support staff are not sufficient to fully implement the curriculum, co-curricular programs, and other learning opportunities. Class sizes on average is 10.7 students, and an adult-to-student ratio of 1:6.25 allows teachers the opportunity to fully implement the curriculum. The facilities are maintained with care and proactive maintenance is planned and implemented to provide a safe and effective learning environment. The facility is usually maintained at comfortable temperatures, and if needed, the director of facilities at EASTCONN can access HVAC controls remotely. The school facilities include a black box theater, costume shop, ballet studio, scene shop, studio theater, and full theater. The audio visual department has state-of-the-art computers, editing booths, cameras, recording studio, and other equipment. The dance department has an industrial sound system, speakers, mirrors, ballet bars and a sufficient budget to put on dance productions. The costume shop has six sewing machines, watercolors, measuring tape, rolling whiteboard, some fabric, wigs, washing machines, dryers, adequate thread and needles to implement the curriculum. The scene shop has many important tools: table saw, chop saw, orbital sander, genie, jigsaw, circular saw, tape measures, framing squares, speed squares, light board, 140 ETC Force Source-4, adequate space, loading dock, freight elevator, and ETC Element for curricular implementation. However, the lack of a gymnasium and science labs limit student curricular opportunities. In science, student often watch video demonstrations, rather than performing hand on experiments. The lack of a gymnasium restricts student opportunities, particularly during the winter months. Teachers usually report that they have access to sufficient instructional materials to implement and support the curriculum. While teachers report that the number of computers are nearly 1:1 for students, many computers are dedicated to specific courses and are not shared by the entire school. The lack of media center resources limits student opportunities for self-directed research. While staffing levels, instructional materials, technology, equipment, and supplies are generally sufficient, when the facilities is also adequate, including science labs and appropriate spaces for physical fitness, and the school has adequate library/media resources to fully implement the curriculum, students will be assured the full range of educational experiences that support achievement of the school's learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- facility tour
- teacher interview
- students
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 2 Indicator 7

Conclusions

The resources of the school have not yet been focused on providing sufficient personnel, time, and financial resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research. EASTCONN has a district-wide director of curriculum who works with the principal, but the current staff has not had collective professional development in curriculum maps for eight years. In the early years of the school, staff turnover was high and many current staff members may have had no training in curriculum review or mapping. Recently, in June 2016, funds to write formal curriculum have become available. Previously, ACT did not have financial resources for formal curriculum development, evaluation, or revision. The structure of the school day in which classes go later in the afternoon, means that teachers have limited time to meet for collaborative curriculum development. While teachers can go to outside professional development, they miss classroom time in the middle of the day to do so. Currently, there is no school-wide development, evaluation, or revision of formal curriculum but some teachers have used summer opportunities to write curriculum. A clearly developed and implemented plan for the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum using assessment results and current research will have a positive impact on student learning and achievement.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teacher interview
- central office personnel
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 2 Commendations

Commendation

The variety of course offerings that enable students to experience a wide variety of learning opportunities that are engaging and individualized for student needs

Commendation

The commitment to develop curriculum that emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills, and provides cross-disciplinary and authentic learning experiences both in and out of school

Commendation

The collaboration that exists between teachers that has resulted in cross-disciplinary, engaging and effective learning opportunities

Standard 2 Recommendations

Recommendation

Decide on a curriculum documentation format for all areas that allows the students to practice and achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to complete formal curriculum documents for all course offerings

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan using current research and assessment data for the regular review and revision of all curricula

Recommendation

Develop a plan to ensure curriculum documents emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills; provide cross-disciplinary, authentic learning experiences both in and out of school, and inform the ethical use of technology

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to monitor the alignment of the written and taught curriculum

Recommendation

Develop and implement plans to improve the facilities so that all curriculum, including science, physical education, and library media can be implemented

Standard 3 Indicator 1

Conclusions

Most teachers at ACT informally examine instructional practices to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations. According to the Endicott survey, 75 percent of staff report that they engage in this practice. Teachers are very aware of the school's identified beliefs, championing the school's mantra, "Respect Yourself, Respect the Work, Respect the Community." The integration of arts and academics is the cornerstone of ACT and what drives the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations, all of which are posted prominently throughout the building. Teacher interviews, student shadowing, Standard subcommittee interviews, and classroom observations all highlight the school's focus on personalized learning across disciplines. In both academic and arts classes, instructors work diligently to make learning accessible and individualized for all learners. Students are regularly given choice in class assignments, drawing from a wide array of opportunities that engage students of varying levels and abilities. Recently, ACT has begun to engage teachers in peer observation in the form of instruction rounds teams (IRT), communities of practice groups (COP), CT's Teacher Education And Mentoring (TEAM) program, data teams, and cooperative planning time, each with the intent of aligning teachers' instructional practices with the school's academic learning expectations. Teachers are formally evaluated by the school's sole administrator who is responsible for the observations of all teachers, in addition to all pre- and post-observation meetings. Currently, there are three different evaluation options in place to meet the needs of the staff at ACT: a teacher portfolio, My Learning Plan, and an arts staff reflection. The school principal regularly meets with staff and provides written feedback about their instructional practices. In addition to formal observations and evaluations, staff are encouraged to reflect upon the effectiveness of their instruction and share these reflections during biweekly staff meetings, professional development workshops, and the ACT portal on the Schoology page. Staff have common planning time each day that can be used to plan, review data, and reflect upon the effectiveness of instructional practices, but that time is used differently by everyone. The school's extended schedule and small or singly staffed departments sometimes limits the staff's ability to work collaboratively on examining and refining instructional practices. While informal examination of instruction exists, when the school develops a more formal and consistent process for examining instructional strategies for alignment with the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations, opportunities to achieve these learning goals will increase.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- teacher interview
- school leadership
- Endicott survey
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 3 Indicator 2

Conclusions

Teachers' instructional practices often support the achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations by personalizing instruction, engaging students in cross-disciplinary learning, engaging students as active and self-directed learners, emphasizing inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking, applying knowledge and skills to authentic tasks, engaging students in self-assessment and reflection, and integrating technology.

Most teachers regularly personalize instruction to best meet the needs of their students. When students first apply to Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT), they are required to select a major which drives their coursework. Of the five majors offered at ACT (dance, acting, audio visual, creative writing, and theater production), students are immersed in courses tailored to their individual interests and needs dependent on their field of study. Within the core academic classes, teachers regularly offer students choice in terms of assignments, projects, and arts performances. For example, students in English courses spend the first fifteen minutes of class working independently on an area of focus related to writing, after which they individually select a series of poems to be included in a hypothetical magazine, offering rationales as to why specific pieces are worthy of publication while others may not be. This particular activity provides student choice and voice, not only allowing them to personalize how they utilize class time, but also how they interpret and judge writing. Additionally, while studying music, students in arts classes select songs on which to base their music study; in a written analysis, each student studies pronunciation, analyzes word choice, and continually rehearses the piece, all while using teacher and peer feedback to improve overall performance. Personalized learning at ACT creates an environment in which students have strong ownership for their learning.

There are several varied examples of cross-disciplinary learning at ACT. There are several co-taught interdisciplinary courses at ACT, including an American Experience course that blends English and social studies. In academic courses, while discussing justice and civil disobedience, students simultaneously read Dudley Randall's "Ballad of Birmingham" and excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," putting in context the historical implications of the time period as they decide what makes laws just and define the concept of civil disobedience. Students in the Dance and Anatomy course understand how science and dance are interconnected, while the Historical Documentary course emphasizes both history and film making. Students studying theater production build sets and props used by students studying acting who perform in the school's plays. Despite the lack of curricular documents, students are immersed in opportunities that connect learning and encourage students to think "big." Cross-disciplinary learning allows students to understand how their courses connect and relate, ensuring the mindfulness of the material being studied.

Teachers at ACT consistently engage students as active and self-directed learners. In English, social studies, psychology, and sociology courses students regularly engage in independent research projects. In math classes, after some direct instruction to reinforce concepts related to quadratic equations, students create small booklets that are formed with color-coded graphing paper, scissors, and glue. Once the booklet is complete, students team up and use the them to practice the concepts of parabolas, locating the axis of symmetry, vertex, and y-intercept. This activity lends itself well to both visual and kinesthetic learners. Additionally, students in arts classes work on projects that are student generated and student led, from designing a Scrabble board to designing a book shelf. Once the proposal is approved by the instructor, the entire project is facilitated by the students who manufacture the end product by implementing and executing a design plan, trouble-shooting issues as they arise, collaborating with peers when necessary, and managing their time to meet the project deadline. Students in the dance, acting, and singing courses are consistently engaged, running lines, refining techniques, and rehearsing performances, all while embedding the feedback of peers and coaching of their instructors in the work they do. The active and self-directed learning environment at ACT affirms that students are invaluable stakeholders in their leaning experiences and opportunities.

The Arts at the Capitol Theater frequently affords students the opportunity to engage in inquiry, problem solving, and higher order thinking. According to the Endicott survey, 92.9 percent of staff agree that they consistently involve students in this practice. The social studies department implements several inquiry-based learning

projects, including one where students investigate the function of government based on their personal interests. In English classes, students also pursue inquiry-based learning when they complete the career I-Search project, a project whose basis is to explore and answer a question generated by the student. Students in English also practice problem solving when they coordinate "survival day," a culminating activity for *Lord of the Flies*. Students simulate the experiences of the text by creating rules for their society, delegating roles and responsibilities, and handling conflicts between peers as they arise; while the activity is a lesson in problem solving, it also involves higher order thinking as students gain authentic insight into the novel's characters. In other academic courses, students are tasked with identifying a problem within the community and proposing solutions to that problem by researching the issue, exploring real-world applications, and disseminating that information to community members.

Students at ACT frequently apply knowledge and skills to authentic tasks. By design, students in the arts courses (i.e., dance, acting, audio visual, creative writing, and theater production) showcase their work for audiences beyond the classroom and school. In dance, students create an entire showcase that is presented to the community. After establishing a thematic concept, students choreograph the routines, cast roles, plan and run rehearsals, edit music, order costumes, and coordinate with lighting and a/v staff to produce the showcase entirely on their own. In the music courses, students submit their performances to the Windham Regional Arts Council for awards consideration. In the acting and theater production courses, students participate in a series of performances for students, parents, and community members several times throughout the year. In English courses, students write and perform poetry at poetry slams both at ACT and at venues outside of school. Additionally, all seniors are required to complete a capstone project; the senior capstone is based on students' personal interests, refined throughout the year, and performed for students, staff, and parents in late May. The ability for students to regularly showcase their work creates an environment where students feel validated and supported by their peers, teachers, parents, and community members.

Although some courses engage students in self-assessment and reflection, the criteria for that assessment and reflection is not always clear. Many teachers at ACT require students to engage in informal self-assessment and reflection. For instance, students in arts classes critique themselves and one another after in-class vocal performances. As each student performs, her audience, in this case her peers, write down feedback that is shared orally with the performer. In this context, students welcome the feedback of their peers, often exchanging in a dialogue about ways to improve future performances. In other arts courses, it is the expectation that students listen and respond to the informal feedback of their peers and instructor to improve their work and advance their craft. As for more formal reflections, in English class, students often use course-specific rubrics to self-assess essays and measure growth from one draft to another. In the theater production department, students maintain journals that are collected and graded every three weeks. These journals have five components, one of which is a reflection on a class experience or assignment. While most teachers employ self-assessment and reflection, the criteria for those assessments and reflections are unclear and serve as more of a checklist than a tool for measuring the quality and depth of insight of the learning and/or reflection. When the criteria for self-assessment and reflection are clearly articulated, students will better understand how their personal learning connects to the school's beliefs about learning.

Most instructors at ACT embed technology in their instruction, but the purposeful integration of technology is not evident across all disciplines. According to the Endicott survey, 85.4 percent of students state that they are asked to use technology in their assignments. Technology at ACT is used in both traditional and nontraditional ways. In the audio visual courses, students make use of the Macs for sound/video editing and film making. In the academic courses, technology is used for calculating and graphing, research, writing, and presentation. For example, students use Google Docs to compose and edit essays, and several Web 2.0 tools such as Google Slides, Prezi, and iMovie for presentations. In theater production, power tools are utilized for set design and construction, and in Lighting courses, students make use of spot lights, more than 200 lighting fixtures, and a new light board. ACT has computers available for students, including two computers on wheels (COW) carts and desktop Macs which are used exclusively by the audio visual department. When computers are knowingly unavailable for classroom use because of high demand, students can bring their own devices to school and easily access the school's WiFi. Regular access to technology does not exist for all departments. Teachers without classrooms are limited in their ability to integrate technology into their daily instruction as they may not have access to the necessary equipment such as projectors or SMART Boards. Additionally, while students can bring their own devices to school, not all students have access to a laptop that they can easily transport to ACT.

When teachers add the purposeful integration of technology across all disciplines to their instructional practices that are most often supporting the achievement of 21st century learning expectations through many other means, students will be better prepared 21st century citizens.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- student work
- teacher interview
- students
- parents
- school board
- Endicott survey
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 3 Indicator 3

Conclusions

The vast majority of teachers at ACT adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student by using formative assessment, especially during instructional time, strategically differentiating, purposefully organizing group learning activities and providing additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom.

According to the Endicott survey, 79.4 percent of teachers report using formative assessment results to inform and adjust their instructional practices. For example, in arts classes, students practice sketching human eyes and ears to gain a deeper understanding of the human anatomy in hopes of improving their artistic renderings. As students draw the human eye from various perspectives, the instructor offers immediate feedback, suggesting techniques for improvement. In math classes, amidst a review of concepts related to quadratic equations, instructors use a question and answer strategy and circulate the room during group work to check for understanding. The feedback provided in classes is specific and immediate and the focus in most courses is more on the process rather than the product.

Eighty-nine percent of teachers report strategically differentiating instruction in their courses. Academic teachers allow students choice in showcasing their understanding of course material in that they can create movies, presentations, or thesis-based papers as final project options. Art teachers also implement choice-based education to meet the needs of diverse learners, and vary the levels of expectations for students as needed. Teachers in some disciplines also provide graphic organizers, manipulatives, and/or modified handouts to help support the mixed abilities and needs of their students.

Classes at ACT are small with the teacher-to-student ratio less than 1:7. As such, teachers do not plan small group learning in all classes; however there are exceptions in some courses. For example, in math classes, students work collaboratively with their peers to plot parabolas; likewise, in some acting courses, students of mixed abilities work together to rehearse, run lines, and refine technique. The small classroom setting allows staff to work individually with students who may require extra help and direction. Teachers often provide additional support and alternative strategies within the classroom. Because teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of students, students ample opportunity to find success while at ACT.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- panel presentation
- student work
- teacher interview
- students
- central office personnel
- Endicott survey
- school website
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 3 Indicator 4

Conclusions

Some teachers, individually and collaboratively, improve their instructional practices by using student achievement data from a variety of formative and summative assessments; examining student work; using feedback from a variety of sources, including students, other teachers, supervisors and parents; examining current research; and engaging in professional discourse focused on instructional practice. While teachers are afforded time to meet formally and informally with colleagues to discuss instructional strategies, it is not evident that assessment data, whether formative or summative, is being reviewed purposefully during this time. Although school-wide professional development opportunities are implemented throughout the year, the workshops are focused mainly on instructional strategies and not on the review of assessment data. The same is true of the biweekly staff meetings and teacher prep and collaborative times afforded to staff. During the 2015-2016 school year, an instructional rounds team (IRT) was formed at ACT; the IRT functions as a teacher-led, collaborative and system process to identify effective instruction and develop learning to improve professional practices comprised of teachers. The data obtained through these observations drives professional development, the focus of which was personalized learning for the 2016-2017 school year.

The communities of practice (COP) group, instructional rounds team (IRT), instructional coach, and administrative input in the form of teacher evaluation are the means of feedback for teachers to improve their instructional strategies. The COP group and IRT convene quarterly to share out information and to discuss and reflect on instructional practices. The faculty as yet does not often utilize the instructional coach. According to the Endicott survey, 67.9 percent of teachers state that they engage in formal opportunities for professional discourse focused on instructional practices, and although formal time is provided for staff during fourth period and after school, most discourse occurs informally before and after school.

Some teachers at ACT examine current research by pursuing professional development opportunities both within and outside of the school. The lack of a library/media center means that most teachers borrow and/or maintain their own materials on current research and pedagogy. While some staff use current research to inform their instructional practices, most of the staff seem ambivalent about whether the decisions in the school reflect a review of current research. Thirty-one percent of staff responded that they disagree or strongly disagree that decisions in the school are reflective of this review of current research, as opposed to only 16 percent who agree or strongly agree. When teachers, individually and collaboratively examine student work and achievement data, study current research, and engage in professional discourse on instructional strategies, then they can make informed decisions to increase student learning.

Sources of Evidence

- teacher interview
- teachers
- school leadership
- Endicott survey
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 3 Indicator 5

Conclusions

Most teachers at Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) maintain expertise in their content areas and in content-specific practices. Teachers are provided professional development opportunities several times throughout the school year in the form of in-house workshops, biweekly faculty meetings and communities of practice (COP) groups. The COP groups afford staff time to advise, collaborate, and share out information quarterly. The COP groups allow staff to gain varying perspectives on teaching and learning, however, as most departments are comprised of one or two staff members, the discourse around course-specific lesson planning and implementation is limited. Teachers at ACT are encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities offered through EASTCONN, and some engage in more individualized professional development opportunities by way of collaboration with the school's instructional coach. The majority of professional development opportunities offered through EASTCONN are academically based; the teachers in the arts pursue expertise in their individual professional areas. When all teachers continue to maintain high professional standards in their academic and artistic fields, they improve the education of the students at the ACT school.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teacher interview
- teachers
- school leadership
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 3 Commendations

Commendation

The efforts of ACT teachers to examine instructional practices to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations

Commendation

The commitment of teachers to personalize instruction for students across disciplines

Commendation

The efforts of many teachers to adjust their instructional practices to meet the individual needs of students in their classrooms

Commendation

The support of school leaders in encouraging teachers to pursue professional development opportunities in order to maintain expertise as adult learners and reflective practitioners and to seek opportunities to research best practices for instruction

Standard 3 Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to ensure equity in access to technology for staff and students at ACT

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to use data to improve and inform instructional practices

Recommendation

Develop and implement a professional development plan to ensure staff in all content areas are engaging in opportunities to research best practices for instruction in their content-specific domain

Standard 4 Indicator 1

Conclusions

The professional staff is beginning to employ a formal process to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations using school-wide analytic rubrics. The 21st century learning expectations and rubrics for assessment were written in 2011 and each school-wide learning expectation has been assigned to a specific department for monitoring. Seniors completing their senior capstone project are assessed using the art integration/senior capstone school-wide rubric. The school, however, does not yet have a formal process to continuously employ these rubrics to assess all students' individual progress or school-wide student progress in achieving all of the school's learning expectations. Even though the school's 21st century learning expectations are in place, many teachers are not using the school-wide rubrics to access them. Student interviews indicated they are not familiar with school-wide rubrics. Although course-specific rubrics are used in the classrooms, the connection to the 21st century student expectations is not articulated. The principal is working with departments to monitor achievement of the school-wide expectations. While many of the foundational elements are in place including school-wide rubrics of the learning expectations and structures such as rich performance assessment including the senior capstone project, when the professional staff employs a formal process to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving all of the school's 21st century learning expectations, students and teachers will be better able to measure progress towards meeting the school's goals for students.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- student work
- teacher interview
- teachers
- students
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 2

Conclusions

The school's professional staff infrequently communicates individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students, their families, and the school community. There is limited formalized means with which to communicate individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. A few teachers have piloted programs that have potential for the necessary communication, by providing informal feedback both in the artistic performance and academic subject. When the school begins to communicate individual and whole-school progress to the wider community, the school will have a deeper understanding of student achievement of the 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- panel presentation
- teacher interview
- central office personnel
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 3

Conclusions

Professional staff attempts to collect, and to analyze data, in order to assess skills, identify areas of need and design interventions to improve student achievement. All students in mathematics and English classes take the STAR assessment at least once a year, but many other classes test multiple times a year to monitor progress. The school uses the data from the STAR assessment to better track student growth over time. This data is used to respond to inequities by providing dedicated intervention in some courses. The formal process for collecting and analyzing data using the school-wide analytic rubrics is in the beginning stages. Developing a formal process for collecting and analyzing the collected data will enable all teachers to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- panel presentation
- teacher interview
- central office personnel
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 4

Conclusions

Prior to each unit of study, teachers rarely communicate to students the school's applicable 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed. As indicated by student interviews, teacher interviews, and the self-study, students are provided with a course syllabus at the beginning of the year/semester. Teachers in the history and world languages departments have begun to implement a standards-based grading system that focuses on mastery of certain discipline-specific goals. However, student interviews indicate that the 21st century learning expectations or related unit-specific learning goals are not communicated prior to each unit of study by all teachers. Moreover, there are few updated and developed course curricula and the distribution of unit overviews at the beginning of new units is not a common practice among staff. When all teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed prior to each unit of study, students will have a clear understanding of what they are learning. The regular distribution of unit overviews at the beginning of new units to students will ensure the communication of the school's 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals being assessed

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student shadowing
- teacher interview

Standard 4 Indicator 5

Conclusions

Prior to summative assessments, most teachers provide students with specific and measurable criteria for success, such as corresponding rubrics, which define targeted high levels of achievement. While some teachers do provide students with rubrics, others individually create and distribute scoring guides for projects and other assessments designed for specific assignments. School-wide rubrics aligned with the 21st-century learning expectations are sometimes used, however, teachers tend to use individually designed rubrics that are task specific instead. As teachers continue to provide students with specific and measurable criteria for success, there will continue to be a higher level of achievements of well-defined targets. When teachers provide students with specific and measurable criteria for success, such as corresponding rubrics prior to summative assessments, there will be a higher level of achievement regarding the well-defined targets.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- student shadowing
- teacher interview
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 6

Conclusions

In each unit of study, most teachers employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments. Students understand both formative and summative assessment and were able to explain the difference with ease. A range of assessment strategies including performance-based assessments were evident during classroom observations. The use of student portfolios is employed as well as formative assessments such as the STAR assessment for mathematics and English. The integration of arts in academic classes adds to the variety of assessment opportunities for students. Because teachers employ a range of formative and summative assessment strategies, students are assured that learning, growth, and progress are effectively measured and used to adjust instruction to meet their needs.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- teacher interview
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 7

Conclusions

Teachers do not collaborate regularly in formal ways on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments. Collaborative planning time exists for teachers, but as of yet, it has not yet been a requirement to create formative and summative assessments, including common assessments. Moreover, the school does not have a process to analyze student work or to vertically align common grading practices for written assessments based upon the 21st century learning expectations. The school does not have a plan to create and analyze formative and summative assessments, and therefore revision of formative and summative assessments is not taking place. The regular collaboration of teachers in formal ways will ensure the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments..

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teacher interview
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 8

Conclusions

Many teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure students revise and improve their work. Students stated that teachers in the arts provide specific and corrective feedback to ensure that students revise and improve their work. Teachers in the academic areas also provide timely feedback. In some classes students are expected to hand in multiple drafts of major works to show progress and receive feedback. Many teachers follow a coaching model to ensure that students receive specific feedback during the process of learning, not just when assignments are completed. Because teachers provide specific, timely and corrective feedback, students can revise and improve their work to meet expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- teacher interview
- teachers
- students
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 9

Conclusions

Most teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning. One formative assessment that is used consistently as a diagnostics test to inform math, English, and other courses is the STAR assessment. Teachers use STAR data to create differentiated text sets to group students by level or more heterogeneously and to cater instruction to specific needs that arise for students on an individual basis. Additionally, some teachers employ a variety of methods to check for understanding. Because professional staff members regularly use formative assessment they are better able to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- student shadowing
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Indicator 10

Conclusions

Teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine some evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, specifically standardized assessments and the sharing of student work; however, at this time the school does not yet have data on individual or school-wide progress of student achievement in meeting the 21st century learning expectations, or survey data from current students, and alumni. Student work has been shared at faculty meetings using gallery walks for the purpose of improving instruction. The results of Star testing, Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are carefully examined by teachers and school leadership to determine the success of the current curriculum and instructional practices. Although the school plans to develop a pilot program to assess individual and school-wide achievement of the school's 21st learning expectations, this is not current practice. The school reviews data from sending schools for the purpose of developing special education plans, but not for all students. When the school examines more extensive evidence of student learning, it will have a better understanding of how to improve curriculum and instructional practices for all.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student work
- teacher interview
- teachers
- Endicott survey

Standard 4 Indicator 11

Conclusions

The school has reviewed some grading practices and has revised them to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. Some teachers have aligned their grading practices with the Common Core and are piloting standard-based grading. The beginning discussion at the school is focused on how effective grading practices best meet the core value of "Respect Yourself, Respect the Work, Respect the Community." Despite school-wide discussions, only 46.4 percent of the staff agrees that the grading practices are regularly reviewed and revised. The school instituted a practice that connects grades with the ability to perform in school productions as a way to tie grading with the tenant "Respect the Work." As the school continues to review and revise grading practices, the consistent practice will become an integral part of the school culture and all students will benefit.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- student shadowing
- student work
- teacher interview
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 4 Commendations

Commendation

The use of the school-wide rubric in the assessment of the senior capstone project

Commendation

The use of Star assessment for reading and mathematics to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement

Commendation

The piloting of standard-based grading in some courses that focus on mastery of certain discipline-specific goals

Commendation

The implementation by some teachers of a range of assessment strategies including formative and summative assessments

Commendation

The use of specific, timely, and corrective feedback that ensures students the opportunity to revise and improve their work

Standard 4 Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a formal process to ensure that all school-wide rubrics are regularly used with all students so that the school can assess whole-school and individual student achievement of the learning expectations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan for the regular distribution to students of unit overviews at the beginning of new units to ensure the communication of the school's 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals being assessed

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan for the regular, formal collaboration of teachers to ensure the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments

Recommendation

Develop and implement a formal means to communicate individual student and whole-school progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to ensure effective use of

Recommendation

Develop and implement a formal process for collecting and analyzing data to identify and respond to deficiencies in student achievement and to meet school-wide learning goals

Recommendation

Develop and implement a formal process to ensure grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning

Standard 5 Indicator 1

Conclusions

The Arts at the Capitol Theater has consciously and continuously built a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility for learning resulting in shared ownership, school pride, and high expectations for learning. At the start of each school year, staff and students are provided with a handbook outlining the daily class schedule, school philosophy, general conduct, attendance policies and behavioral expectations. An electronic copy of the student handbook is also available for students and parents to access on ACT's website. Results from the Endicott survey indicate 93% feel safe at school. Displays of the school's core values and beliefs adorn the walls and classrooms throughout the building, and students frequently cite the impact of those core values and beliefs on their daily life. ACT has a school counselor, a social worker, and a special education teacher on staff to provide student assistance as needed. A student assistance team provides additional supports for students not already receiving support through special education or 504 plans. Students are encouraged to check their academic progress frequently using PowerSchool. Student participation in arts advisory activities, student council, and Sexuality and Gender Alliance give them a voice in the events and activities that take place at the school. The student performances in theatrical and musical events connect students with each other and their community. The Endicott survey results show 79.7 percent of ACT students are proud of their school. Providing a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive environment, combined with shared ownership, pride, and having high expectations, allows students to acquire the necessary 21st century skills that ultimately lead to future success.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student shadowing
- teachers
- students
- school support staff
- Endicott survey

Standard 5 Indicator 2

Conclusions

ACT is deliberately equitable and inclusive, ensuring access to challenging academic experiences for all students, making certain that courses throughout the curriculum are populated with students reflecting the diversity of the student body, fostering heterogeneity, and supporting the achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations. The school draws students from towns throughout eastern Connecticut resulting in a diverse population with regard to previous education, cultural experience, and socioeconomic background. Every student is able to take any of the academic classes that are offered, and some of the introductory arts classes. Higher level arts classes are reserved for the students in that major. Classes in the arts area generally have students heterogeneously grouped from all four grade levels. There are varied levels of classes available for the students, including honors classes in English and an Advanced Placement class in mathematics. There is also an opportunity for eligible upperclassmen to enroll in classes at two local colleges, Eastern Connecticut State University and Quinebaug Valley Community College. ACT's rotating A-Day/B-Day schedule ensures that students have greater choice and are able to enroll in all of the classes they wish to experience. ACT's provision of equitable access to challenging academic experiences for all students ensures that all students have the opportunity to meet their 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- teachers
- students

Standard 5 Indicator 3

Conclusions

ACT has effective, formal, ongoing programs and processes through which each student has an adult in the school, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. All ACT students participate in an arts advisory and enrichment day once each month. The schedule on that day includes an hour and a half for arts advisory in which the student body breaks up by art major to complete pre-selected activities with an arts faculty member. This time is often used to set goals at the beginning of each year and to provide the opportunity to review student goals and progress toward each student goal as the school year progresses. The arts advisory and enrichment schedule also includes an hour and a half each week for enrichment. This enrichment block gives students the chance to participate in an activity that they might not normally engage in and allows them to interact with a staff member in a new way. As a result, students develop a relationship in which the arts department faculty helps and encourages them to maintain positive academic progress and provides support where needed. The Endicott survey indicates 76.5% of students agree there is a program that provides them with an adult in the school, in addition to the guidance counselor, with whom they meet with regularly and who knows them well and observing students during observations and shadowing indicated that students do feel there is an adult they can go to for support. Having an adult in the school who knows each student well and helps to ensure that students' academic and artistic progress will be supported and students will graduate with the 21st century skills and knowledge they need to be successful.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student shadowing
- teachers
- students
- school leadership
- Endicott survey

Standard 5 Indicator 4

Conclusions

In order to improve student learning through professional development, the principal and professional staff have engaged informally in professional discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning; used several resources outside of the school to maintain currency with best practices; dedicated some formal time to implement professional development; and applied some of the skills, practices, and ideas gained in order to improve instruction and to some extent curriculum and assessment.

ACT teachers have a 65-minute prep period with an additional 40-minute collaborative period (every other day) built into the schedule which provides teachers with formal time to implement or share professional development learning. They also have a shortened instructional day on Friday that affords them additional time in the afternoon for that purpose. Faculty meetings are designed to be reflective on discussions of instructional practice. Data from instructional rounds has been a focus for this year with a focus on personalized learning.

Faculty participate in several councils which brings together teachers from surrounding EASTCONN schools several times a year. Their involvement this year includes Social Studies Council, Science Council, ELA Council, and Arts Council. The ACT principal and education director for EASTCONN are highly supportive of attendance at professional development outside of the district that supports the goals of the school. There are six professional development days scheduled and a seventh All-EASTCONN day where the entire RESC comes together for professional development. The faculty has been engaging in instructional rounds with a focus on personalized learning.

The ACT school has implemented an instructional coaching period during which one of its English faculty has a period available in her schedule for coaching. And although not used by all teachers, she is available to work on instructional strategies, instructional goals, implementation of professional development and learning, and evaluation portfolio development. Faculty may use the collaborative time to work on the implementation of professional learning. An example of this is the "Civic Life Project" that the two history teachers have received training on and are now collaborating together to implement.

While there is informal discourse within the academic side and between the arts and academic teachers on improvement of instruction, when this expands to further include curriculum and assessment, student learning will be impacted to a greater degree

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- teachers
- school leadership
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 5 Indicator 5

Conclusions

The principal at ACT regularly uses research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning. Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, certified teachers have had two options for evaluation. The newest route for evaluation is portfolio development which includes a focus area for teacher learning, student learning goals, and formal and informal observations using the evaluation rubric. The portfolio can be physical or digital. The second method is a more traditional method of evaluation incorporating SMART Goal development and formal and informal observations utilizing the observation rubric. This method incorporates the online platform My Learning Plan. Staff utilizes My Learning Plan to collect documentation for evaluations and as a means to gather and maintain pertinent documents during the evaluation process. In addition to those two evaluation options, arts area instructors teaching under a permit are evaluated through a process which includes goal setting for themselves, goal setting for students, and three observations. This year 15 teachers have elected to be evaluated under the portfolio option and one teacher has elected the online platform method. Three arts teachers are being evaluated under the third method.

Administrators have been following the StEPP (Standards for Educator Performance and Practice) rubric modeled after the CT Common Core of Teaching, for teacher evaluation since 2013. Administrators from multiple schools were calibrated on the observation process using the rubric under the guidance of an educational leadership specialist from EASTCONN. In August 2013, a professional development workshop was presented to all EASTCONN staff on the rubric. School leaders including the ACT principal regularly attend conferences on a variety of research-based topics. Since 2014, administrators have attended professional development conferences which have included professional learning on Instructional Rounds, Mastery-Based Learning, From Compliance to Coherence, Mindful Leadership in Education, Summer Institute for Educators, the Association of Educational Service Agencies National Conference, and Magnet Schools of America National Conference (two of the last three years).

ACT has four teachers who are trained as mentors and have completed the two-year TEAM (Teacher Education and Mentoring) program. ACT provides beginning teachers with one of the mentors in the school who assists them in completing five modules covering each of the domains in the StEPP rubric. Although the TEAM evaluation piece is completed at the state level, the mentor is also a valuable leader who helps the new teacher focus on specific ways to improve student learning. The continued use of research-based evaluation and supervision processes ensures improved student learning.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teachers
- school leadership
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 5 Indicator 6

Conclusions

ACT has made deliberate efforts to organize time in a way that supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students. The Arts at the Capitol Theater's daily schedule is comprised of alternating A Days and B Days. The Monday-Thursday schedule includes six 65-minute classes and an hour-long, school-wide study hall and lunch period (40 minute study hall/20 minute lunch). Dismissal time Monday through Thursday is 4:25 p.m. On Fridays, classes meet for 40 minutes with a ten minute mid-day break. Departure time on Friday is at 1:07 p.m. The school-wide study hall period allows students to meet with teachers for assistance as needed, the artistic staff to hold additional rehearsals for performances, clubs to hold weekly meetings, and staff to collaborate each day.

Having 65-minute instructional periods and a 40-minute period on Fridays allows faculty the option of breaking longer periods into smaller chunks or using them for extended instruction and projects. Some classes meet in double blocks which provides even more flexibility in the use of time. All full time teachers have two planning periods and one collaborative period across the two-day A/B schedule. Part-time teachers may have one planning and one collaborative period. The collaborative planning periods occur during fourth period on Mondays through Thursdays. This time allows for interdisciplinary collaborations, particularly between the arts and academics. The deliberate efforts to organize time in a fashion that supports research-based instruction and professional collaboration among teachers ensures the learning needs of all students will be kept at the forefront.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student shadowing
- teachers
- students
- school leadership

Standard 5 Indicator 7

Conclusions

Student load and class size at ACT are supportive in enabling teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students. Arts at the Capitol Theater works to create each year's master schedule to allow for effective instruction and individualized learning. Over two thirds of classes offered had fewer than fifteen students; the overall average class size was 10.7 students, and the student-to-staff ratio was 6:1. The Endicott survey results indicate the average student load for the 14 full-time teachers and instructors was 92.9 students with a low of 71 and high of 134. Results from the Endicott survey also show 85.4 percent of students feel that class sizes in their courses are reasonable. Parent responses to a similar statement, "The number of students in my son's/daughter's classes allows the teachers to meet his/her individual learning needs," shows 92.1 percent in agreement.

ACT, as a performing arts high school, values the interests of students who are looking to dive into specialized areas of their art as well as academics outside of the mainstream courses. Classes in these areas are often available even though enrollment may be low. These academic classes include AP Statistics with four students, Trigonometry with three students, and World Geography with four students. Arts courses include Costume Construction II with two students, History of Theater with three students, History of Costume with four students and Modern III, a dance class, with five. The small class sizes and student load support the ACT teachers' efforts to meet the learning needs of individual students.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- facility tour
- teacher interview
- teachers
- students
- school leadership

Standard 5 Indicator 8

Conclusions

The principal at ACT has worked regularly with other building leaders to provide instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The principal was an integral part of the development of ACT's values, goals, and expectations. Her background at ACT as a teacher and former dean of students informed much of that work. During staff meetings, the principal consistently ties objectives back to the core values and goals of the school. Endicott survey results show 96.4 percent of the staff is in agreement that the principal provides instructional leadership consistent with the school's core values. Eighty percent of the students polled agree that the principal is clear about what she wants and expects the school to accomplish for all of the students.

The principal meets monthly with parents of ACT (PACT) to brainstorm fundraising ideas and ways that they can support student and school-wide activities. The principal also has conversations with faculty and student groups to hear their feedback and address concerns that they might have. She consults with another principal leading a similar school twice a month to reflect on the overall school culture and student behavior. She meets with ACT's school counselor, social worker, and special education teacher regularly to hear their perspective and suggestions about how best to meet the needs of students and staff in addition to upholding the core values and expectations.

The principal maintains an open door policy for staff and is very accessible to all members of the school community. She is available to all staff members and encourages staff to visit and ask questions about lesson ideas or creative ways to meet the constantly evolving needs of ACT students. She responds promptly and thoroughly to all questions or concerns. Her previous experience as a teacher in the school, in addition to her time as the the dean of students, has given her a strong background knowledge of the challenges staff face. The principal's deliberate and ongoing efforts to work with leaders both in the ACT school building and within the EASTCONN network ensure that decisions are made with the core values, beliefs, and learning expectations firmly in mind.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teachers
- students
- Endicott survey
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 5 Indicator 9

Conclusions

Teachers, students, and parents are involved in multiple meaningful and defined roles in decision making that promote responsibility and ownership. Teachers have many opportunities to be involved in decision making. They are consulted on decisions impacting changes to the schedule, class offerings, personal schedules, and student schedules. Teachers also have the opportunity to bring forward ideas for change. Two examples include suggesting a change to the morning routine that kept students housed in the lobby until a specified time rather than allowing full access to the building, and providing breakfast as an option while the students are waiting. Both suggestions were implemented, the first providing improved morning supervision and the second resulting in breakfast being provided free of charge for all students.

In the arts area, arts teachers have freedom to make decisions regarding shows, music, and coffee house content. Dance students are involved in creating a theme for Student Dance Company Showcase. They choreograph the routines, choose the music, and develop the costumes. Students also develop the advertising, including poster design for the show. Creative writers select a title for each coffeehouse; they choose which pieces to present and select appropriate presentation attire. Show students helped create the fall 2015 show, a collection of Broadway pieces through the decades, and are always involved in the research and selection process for any play or musical selected. Academic teachers have been given opportunities to add or create classes, both by administrative suggestion or teacher input. The Endicott survey results show 64.2 percent of students and 67.9 percent of faculty agree that they have meaningful and defined roles in decision making.

Students have an additional voice in decision making and event planning through their participation in student council or as one of the four school presidents. Two of the president positions handle events and outreach, and two of the presidents focus on school climate. Through regular meetings with the principal, students in the student council or serving as one of the presidents are able to contribute to decision making that impacts the school.

Parents have not always taken advantage of the opportunities that are offered for input. Parents of ACT (PACT) is an integral part of the school. The funds they raise pay for student planners which includes the school's student handbook. The group also covers field day, the honors breakfast, \$1,000 deposit to prom, and the PACT scholarship and senior send off bags. The group consisted of one parent during the 2015-2016 school year. This year saw an increase in interest and participation, with ten to fifteen parents at each meeting in the fall, but participation decreased significantly as the year progressed. Parents meet one Wednesday per month. The wide range of sending towns may be a factor in the limited parent involvement. The principal's openness to including teachers, students, and parents in various meaningful and defined decision-making roles promotes responsibility and ownership in the school.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student shadowing
- facility tour
- teachers
- students
- school leadership
- Endicott survey

Standard 5 Indicator 10

Conclusions

Across the school, teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning. The principal holds staff meetings every two weeks. Staff have the opportunity in those meetings to share what instructional strategies have worked for them, or to ask for help from their colleagues on issues they are experiencing. This established open environment encourages staff to ask questions and allows for everyone to contribute. In addition, the schedule provides a collaborative period every other day during which teachers have the opportunity to work with their peers on both short-term and long-term projects, courses, or plans. This is especially important in the performing arts magnet school where one of the main goals is to incorporate the arts into academic classes and to engage students more actively by appealing to their interests.

There are several committees that allow teachers to assume leadership roles in different contexts, especially given the small staff size and small department sizes, sometimes being departments of one. The teacher leader cohort focuses on providing quarterly professional development to teachers who demonstrate leadership qualities in the school setting. The data team looks at ways to collect data on and increase student engagement and learning, and shares their results at the end of the year with the rest of the staff. The instructional rounds team consists of a group of teachers and administrators who observe different classes looking for commonalities and ways in which school-wide instructional practice can improve. The rounds team presents its findings and suggestions about how to use that knowledge to improve instruction to increase student learning and engagement. There are community of practice groups of teachers who meet four times a year during scheduled times to discuss how instructional practice can be improved and to discuss what supports are necessary to facilitate the improvements. Just about every teacher is a part of at least one committee, which allows for many leadership and collaborative opportunities. Teachers also organize field trips, are responsible for running an enrichment group once a month, and collaborate to create plans for enhanced student learning and performance. Because teachers exercise their initiative and leadership skills, essential improvements and increased student engagement in learning occurs.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teachers
- school leadership

Standard 5 Indicator 11

Conclusions

The governing board, district leadership, and principal are very collaborative, reflective, and constructive in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. The principal, the director of education, and the director of curriculum, instruction and assessment form a tight trio in terms of their working relationship. The principal collaborates with the director of curriculum, instruction and assessment on issues of evaluation, instructional rounds, grant writing, and professional development. In particular, recently, they have collaborated on the implementation of the portfolio method for teacher evaluation and the focus of personalized learning in instructional rounds. The principal's collaboration with the director of education focuses primarily on budget development and staffing concerns. Their weekly communications and discussions focus on school issues including 21st century learning expectations, learning and achievement, culture and relationships, and systems and process. These tie to EASTCONN's agency goals of providing exemplary programs and services to learners, including those with barriers, to achieve individual success; engaging in strategic collaborations that effectively respond to the needs of learners; and enhancing the knowledge and skills of educators in order to improve the outcomes for learners. All of these items form the basis for ongoing collaboration between EASTCONN's directors and the ACT principal. Given the collaborative, reflective, and constructive relationship that the principal and the directorship of EASTCONN maintain in working to achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations, students will be better prepared for their post-secondary plans.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- school board
- school leadership

Standard 5 Indicator 12

Conclusions

The governing board and district leadership provide the principal with significant decision-making authority to lead the school. ACT's principal is imbued with significant decision-making authority by the executive board of EASTCONN. Given the non-traditional district makeup of multiple sending schools, students could potentially come to ACT from 36 towns, the governing board of EASTCONN puts significant trust and decision-making authority in their administrators. The principal at ACT has power to make administrative decisions but also has the resource and ability to contact EASTCONN's central office when she needs support or advice on an issue. The principal will frequently confer with the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment when contemplating issues or changes at the school and, conversely, the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment will contact the principal with ideas for school improvement that she may have. When she saw the need for additional special education services at the school, the principal conferred with the director of support services to bring on an additional special education teacher. When she saw the need for fiscal support for performances, given there was no budget for productions, she worked to keep funds from ticket sales in an account at the school and to reserve them for production costs. According to the Endicott survey, 67.9 percent of staff, and 73.3 percent of parents polled agree that the principal has sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school. Because she is given sufficient decision-making authority and is able to exercise that authority, the principal can successfully lead the school.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- central office personnel
- school leadership
- Endicott survey

Standard 5 Commendations

Commendation

The safe, positive, respectful, and supportive environment and the enthusiasm of students for learning

Commendation

The equity of access to challenging academic experiences for all students

Commendation

The meaningful connection to an adult for students through the arts advisory and enrichment program

Commendation

The two research-based choices for the supervision and evaluation of certified staff

Commendation

The schedule which allows opportunities for professional development and collaboration

Commendation

The small class sizes that enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students

Commendation

The transparent, inclusive principal's leadership that is rooted in the school's core values and beliefs

Commendation

The initiatives and opportunities available for teacher leadership

Commendation

The collaborative, reflective, and constructive relationship that exists between the principal and the directorship of EASTCONN

Commendation

The principal's decision-making practices which focus on school improvement

Standard 5 Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan for professional development focused on curriculum development and assessment of student learning

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan for increasing parent involvement in decision-making

Standard 6 Indicator 1

Conclusions

The ACT school has multiple timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies for all students, including identified and at-risk students, that support each student's achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations. Parent contact is initiated any time a student's grade falls below a 73 during the academic year. The purpose of these phone calls is to ensure parents stay aware of what is happening in classrooms, to identify whether the decline in grade is due to a minor disruption in the student's life or part of a larger ongoing struggle, and to put in place interventions and to devise strategies to bring the student back to his or her regular achievement level. For students who continue to struggle, a student assistance team (SAT) is put in place. A student can self-advocate for referral to SAT, can be referred by a faculty member, or can be referred by a parent or guardian. A student's team is comprised of the principal, the school counselor, the school social worker, one of the student's classroom teachers, the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), and the student. The SAT process is available to students who are having emotional, academic, and/or social difficulties. During the SAT process, the area of difficulty is identified, a plan is made, a contract stating the responsibilities of the student, staff, and family is developed and signed, and a follow-up meeting date is set. Potential next steps in the SAT process can include, but are not limited to, referral to special education services or to community partners. Finally, a leadership team comprised of the principal, the school counselor, the social worker, and the special education teacher meet bi-weekly to discuss and identify students who may be at risk or in crisis, and determine if interventions need to be put in place.

Within the classroom, all students have equitable access to the curriculum in an inclusive setting. A distinct advantage that the school has is the small class sizes that enable individualized learning and the ability to provide accommodations for students of different learning levels. Additionally, several classrooms have paraprofessionals to assist. Students who may require further support in the classroom, such as a student who has a severe hearing impairment, may be provided with a 1:1 paraprofessional through the special education process of that student's sending school. Specific support for students in preparation for career and/or college readiness is provided by the school counselor both in and out of a classroom setting. Although the school counselor meets with each student at the beginning and end of each year, more formal and frequent support begins in a student's junior year. The class, After ACT Prep, is co-taught by the school counselor and is available to seniors interested in more directed learning and planning for their post-secondary futures. The social worker is available to all students throughout the day for support and has access to many resources students can be connected to for emotional and/or social support. Health services are provided throughout the year to students via ongoing assessments, which may lead to an intervention plan being constructed should an area of concern be identified. This is all made possible by constant collaboration among students, student support staff, teachers, families, and the community. The multitude of timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies, complimented by small class sizes and a commitment to collaboration, supports and ensures each student's achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teacher interview
- students
- parents
- school leadership
- school support staff
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 6 Indicator 2

Conclusions

The school consistently provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services. At the beginning of each school year, an orientation night is open to all freshmen, transfer students, and families to introduce the ACT school social worker, the school counselor, and give a brief overview of all student support services available to students and families. Additionally, a comprehensive packet of informational documents, letters of introduction, and family needs surveys are sent annually to each family. Further communication with student families comes regularly through quarterly newsletters and the ACT Facebook page. The school regularly contacts families through set-up systems, which establish communication via phone calls, text messages, emails, and occasionally follow-up letters in the mail. Student support services that ACT does not have available on-site are made available through community contacts and resources. The school's social worker has established connections and partnerships with outside agencies, such as PFLAGG, Salvation Army, and other agencies set up to assist families in times of emergency or crisis. Further communication is initiated between the school and families of students who are referred to the student assistance team. According to the Endicott survey, the majority of students, families, and staff agree that there is sufficient and frequent communication. Through surveys sent home and informal feedback, the school collects data to determine which student support services are effective and which services students feel would be beneficial for them and/or their peers. Because of the multiple methods of disseminating information, families feel confident in their knowledge of support services available to their students, therefore ensuring that students in need, especially those most at-risk, are supported fully and quickly.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- students
- parents
- school support staff
- Endicott survey

Standard 6 Indicator 3

Conclusions

Student support services staff use a variety of technology resources to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student. All students work with the school counselor to create a Naviance account to help guide them with preparing for college and career readiness. Services within Naviance include goal and achievement planners. All students also have PowerSchool accounts to monitor their academic performance, to which families have access also. PowerSchool can be accessed from any device which supports Safari, and apps are available for iPhones and Androids, ensuring that students and families have on-demand access to grades and teacher comments/reports. The special education department utilizes IEP Direct to keep track of and access student IEPs, and they are in regular email communication with all teachers regarding the performance of IEP students, as well as any sending district 1:1 paraprofessionals. Depending on individual need, additional technology, such as an FM System for a student with a hearing impairment, is made available. All students also undergo STAR testing a minimum of four times a year to monitor progress and growth. Because of budgetary constraints, the special education department takes great strides to utilize the current technology available to find free web-based practices and resources that align with each course's curriculum. IEP and ELL student needs are being met, and there is a continuous movement to find ways to expand resources to stay up to date with best practice and to further respond to each individual student's needs within each class curriculum. Student health records are maintained electronically by the nurse via SNAP Health Center Electronic Health Record software. With the current technology available, student support services staff effectively use technology to deliver a range of coordinated services for each student.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- school support staff
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 6 Indicator 4

Conclusions

ACT has an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff for school counseling services, with one school counselor and one social worker for a student body of approximately 130 students. A comprehensive 9-12 school counseling curriculum is in the process of being written, with products such as the After ACT Prep course emerging one stage at a time. The After ACT Prep course, designed for seniors, is co-taught by the school counselor and a history teacher. Outside of this course, the school counselor meets with all students bi-annually, individually and in grade-level settings. Beginning junior year and as students start to plan for their post-secondary lives, additional individual and group meetings between students and the school counselor are arranged. School counseling services offer a healthy relationship advocate group, and other small groups and initiative supported by student council, such as a Sexuality and Gender Alliance and an anti-bullying initiative. The social worker has established partnerships and connections with a variety of additional community resources, such as the Teen Outreach Program. For the past seven years, students at ACT have consistently placed in the statewide Top 10 Teen Safe Driving DMV video contest, which requires students to research unsafe driving habits, including but not limited to, driving under the influence and texting while driving, and communicate the consequences of those choices to the community. Should further services be determined to be necessary, EASTCONN's director of student services can coordinate and provide referral or direct services to ACT students in crisis on-site or off-site, depending on the need. Monthly advisory and enrichment time is regularly utilized to address specific student needs within the school, bring in guest speakers, presentations, and other community partners to respond to as the school year progresses.

Data relating to school counseling services are collected and analyzed formally and informally throughout the school year, although there is no evidence of clear evaluation standards for counseling services at this time. The leadership team, comprised of the principal, the school counselor, the social worker, and the special education teacher meet bi-weekly to discuss the efficacy of services currently being provided. There is a student suggestion box which is regularly reviewed by the school counseling staff, and surveys sent home a few times a year to collect further data. Evidence collected from the Endicott survey has already started to be analyzed by the school counseling services to find ways to strengthen current programs and resources. The counselor, social worker, and EASTCONN's director of student services have established several connections with community resources to support students. When there is a written guidance curriculum and program evaluation, the counseling services can ensure that all students are achieving the school's 21st century learning expectation.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- school board
- school leadership
- school support staff
- Endicott survey
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 6 Indicator 5

Conclusions

ACT's health services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff, fulfilled by a registered nurse on-site for three hours each day. The nurse provides both direct and preventative interventions, as well as referral services. Direct interventions include responding to injury, responding to emergency situations, and referring students to additional resources, which can include a student's primary care doctor in relation to a specific injury or concern or ACT's SAT. Preventative interventions include providing ongoing health assessments, such as scoliosis screenings; evaluating required health assessments as mandated by the state; maintaining up to date medical records; and revising emergency action plans and protocols as necessary. The nurse collaborates with the school counselor and social worker to provide further interventions. EASTCONN also provides CPR, AED, First Aid, and medicine distribution training for certain ACT staff members. Additionally, ACT's security guard, who is on site all day, is a certified EMT. To maintain document security and confidentially, student health records are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the space designated for the nurse. Medicine is kept locked in the teacher's lounge and is only accessible by authorized staff members. Since at times the nurse provides services in the school lobby, there is consensus among students, staff and parents confidentiality is not always provided. ACT health services is sufficiently staffed providing the continued health and success of students as determined by a nursing audit conducted during the school year 2015-2016 for the purpose of program evaluation. In addition the school uses STAR data to determine what practices need to be changed to provide the best services in meeting the school's 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- facility tour
- teachers
- students
- parents
- school support staff
- Endicott survey
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 6 Indicator 6

Conclusions

There are currently no library/media services integrated into curriculum and instructional practices. Media services are in the process of being developed at present, with occasional support from a specialist from ACT's sister school, who is available to come in by formal request during afternoon hours on certain days. There is a course taught by a history teacher which is a requirement for freshmen that uses elements of library/media services, including best practice research strategies; however, ACT teachers have access to a "Skybrary" via Schoology to access certain digital resources, and they are encouraged to teach effective research methods and methods of evaluating reliable online sources. There is no dedicated library media space and there is a limited range of materials, technology, print material and other information services in support of the school's curriculum and student needs. Furthermore, students do not have access to available technology before or after school. In order to meet these needs, ACT teachers are encouraged to utilize the Willimantic Public Library located across the street; however, the library has been under renovation and closed for the past several months, and no personnel were available to assist students. According to the Endicott survey, no more than 20 percent of the students feel the school has adequate library/media services, no more than 20 percent of the staff feel the school has adequate library/media services, and parents are split at roughly 50 percent. The lack of library/media services means it is difficult for the school to develop strategies to incorporate library/media services into the school's curriculum and instructional practices impacting its ability to support student needs in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- teacher interview
- students
- parents
- school support staff
- Endicott survey
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 6 Indicator 7

Conclusions

ACT support services for identified students, including special education, Section 504 of the ADA, and English language learners, have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff to achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations. There is constant collaboration and discussion between support service staff and teachers throughout the year, including professional development sessions at the beginning of the school year to discuss accommodations for identified IEP, 504 and ELL students with all staff; regular faculty meetings and email communication with updates to plans and performance; open and frequent one-on-one communication between support services staff and teaching staff; formal SAT referral meetings; and online and hard copy access for all teachers to student IEP and 504 plans. Identified students receive services in inclusion classrooms, and receive additional support weekly in the resource room as prescribed by a student's IEP and/or 504 plan, which can range anywhere from 2.5-7 hours a week. Data from progress reports, a variety of academic assessments, reporting from district and state standardized testing, and STAR testing results are collected, analyzed, and used to construct plans of action in order to support student success in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. There was little evidence of data used to support improved services specific to English language learners; however, there was little evidence to show a need for that in response to the school's current population. ACT has allocated sufficient student support staff who utilize resources to ensure all students are successful in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teacher interview
- school leadership
- school support staff
- Standard sub-committee

Standard 6 Commendations

Commendation

The ongoing communication between the school and families regarding student support services

Commendation

The variety of interventions available to students based on their social, academic, and emotional needs

Commendation

The variety of community resources available to students to ensure support in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations

Commendation

The collaboration and open communication between student support services staff and teachers

Commendation

The access to individualized student support within an inclusion setting

Commendation

The ongoing communication between the school and families

Standard 6 Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to provide appropriate library/media services

Recommendation

Develop and implement a program evaluation process for counseling services

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to address confidentiality for students receiving health services during the school day

Standard 7 Indicator 1

Conclusions

The community and the district's governing body provide dependable funding for a range of school programs and services, sufficient professional staff in most curricular areas, some support staff, most school programs, necessary services and sufficient equipment, instructional supplies and materials as well as some technology support. As a magnet school, ACT faces challenges with adequate funding. Connecticut's budget for magnet schools has not increased in the last five years, and so ACT must rely on student enrollment and payments from the over thirty school districts whose students attend the school. The budget provides funding for each of the school's needs: arts (production), academics, building structure and the community of EASTCONN. Generally, professional staff is provided with requested classroom supplies and equipment. The school has adequate funding for professional development, but the funding for curriculum review and revision is limited. There is no budget for necessary library/media services or a science lab, and technology has to be shared using technology carts. All allocations are distributed through the governing team of the EASTCONN's executive director, its curriculum director, and the principal of ACT. When ACT has complete budgetary support for staffing and program needs, the school will be better able to ensure that all students achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- facility tour
- central office personnel

Standard 7 Indicator 2

Conclusions

The school develops, plans, and funds programs to ensure the maintenance and repair of the building and school plant, and to properly maintain, catalogue, and replace equipment to keep the school clean on a daily basis. Although some cosmetic repair and maintenance is not always addressed in a timely manner, the facility is clean and safe. All requests for repairs are submitted electronically through "School-Dude," a system which is used to record and log maintenance and equipment requests. The two full-time maintenance staff are supervised by the EASTCONN's director of facilities who is responsible for the budget. As a result, the students and faculty are able to provide the programs necessary for the school to run effectively.

Sources of Evidence

- facility tour
- teacher interview
- central office personnel

Standard 7 Indicator 3

Conclusions

The EASTCONN communiy has designed a long-range plan that addresses programs and services, enrollment changes and staffing needs, facility needs, technology, capital improvements. The school also has a long range plan which deals with the many facilities issues such as the science labs, nurse's office, and computer resources. In addition, the school tracks school enrollments in order to anticipate revenues from year to year. The educational services team has developed a long-range plan for programs and services. There is an annual end-of-year check-in of anticipated staffing needs. While the school seems to be able to plan for program and services, it continues to struggle with updating and modernizing its technology resources. When the state is able to provide predictable sustained funding for the ACT school, the long range plan will be implemented.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- central office personnel
- school leadership

Standard 7 Indicator 4

Conclusions

The building administrator is actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget, but the faculty has limited input. The ACT school is still moving toward having the faculty and building administrators be actively engaged and involved in the budget process. Currently, the principal communicates with the executive director and the school's budget is based on student enrollment. The responsibility of the budget allocations falls on the principal, but not the leadership team. The principal revises the budget and passes it to the executive director who is part of EASTCONN. Once the budget is approved, the administrative receptionist manages the budget for the arts and academics. The ability of the faculty to have more input in the budget development will strengthen the collaborative nature of the school.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- central office personnel
- school support staff

Standard 7 Indicator 5

Conclusions

The school site and plant do not support the delivery of high quality school programs and services in all areas. The renovation of the former theater thirteen years ago has provided some appropriate space for classrooms, especially for the arts, but the facility lacks a dedicated science laboratory, cafeteria, media center and gymnasium. Students do receive hot lunches from a neighboring school and a nurse's office has been created from a former stage dressing room. The nurse dispenses medication in the school foyer as prescriptions are kept in a locked area in the teachers' room. Additional spaces are used for a variety of functions including costume design classroom, auditorium, support services offices, and other performing arts rooms. Evidence indicate that some teachers have adequate and suitable offices, or personal desk areas, and there are confidential areas and suitable space in guidance areas, conference rooms, and offices. Separate school parking is unavailable because of the the unique location of the school. While the school and plant have the adequate performing arts facilities, some of the academic spaces are not fully supporting the delivery of high quality school programs and services. When the school addresses these facilities needs, all school programs and services will be highly supported.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- student shadowing
- facility tour
- parents

Standard 7 Indicator 6

Conclusions

The school maintains documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. The ACT school adequately maintains the facility. The school personnel provide proper documentation where needed which can be found through EASTCONN. There is adequate ventilation throughout the facility and a temperature control system. The school's maintenance director can access the facility control room remotely from his personal cellular device to make adjustments as needed or to troubleshoot issues that arise. As a result, the ACT school runs efficiently and safely.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- teachers
- department leaders
- central office personnel

Standard 7 Indicator 7

Conclusions

All professional staff actively engage parents and families as partner in each student's education and reach out specifically to those families who have been less connected with the school. Teachers and administrators strive to engage parents and families as partners in the scholastic lives of their sons and daughters. The primary modes of contact include PowerSchool, open houses, and parent teacher conferences, and teachers strive to increase communication via emails, phone calls and quarterly newsletters. Some teachers have established personal goals for communicating with parents. There is a school-wide practice to connect with parents when their children's grade in a course falls under a 73 percent grade average. In addition, the social worker and school counselor work to engage all parents in educational decisions. As a result of the staff actively engaging parents and families as partners, students learning needs will continue to be met.

Sources of Evidence

- self-study
- panel presentation
- parents
- community members

Standard 7 Indicator 8

Conclusions

The school has developed productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that extensively supports student learning. Many forms of community outreach and partnerships are evident. Each performance department contributes two shows/performances/productions for a total of ten/twelve yearly. In addition, several departments have formed partnerships with the local library, police department, and executive administration for projects such as community connections through history and film-making, a recruitment video for the police department and the creation of Web ads for local businesses. Students meet with their performing arts advisory once a month to discuss a range of topics, including, but not limited to, post-secondary plans and the opportunities for dual enrollment Quinnipaug Valley Community College and Eastern Connecticut State University and have access to professors at ECSU. On other advisory days, students attend teacher-led enrichment opportunities to explore other interests or growth opportunities. Students become the face of the school as they engage in street performances one Thursday a month. Because of these partnerships in and out of the school setting, students continue to feel safe, successful, and connected to their school and the greater community.

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- self-study
- student shadowing
- panel presentation
- teacher interview
- teachers
- students
- parents
- Endicott survey

Standard 7 Commendations

Commendation

The financial support and the opportunities for professional development provided by EASTCONN

Commendation

The efforts of the facilities personnel to provide a clean and well-maintained school

Commendation

The extensive community partnerships, business partnerships, and higher education partnerships for the ACT students

Commendation

The school's efforts to effectively communicate and engage with parents and families

Standard 7 Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to increase faculty participation in the development of the budget

Recommendation

Develop and implement a plan to address facilities needs including a science laboratory, a designated cafeteria, a private nursing area and research/information services

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 this school. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administration yearly of progress made addressing visiting committee recommendations.

Since it is in the best 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 initial/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 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 principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty days (60) 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 the Standards for Accreditation. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included on the next page. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report which is required of each member school 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 evaluation 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 Commission staff following the on-site visit.

The visiting committee would like to express thanks to the community for the hospitality and welcome. The school community completed an exemplary self-study that clearly identified the school's strengths and areas of need. The time and effort dedicated to the self-study and preparation for the visit ensured a successful accreditation visit.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES Commission on Public Secondary Schools

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence 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
- grade level responsibilities of the principal
- cuts in the number of support staff
- decreases in student services
- cuts in the educational media staffing
- increases in student enrollment that cannot be accommodated
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees
- changes in the student population that warrant program or staffing modification(s) that cannot be accommodated, e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency

Roster of Team Members

Chair(s)

Chair: Pamela Burke - Merrimack Valley High School

Assistant Chair: Troy Hopkins - Ashford School

Team Members

Mr. John Fidler - East Hampton High School

Valerie Fortney - North Haven High School

Hillary Lynch - Atlantis Charter School

Heather O'Brien - The Morgan School

Michelle Pusser - Academy of Information Technology and Engineering

Paul Ricamo - Mt. Hope High School

Lisandra Rosario - Connecticut River Academy