

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

**COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE**

**Billerica Memorial High School**

**Billerica, Massachusetts**

**March 3, 4, 5, 6, 2002**

**Stephen Cullinan, CHAIR**  
**Robert C. O'Day, ASSISTANT CHAIR**  
**Richard Safier, PRINCIPAL**

## **STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS**

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

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of Billerica Memorial High School to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty (60) days 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 Billerica Memorial High School in terms of the school's stated mission and the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.

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## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

- Teaching and Learning Standards
  - Mission and Expectations for Student Learning
  - Curriculum
  - Instruction
  - Assessment of Student Learning
- Support Standards
  - Leadership and Organization
  - School Resources for Learning
  - Community Resources for Learning

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

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

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Billerica Memorial High School, a committee of 6 members with the principal serving in an *ex officio* capacity supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities

available for young people. In addition to faculty members, the self-study committee included one student and one parent.

The self-study of Billerica Memorial High School extended over a period of 17 school months from September 2000 to March 2002. The visiting committee was pleased to note that a student and a parent joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Quality of the Self-Assessment**

The self-assessment completed by the professional staff at Billerica Memorial High School had a consistent quality for each component of the standards. For all of the Standards of Accreditation, the information provided the committee with findings reflective of the strengths and needs of the school. Each indicator was addressed and rated and the staff provided the committee with a judgment of where more work was needed. As a result of this thorough presentation, the visiting committee was able to use the report not only to confirm the school reform work underway but also to guide the future works of the school in those areas where needs remain unmet.

## **Overview of Findings**

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

Billerica Memorial High School enjoys a fine reputation in the community it serves. The school has many of the elements necessary to provide youngsters with an excellent education well into the twenty-first century. Administration, faculty, students, and parents have affirmed the positive regard for this school. The high school has a delightful student body, that openly expresses positive beliefs regarding the academic preparation provided to students as well as the safe environment provided by administration and staff. The students are bright, intelligent, articulate, personable, and open in discussing their school.

Billerica Memorial High School has an experienced professional staff that is appreciated by the school board and students. Most students report that they believe there is a caring adult to whom they can turn in a time of need. There is also an expansive facility that supports a comprehensive academic program and one that should be able to handle the anticipated increase in student population during the next few years.

## **Mission & Expectations for Student Learning**

The Billerica community has successfully created high expectations for students in academic, civic, and social areas. These expectations have been further delineated in the Bridge Document. Further course proficiencies provide both parents and students with a clear outline of course expectations. Considerable effort has been expended to make the mission and expectations for student learning document known throughout the community. The mission and expectations for student learning reflects the fundamental values and beliefs of the Billerica community.

To ensure that the mission and expectations for student learning becomes a living document, it is imperative that this community develop a process to regularly review it to ensure that it reflects the needs of a changing student population. It is also imperative that the mission and expectations document become the guiding force in all future decision-making. Finally, although, there is growing awareness among students, parents, and staff regarding this document, more needs to be done to make the mission and expectations known, valued, and lived at Billerica Memorial High School.

## **Curriculum**

The curriculum of Billerica Memorial High School provides challenging and rigorous work for many students at a variety of levels. Students in advanced classes stated their belief in the high quality of their academic preparation. The success of Billerica graduates is further evidence of the confidence expressed by students in their preparation. However, there is concern regarding

the level of challenge and rigor demanded of all students in all disciplines at all levels. It is imperative that all students are held to high expectations in all levels of work.

Curriculum integration has begun in the American Studies program. However, a plan must be developed and implemented that will create more opportunities for similarly integrated curriculum. The use of rubrics is common in some areas and becoming more prevalent in others. However, this has usually been the result of the initiative of individual teachers rather than a systemic plan of professional or curriculum development. The development and implementation of rubrics that specify the expected level of the quality of student performance in all tasks, for all students, in all disciplines, at all levels is imperative. To successfully complete this daunting task the opportunity must be provided for staff to meet to review and revise student work in a formal manner. It is also imperative that the professional development program for the district support this initiative.

Assistance is offered to students in a multitude of ways. Among them are the learning center, Title 1 services, peer tutoring, the night school, and the extended year program. A wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular offerings are available for students in which students are actively engaged.

The MCAS has had significant influence upon the revision of curriculum, possibly to the exclusion of other important, local sources of data such as classroom and departmental assessment. It is important that a formal process be designed and implemented to incorporate the results of that local assessment to guide future curriculum planning.

Class size has been a source of concern for staff and students as the community added six full-time teachers last year. However, the addition of MCAS classes added to a projected increase in enrollment in tight fiscal times might pose a significant challenge to the district.

The increase in technology is commendable as it provides an exciting opportunity at various levels and in most disciplines. Again the need is to develop a long-range plan for hardware, software, and personnel to keep pace with demand. A related challenge will be to develop and implement appropriate professional development in technology for staff members. Finally and most importantly, it is imperative to direct efforts to implement a plan to integrate technology into all curricular areas.

## **Instruction**

A variety of instructional methodologies are evident at Billerica Memorial High School. However, this is not evidenced in all disciplines and at all levels. Again, the professional development plan must address staff needs to develop the expertise to implement a wide array of instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of today's learners. Those instructional strategies must then be implemented across the school to involve all students in higher order thinking.

Personalization of instruction is in evidence and has positively affected student performance. Again, the challenge is to further personalize instruction for all students in all academic areas.

The mission and expectations document has created high expectations for the students at Billerica Memorial High School. Instruction in all courses at all levels must support higher order thinking, independent inquiry and problem-solving skills. The revision of instruction takes time and resources. As significant challenge for this community is to develop and implement a plan whereby the discussion of instructional strategies, practices, and student work shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.

### **Assessment**

Excellent examples of authentic assessment are evident throughout the school. Students are challenged to make real world applications in many areas. Many rich and exciting assessment tools are provided in a variety of venues. Quite often, however, the success of teachers in implementing authentic assessment is due more to the initiative of individual teachers than a planned program of professional development. Evidence of integrated curriculum and assessment is limited. Another challenge is to create a formal plan for professional staff to meet within and across departments to improve the use and quality of assessments strategies.

### **Leadership & Organization of Student Learning**

There was universal support for the current administration with special recognition to the principal for the work he has done in the area of communication and accessibility since assuming his current role. The administrative team and staff have made positive steps in developing a positive learning environment. The support and involvement of parents at Billerica Memorial High School is also commended. The principal has sufficient autonomy to guide the school in its stated mission and expectations. Meaningful roles have been accorded to teachers, parents, and staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.

There are a number of demanding challenges for the future. Formal plans that clearly describe procedures for planning curriculum, managing the growth and creative use of technology, as well as maintenance of facilities must be developed and implemented. The creation of formal opportunities for staff members to collaborate within and across departments and formal opportunities for staff to have reflective, thoughtful, and constructive discourse about student well-being must be developed. Student grouping patterns that foster heterogeneity and are consistent with the mission and expectations of the school must be researched, developed, and implemented.

## **School Resources for Learning**

Billerica Memorial High School should be proud of the variety of support services and programs in place for student success. The learning center, the evening school, peer tutoring, and Title one services are all sources of pride and necessary supports for a changing population. The efforts of support personnel, guidance, special education staff, library media personnel, and the social worker are highly regarded by fellow colleagues, students, and parents. They are resourceful, dedicated, and caring professionals who are appreciated within the community.

The demands placed upon these services as well as those of the nurses are stretched in a variety of ways and for various reasons. Attention and planning is needed to guarantee that the necessary, intended student services are not compromised, as their effective delivery is necessary to successfully attain the expectations of the Billerica Memorial High School Mission Statement.

## **Community Resources for Learning**

Many parents are active participants in the life of Billerica Memorial High School. Students are also enthusiastically engaged in the academic and co-curricular offerings of the school. There are a variety of school-community partnerships that benefit students. These represent a justifiable source of pride within the school. Among the current challenges is to continue to expand these and similar opportunities to assist students at all levels.

Billerica Memorial High School has an expansive physical plant. As such, it adequately supports the various offerings for students. The obvious need to direct funds and resources first to teaching and learning does not, however mean that capital improvements and ongoing maintenance issues can be ignored. Problems related to heating and ventilation throughout the school negatively impact the teaching and learning environment and must be resolved. Student concern regarding the availability and condition of the lavatories must also be addressed. A written plan for daily cleaning and maintenance of the school along with appropriate implementation of the capital improvement plan is necessary. Further, the implementation of the capital improvement plan is most important.

## School and Community Report

The Town of Billerica is located 20 miles northwest of Boston. Incorporated in 1655, the town remained predominantly rural until the mid-nineteenth century when a major mill complex was sited on the Concord River in North Billerica. Although a number of small industries grew up over the next 100 years, it wasn't until the 1950s that the present day industrial base was established. Today, Billerica is a major regional employer and home to several high technology firms, many of which are offshoots of companies along Route 128 to the south. With only 10,000 residents in 1950, Billerica currently has 38,982 residents.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts' average per pupil expenditure in 1999 was \$6,333 compared to Billerica's \$5,783. In 2000, the state's per pupil expenditure was increased to \$6,692; Billerica's expenditure increased to \$5,809. During those two years, 92% of educational funding came from local and state sources. Eight percent came from federal and other sources. Of the total Billerica property taxes available, 51% supported education.

The Billerica Public School System does not participate in school choice and, therefore, has no students enrolled from other communities. BMHS students have an opportunity to take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities after school hours. The University of Massachusetts at Lowell and Middlesex Community College have been the principal colleges BMHS students have attended with three students currently enrolled at the latter through this program. The Billerica Alternative School (BAS) program provides a structured environment for students who are unable to be successful in the traditional day school program. The Merrimack Education Center (MEC) located in the neighboring town of Chelmsford is an independent school serving "at risk" youth from Billerica and other communities.

There are a number of partnerships between BMHS and business or industries in the area. In addition to the Billerica Partners for Education UPS awards and grants, Cisco Systems Corporation provides educational/training opportunities through MCC. Middlesex Community College has an ongoing articulation agreement with Billerica Memorial High School allowing students to receive college credit for one course currently taught at the high school with a second course under consideration. A similar agreement with Northern Essex Community College will be implemented in the fall 2002.

The district includes six elementary schools, two middle schools, a high school, and a vocational school.

BMHS offers to qualifying students a wide array of academic and non-academic awards to undergraduates as well as to graduating seniors in June. BMHS gains performance data through the use of PSAT, SAT, AP, and MCAS instruments. Students are also evaluated in mid-term and final exam projects and through student exhibitions and performance in the arts. Students eligible for graduation must have a minimum of 100 credits with mandated course work in English, math, social studies, science, physical education, health, and fine or practical arts. Diplomas were awarded to 319 graduates in 2000. BMHS has a school improvement plan in place.

With a total high school enrollment of 1,452, the classes are fairly evenly divided. Over the next two years (2001-2003), total high school enrollment is projected to increase by 9%. The average daily attendance rate for students was 95.3% in 1999 and 94.5% in 2000. There are no unusual conditions that affect withdrawals and transfers at the high school. The Billerica Alternative School (BAS), however, does provide an opportunity for students who are considering withdrawal to remain in school. In 1999, the BMHS drop out rate was 1.6 and 2.4 in 2000. Average class size in academic areas range between 18 and 23 students. Ninety percent of the Class of 2001 is enrolled in post-secondary education.

Some school initiatives are in effect now; others are yet to be completed. Billerica schools receive a number of state and federal grants that fund various programs. Billerica Memorial High School is able to enhance curricular activities through grants from the Billerica Partners for Education and other community based programs. The BMHS Scholarship Program provides thirty-three scholarships totaling \$65,000 for graduating seniors. The Billerica Scholarship Foundation presented 134 awards in the amount of \$100, 000 in 2001.

Of the 105 teaching staff responding to survey, 76 (73%) reported having a major in their content area while 28 (27%) reported having a minor.

Some of the major issues that the BMHS community faces are similar to those faced by many Massachusetts communities. There is concern that in the future the impact of the MCAS may result in the reduction of courses in some curricular areas or that class size would be increased to accommodate additional prep courses. The student population is projected to increase while budget resources remain constant with inflation. In addition, many faculty members are expected to retire over the next five to ten years.

**MISSION STATEMENT**  
**BILLERICA MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL**

Billerica Memorial High School's mission is to create an environment in which each member is provided the opportunity to learn, grow, and become an enriched individual. We are dedicated to becoming a community where individuals are respected for the inherent dignity that is theirs as human beings. All are encouraged to join in and appreciate the adventure and rewards of lifelong learning through the development of their unique talents and abilities. Furthermore, we dedicate ourselves to the creation of high academic standards in a comprehensive environment. These standards are essential to the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and civic development of each member of our school.

Through the achievement of these goals, each individual is empowered to become a competent, caring, and responsible citizen working in and contributing to our school town, state, and country.

**DIGNITY \* RESPECT \* COMMUNITY \* ENRICHMENT**

ADOPTED: JANUARY 3, 2001

## **EXPECTATIONS FOR LEARNING BILLERICA MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL**

- A. Thinking Skills Expectation
  - Students will use a variety of complex thinking skills.
- B. Learning and Problem-Solving Skills Expectation
  - Students will become skilled learners and problem solvers.
- C. Accountability and Responsibility Skills Expectation
  - Students will accept responsibility for efforts to achieve their academic potential and show accountability for the quality of their participation in the learning process.
- D. Communication Skills Expectation
  - Students will communicate ideas effectively using modes of communication that are appropriate for content, purpose, and audience.
- E. Cooperative Working Skills Expectation
  - Students will work cooperatively and with respect for one another's individuality.
- F. Technology Skills Expectation
  - Students will develop the technology skills necessary to adapt to an ever-changing society.
- G. Wellness and Health Skills Expectation
  - Students will develop an awareness of both the intrinsic value of their physical and emotional well-being and of the various activities that will enable them to maintain wellness, and they will demonstrate the skills of realizing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- H. Social and Civic Skills Expectation
  - Students will interact with others in a constructive and respectful manner, will become active members of the school and community, will recognize and act responsibly regarding the needs of their community, and will understand and apply the democratic process to respond effectively.

**COMMISSION ON  
PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**TEACHING AND LEARNING  
STANDARDS**

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**MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS  
FOR STUDENTS LEARNING**

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**CURRICULUM**

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**INSTRUCTION**

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**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT  
LEARNING**

# **1 TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD**

## **Mission and Expectations for Students Learning**

The school's mission statement describes the essence of what the school as a community of learners is seeking to achieve. The expectations for student learning are based on and drawn from the school's mission statement. These expectations are the fundamental goals by which the school continually assesses the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Every component of the school community must focus on enabling all students to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.

1. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning and the purpose of the school and be consistent with the district's mission statement.
2. The school shall have established expectations for student learning that:
  - reflect the school's mission statement;
  - identify high expectations for all students in academic, civic, and social areas;
  - specifically state what all students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school taking into account the skills, competencies, concepts, and understandings identified by the district, state, and national standards and by professional organizations.
3. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the faculty, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.
4. The school shall utilize a variety of data to regularly review the mission statement and expectations for student learning to assure that they reflect students' needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state standards.
5. There shall be a separate document developed by the faculty that defines the school's academic expectations for student learning in specific, measurable ways, describes specific levels of performance, and indicates which level is the indicator of successful accomplishment.
6. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Billerica Memorial High School Mission Statement and Expectations For Student Learning articulates the school's fundamental philosophy regarding the purpose of the school and the high standards to which students should be held. Created by a group comprised of a parent, a student, and several faculty members, the document was revised throughout its development, based on input from various constituents. The mission statement is an accurate reflection of the values and beliefs of the community and is consistent with the mission of the district. The document was approved by the faculty early in February 2001 and accepted unanimously by the school committee later that month. It has been widely disseminated to students through the student handbook, framed copies throughout the school, in-house television presentations, and focused lessons reaching all students and to parents and the community-at-large through handouts and home mailings. In addition, it appears on the school web site (self-study, school committee, parents).

The mission statement is comprehensive and inclusive. It sets forth an idealistic vision of a vital community of learners who function in a caring, enriching environment that respects each individual and provides opportunity for growth and development in academic as well as personal terms. It reflects the beliefs that underlie current practices and, in fact, grew out of the questions: who are we? what is our role in society? and what is our purpose in this school? The answers to these questions revolve around four fundamental principles: dignity, respect, community, and enrichment. The mission statement derives out of a deeply held commitment to these principles evident in the administration, the faculty, and the student body at large. Nonetheless, the mission statement is expressed in idealistic terms that serve more as a guide and goal for the future than a fully realized description of the school at this time. A major concern of the faculty is that it might be set aside, having served its purpose of directing the reaccreditation process and a common reaction of students is that it seems to have been written and presented in direct response to the anticipated arrival of the NEASC team. The challenge for Billerica Memorial High School is to ensure that the mission statement will become a living document. Rather than viewing the document as a statement of what is already being done, the faculty needs to use the document as a working reference point for the further creation and development of curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment tools. Additionally, the mission statement should be used as a driving force for all decisions within the school. While the mission statement will continue to be published in school documents and mailings and reviewed with incoming freshmen, there is currently no mechanism in place to ensure that the document itself will be an ongoing component of school curriculum at all levels nor to measure whether its goals are indeed being explicitly fostered throughout the school programs, nor to review or revise it at any time (teachers, parents, students).

Billerica Memorial High School administration, faculty, and staff all contribute to the development of a safe, supportive atmosphere throughout the school, a fact that is strongly attested to by both themselves and students. Teachers and students exhibit a genuine liking for one another, interacting with warmth and concern. Students report that the principal is very approachable, "easy to talk to." Within this community, opportunities exist through which students can discover and develop their individual strengths. The strong music, art, and drama programs, courses in practical arts and home skills, among others, as well as a broad range of

clubs and co-curricular activities, provide students with the opportunity to develop their unique talents and abilities. Such programs as peer tutoring, peer leadership, conflict resolution, the community service class, and the mentor program provide opportunities for students and staff to support one another and contribute to the larger community. The mission statement emphasizes the balanced interrelationship between the individual and the community, and the school promotes this balance by providing a clear set of rules and expectations printed in the student handbook that enables the entire community to operate respectfully, responsibly, and fairly. In spite of the commendable efforts of the school to foster positive attitudes and relationships however, faculty and students report incidents of disharmony and lack of respect, both for people and for the facility. While the faculty is aware of the pressures exerted by society at large, which militate against civility and respect, it accepts the responsibility for creating an atmosphere that fosters positive behaviors and protects all members of the school community. Maintaining an active focus on the vision of the mission statement and the related learning expectations will enable the entire BMHS community to reinforce the positive aspects of the school atmosphere and mitigate the negative ones (teachers, support staff, students).

By delineating eight concrete academic, wellness, social, and civic skills, the expectations for student learning steers the school in the development of policies and practices that foster the attainment of these goals and align the curriculum with the Massachusetts Common Core of Learning. Each expectation is supported by a rubric that clearly identifies those indicators of excellent, good, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory achievement of the skill. Further, Billerica Memorial High School has written an extensive bridge document that specifies by department, concrete, rigorous learning expectations. Billerica Memorial High School cites data from assessments such as SAT, AP, and the MCAS to support the judgments of student success in meeting these expectations (panel presentation, self-study, teachers).

In addition to these measurement tools, Billerica Memorial High School faculty members have created specific proficiencies lists for every course that provide teachers with clear guidance for the delivery of curriculum in those courses and students with clear indicators against which to measure their success. These proficiencies are distributed to students at the start of every course and to parents at Back-to-School Night. In addition, many semester exams are keyed to the proficiencies, with questions being aligned in such a way that students know exactly which proficiencies are being tested in any one question. In at least one department, the accomplishment of a cumulative number of proficiencies is the determining factor by which students are advanced to more difficult levels of study. As a result of the pervasive use of proficiencies, students are familiar with the concept of proficiencies as a measure of academic achievement and are able to cite proficiencies for their coursework. However, in at least one department, proficiencies for all courses of every level are *verbatim* copies of each other, with the exception of a change in text titles. Failure to provide students with appropriately differentiated expectations in some department proficiencies creates an unclear picture of the purpose and expectations unique to individual courses. Other internal devices used to measure a student's achievement of the high academic expectations of BMHS are rubrics created by some teachers and linked to some assignments in some curricula. The sporadic use of these tools, however, provides inconsistent guidance to students striving to satisfy BMHS's high academic standards (school handbooks, teachers, students).

## **COMMENDATIONS**

1. The succinct and clear terms of the mission statement which capture the essence of the school community's basic values and beliefs
2. The commitment of the faculty to the realization of the ideals expressed in the mission statement
3. The wide dissemination of the mission statement and student expectations for learning
4. The clear identification in the bridge document of indicators that determine a student's achievement of Billerica Memorial High School's high academic expectations.
5. The creation and pervasive use of proficiencies keyed to specific courses in all disciplines
6. The efforts of administration, faculty, staff, and students to create a supportive culture throughout Billerica Memorial High School that encourages both individual development and community spirit

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Ensure that the principles of dignity, respect, community, and enrichment remain an explicit focus in the life of Billerica Memorial High School
2. Develop and implement a plan to ensure that the school's mission and expectations for student learning document is reviewed and revised on a regular basis
3. Ensure that the mission statement and student expectations for learning serves as a constant reference point in the development of curricula, instruction strategies, and assessment tools
4. Review and revise proficiency documents to create clear, course-specific indicators of rigorous learning expectations in all levels of all disciplines
5. Ensure that all disciplines at all levels develop appropriate rubrics that are consistent with the rigorous academic standards of the student expectations for learning
6. Ensure that the mission and expectations for student learning document is used to guide all future decision-making

## **2 TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD**

### **Curriculum**

The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other educational experiences as described in the program of studies, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links what the school believes and expects students to learn to its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon staff commitment to and involvement in a dynamic process of review, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on the school's expectations for student learning.

1. From the document that defines the school's academic expectations, each curriculum area shall identify those expectations for student learning for which it is responsible and shall have clearly articulated learning standards in support of such expectations.
2. Written curriculum documents shall be aligned with the school's expectations for student learning and shall guide content, instruction, and assessment.
3. The curriculum plan shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of the school's academic expectations for student learning.
4. The content of the curriculum shall be intellectually rigorous and provide opportunities for authentic application of knowledge and skills.
5. The curriculum shall be appropriately integrated and shall emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.
6. The school shall provide opportunities to extend student learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus.
7. There shall be effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district to ensure the expectations for student learning are being addressed.
8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment and supplies, and staffing shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.
9. There shall be ongoing review and evaluation of the curriculum that takes into account the assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations for student learning.
10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the review and evaluation of curriculum.
11. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the development and revision of the curriculum.
12. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS

Billerica Memorial High School's departments have identified those academic expectations for student learning for which they have responsibility. Each department has identified a common core of knowledge that all students are expected to achieve. Students are presented with clearly articulated proficiencies that support the expectations of each course (self-study, teachers, parents).

Written proficiencies in all areas have been developed to delineate specific course outcomes so that students have the opportunity to practice and achieve Billerica Memorial High School's academic expectations. Current written curriculum documents are not available in all disciplines and all courses. Further, there is no formalized plan for the ongoing and regular review of curriculum. Written curriculum guides that describe course content require a systematized process for ongoing review and revision to maintain the correlation to the proficiencies (school documents, students, staff).

The learning center comprised of National Honor Society students and faculty members tutor students to help them achieve Billerica Memorial High School's academic expectations. The night school program is also in place to provide another opportunity for student achievement. Additional courses have been offered to monitor and motivate students having difficulty or failing the MCAS. There are several support systems in place such as special education services, Title One, the learning center, the extended year program and the night school program to help all students succeed. The community service program expands learning beyond the campus. Peer mediation provides an opportunity for students to develop problem-solving skills in support of their school community. Beyond the scope of the core curriculum, there are multiple opportunities through varied electives and co-curricular options to allow students access to additional learning experiences (school documents, students, staff).

There is evidence of an intellectually rigorous content in some classes at Billerica Memorial High School. There are many opportunities to apply skills and knowledge authentically. Mock trial provides an opportunity to apply information learned about the judicial process. DECA creates business projects and regularly competes in local, state, and national events. The Billerica Memorial High School Marching Band performs and competes regularly, applying skills and concepts learned in this course. However, this high degree of academic rigor is not present at all levels, thus the school fails to provide a challenging and rich academic environment for all students (self-study, teachers, observations, parents).

Curriculum articulation across disciplines is limited. There is an effort to integrate the curriculum combining language arts and American History. Time and resources are not provided to allow teachers to meet across disciplines. There are few opportunities for interdisciplinary learning in the classes. Teachers have to go "out of their way" to work on interdisciplinary activities. As a result, students may lack the ability to make connections across the curriculum (teachers, school documents, observations). MCAS testing with related prescriptive and remediated instruction is reported by staff members to be actually driving the curriculum. Consequently, teachers report the need to focus on greater coverage over their desire to provide learning in depth. Currently, breadth of coverage outweighs depth due to the testing pressures.

Further, the use of authentic assessment is also limited by this testing influence and its procedures (self-study, teachers, course proficiencies, curriculum coordinators).

Billerica Memorial High School offers a wide range of curricular and co-curricular activities for a diverse student population. For example, courses in auto mechanics also incorporate physics concepts such as inertia and thermal expansion. Music technology classes offer opportunities for students to apply computer, music and history skills. Billerica Memorial High School provides many opportunities for students beyond the school campus to include partnerships with Cisco Systems and Middlesex Community College (program of studies, self-study, teachers).

District-wide curriculum coordinators are in place in most disciplines to align curriculum at Billerica Memorial High School and sending schools. Focus groups comprised of faculty members and coordinators meet regularly to analyze assessment data and to make appropriate revisions. However, there is little evidence of coordination and articulation between curriculum areas (teachers, self-study, curriculum guides).

Supplies, materials, equipment, and staff are provided to implement the curriculum. Six new teachers were added to allow for the implementation of the curriculum. Teaching loads are normal regarding classroom size and assignments. However, there is a concern that anticipated increases in enrollment without staffing increases will impact the quality of curriculum and instruction. Many academic classes do not have computers or updated technological resources to support instructional needs. Despite the increase in technology in recent years, there remains a significant need for teachers to imbed the use of technology in all curricular areas. The library media center does offer excellent support to the overall curriculum (teachers, self-study, class observation).

The collegiality among staff members has led to informal collaboration for curriculum revision. The initiative of individual teachers has led to curricular change through creating and presenting changes to the curriculum coordinator. While there is no formal plan for curricular revision, the aforementioned focus groups do review and revise curriculum. The mentoring program for new teachers in place offers an excellent vehicle to introduce them to course proficiencies and curriculum (teachers, leadership team, self-study).

Some professional development opportunities are available to faculty members for the development and revision of curriculum. Billerica Memorial High School faculty members have participated in advanced placement conferences, and some staff members are participating in an upcoming *Understanding by Design* conference. Also, summer curriculum work by the math department has been provided. The district offered professional development in the use of technology in 2000-01. The demands of preparing for the NEASC accreditation have further limited professional development opportunities. A comprehensive staff development program designed to support all programs and levels is currently not in place (self-study, teachers, leadership team).

## **COMMENDATIONS**

1. The learning center that provides tutoring to students
2. The night school program
3. The extended year program
4. The variety of opportunities beyond campus
5. The collegiality among staff members
6. The wide range of co-curricular activities
7. The addition of six teachers for curriculum implementation
8. The mentoring program for new teachers
9. The curriculum focus groups
10. Participation in *Understanding by Design* professional development

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Develop course curriculum which ensure appropriate rigor for all classes at all levels
2. Develop and implement a plan for the ongoing review and revision of curriculum
3. Provide formal opportunities for staff members to review and evaluate curriculum
4. Develop and implement a plan to create more opportunities for integrated curriculum
5. Direct efforts to infuse current technology into all aspects of the curriculum
6. Implement plans to provide comprehensive professional development for all teachers on curriculum related topics
7. Develop and implement a curriculum model which emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage

### **3. TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD** **Instruction**

The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning and is the link between curriculum, learning expectations, and student performance. Instructional practice must be grounded in the school's mission and expectations for student learning, supported by research in best practice, and refined and improved based on identified student needs. Consequently, teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional practices and participate in professional dialogue with their colleagues about student learning.

1. Instructional strategies and practices shall be consistent with the school's stated mission and expectations for student learning.
2. Instructional strategies shall include practices that personalize instruction, make connections across disciplines, engage students as active self-directed learners, involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding, and provide opportunities to demonstrate the application of knowledge or learning.
3. Teachers shall provide formal and informal opportunities for students to assess their own learning.
4. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources such as other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.
5. Teachers shall be knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice.
6. Discussion of instructional strategies, practices, and student work shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
7. Adequate time and financial resources shall be committed to ensuring the continuous improvement of instruction.
8. Technology shall be utilized to support instruction and to improve student learning.
9. The school's professional development programs shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional practices and be guided by identified instructional needs.
10. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

The school has created a system of expectations that reflect the mission and are tied to a school-wide rubric although it is not clear that the expectations are consistently applied in all course levels. There is diversity in the instructional strategies used throughout Billerica Memorial High School. Some creative instructional strategies were observed. However, these do not appear to be present in all classrooms throughout the school. While students in upper level courses are expected to demonstrate proficiency in complex higher order thinking, learning, and problem-solving skills, students in lower level courses do not always have the opportunity to develop these skills. Thus, students in lower level courses are at risk of not attaining proficiency and meeting the expectations. In addition, there seems to be little accommodation for diverse learning styles. As well as the need for differentiated instruction, more cooperative, hands-on activities must be used to attract the seemingly disengaged student (observation, students, curriculum proficiencies).

Instruction is personalized within the area of world language, both in the design and delivery of instructional practices. Students are held responsible through a performance-based program on the basis of their acquisition of proficiency at each phase of the language. Provision is made individually for the student to progress forward in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in all such disciplines. The personalizing of instruction can be improved by giving more specific feedback on assessments in all courses. There are some courses where students have the opportunity to utilize self-evaluation to improve their proficiencies. In the learning center, reinforcement provided by staff members and National Honor Society members is available both within and beyond the school day for students who require additional assistance in meeting course level proficiencies in any curricular area. Additionally, there is a one-year alternative educational program available for students who have not met success within the Billerica Memorial High School day school. Priority has been given to lowered class size in levels two and three. MCAS prep courses also have a preferred student teacher ratio (students, parents, teachers, observations).

Connections across disciplines appear to be limited, with American Studies the single cross-curriculum offering. Writing across the curriculum, while utilized by some subject area teachers, is not predominant throughout the school and disciplines. As a result, connection across disciplines and a comprehensive understanding of the application of writing process are not an integral part of the learning experience (teachers, observations, curriculum, course proficiencies).

Examples of student work show evidence that teachers are beginning to use performance-based tools to evaluate and adjust instruction, but this must be expanded. Teachers and curriculum coordinators participate in focus groups that meet to reflect upon the efficacy of instruction, particularly in regard to MCAS performance. The English department has developed a common set of rubrics by which to analyze writing. Most departments generate semester exams which also are utilized as a diagnostic measure of the success of instruction. Therefore, Billerica Memorial High School focuses on instructional strategies that are designed to allow students to meet the expectations for learning and to successfully complete the MCAS. In addition, the expanded use of the school e-mail system would provide a further avenue for feedback (teachers, self-study, curriculum coordinators).

The school committee has expressed a strong interest in utilizing the staff of Billerica Memorial High School to provide professional development as related to the improvement of instruction. However, no formalization of this plan is currently in place. Adequate time and resources must be committed to a viable professional development program dedicated to the improvement of instruction. Teachers report that they lack access to appropriate subject area professional development. Since there is currently a number of new teachers and significant projected retirements, this need is even more critical (teachers, central office and school administrators, school committee).

It is noteworthy that many teachers have participated in the Skillful Teacher course and that administrators have adopted this methodology for evaluation purposes. Teachers and administrators report that the use of this coordinated approach will enhance and improve instruction. Therefore, genuine opportunities for discourse between teachers and evaluators related to effective instructional practices have been implemented and should be continued and expanded. A mentoring program has been instituted by the joint effort of the Billerica Memorial High School faculty and district administration. While the schedule allows for freshman teachers to discuss effective instructional techniques, the teaching schedule does not afford other teachers the same opportunity. Staff members must be given the time and resources to engender a climate where professional collegiality and discussion related to instructional practices is an identified priority (teachers, administrators, and self-study).

The lack of use of technology as an integral facet of instruction is an observed weakness. The school is attempting to increase the number of technology-based courses such as Computer Assisted Drafting, Music Technology, and Video and Power Point production. Since a limited number of students can be served in these courses, this causes a larger population of students to lack the opportunity and exposure to technology as an integral component to classroom instruction. Computers in the classroom are insufficient in number, dated, and do not support the active integration of technology for instructional practices. Computer laboratories are limited in capacity for a school of this size. Students are provided assistance through the library media center and the learning center with technology beyond the classroom setting; however, this often must be accomplished at their own initiative and beyond the scope of the school day. A related issue is the availability of technical support for current technology as well as for future growth (observation, teachers, self-study).

## **COMMENDATIONS**

1. The efforts by many teachers to personalize instruction
2. The reinforcement of instruction within and beyond the scope of the school day
3. The night school program
4. The training of staff in the Skillful Teacher Program
5. The commitment to lower class sizes in levels two and three

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that instruction in all course levels supports higher order thinking, learning, and problem-solving skills
2. Institute a professional development program to improve instructional techniques
3. Provide professional development for the development of integrated curriculum
4. Utilize the expertise of the Billerica Memorial High School faculty in delivery of professional development
5. Develop more interdisciplinary course offerings
6. Expand the use of writing across the curriculum
7. Provide time and resources to support collegial discussion of instruction
8. Develop and implement a plan to expand the availability and use of technology for instructional purposes across the curriculum

## **4 TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD**

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Its purpose is to inform students regarding their learning progress and teachers regarding ways to adjust their instruction to better respond to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates the growth and competence of students to parents, school officials, and the public. The results of student learning must be continually discussed and used to develop short-term and long-term strategies for improving curriculum and instruction.

1. Teachers shall base their classroom assessment procedures on clearly stated expectations for student learning.
2. Specific learning criteria based on specific expectations for student learning shall be the basis for grading and reporting.
3. Teachers shall use a variety and range of classroom assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.
4. Teachers shall use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to evaluate and revise curriculum.
5. Teachers shall use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to improve their instructional practices.
6. Teachers shall meet to discuss and share student work and the results of classroom assessment for the purpose of revising curriculum and instructional strategies.
7. Teachers shall communicate to students and their families how student work and progress are being assessed.
8. The school's professional development programs shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop a broad range of assessment strategies for classroom use.
9. The administration and faculty shall use agreed upon levels of performance, indicators of successful accomplishment, and other data to assess the progress of students in achieving the school's stated academic expectations for student learning and regularly report the findings to the public.
10. The administration and faculty shall use assessment data to determine student success in meeting the school's stated civic and social expectations and regularly report the findings to the public.

## CONCLUSIONS

Teachers in many departments use a variety of formative and summative assessment tools to measure student progress toward and attainment of course proficiencies. The use of formative assessment tools such as homework assignments, class discussions, performance tasks, and the monitoring of student responses during class activities gauges progress towards course proficiencies. The attainment of course proficiencies is measured through the use of summative assessments including paper/pencil tests and quizzes, projects, portfolios, debates, oral and written assignments, and lab reports. According to the NEASC self-study, 53% of students agree that teachers determine what they know in a variety of ways while 71% of parents and 81% of teachers agree that grades are based on a number of different assessment strategies. In some disciplines, however evaluation is still based predominantly on tests and quizzes. The school improvement plan has identified the need to expand the use of varying forms of assessment. In addition, the implementation of performance assessments has been identified as a priority by the administration (classroom observations, self-study, student work, teachers, shadowing, panel presentation).

Most teachers base their classroom assessment procedures on clearly stated expectations for student learning that are found in course proficiencies. Course proficiencies define specific outcomes of instruction including conceptual and procedural knowledge and the development of process skills. For example, students in freshman biology create models of plant and animal cells to demonstrate their attainment of course proficiencies pertaining to cell structure and function. An exam in chemistry included questions that were designed specifically to measure student attainment of learning outcomes that were identified in the course proficiencies. A quiz in world language included a statement of the course proficiencies that were being assessed by that quiz. However, some of the course proficiencies are difficult to measure or assess as a result of the nature of the expectation. For example, one of the science course proficiencies states that students will "...understand meiosis." Some of the course proficiencies do not clearly identify tasks, observable behaviors, or assignments that students can do that would enable the teacher to accurately measure whether students are meeting that proficiency (course proficiencies, teachers, student work).

Teachers regularly and effectively communicate to students and their families how student work and progress are evaluated and assessed through progress reports, report cards, phone calls, and mailings. Many parents commend the school's efforts regarding the communication of student progress. They have reported that teachers respond quickly and professionally when contacted. A parent who commended teachers for contacting parents for issues other than behavior or poor performance provided an example of this effective communication. In the Billerica Memorial High School self-study, 78% of parents agree that most teachers explain to students how work and progress are assessed. An open house at the beginning of the school year allows parents the opportunity to receive information such as course proficiencies and grading procedures for each course. For parents who are unable to attend the open house, there are other opportunities to receive these materials from the teachers. Students report that teachers review the course proficiencies and grading procedures at the beginning of the year. There is a concern by some parents that the students cannot take student work home, and thus parents do not see the quality of work that is being produced by their student. Another parental concern is the organization of

the open house. Parents with several children in the school have found it difficult to communicate with all teachers. In addition, some parents feel that there was inadequate time to meet with each teacher. A few parents want teachers to communicate with them at times other than only when progress reports and report cards are distributed (parents, self-study, shadowing).

Teachers demonstrate some use of the results of classroom assessment of student learning to improve their instructional practice. For example, some teachers explain that information about student learning obtained from formative assessments has caused them to re-teach material using different instructional methods. This enables teachers to address the needs of students who are not meeting the stated learning outcomes or to modify an existing lesson to help students reach desired learning outcomes. In addition, many teachers report that students are given the opportunity to revise their work to meet course proficiencies. In these ways, teachers are using the results of assessment to guide and improve instruction. However, this practice is not universal. There are some informal discussions of student work and assessment strategies among teachers who teach the same subject. Some teachers are allowed common planning time as in the freshman cluster. More frequently, however, teachers report a lack of common planning time in which to discuss the results of student assessment. As a result, there are few formal opportunities for teachers to use student work and the results of classroom assessment for the purpose of improving instruction and sharing the information (self-study, teachers, classroom observations).

Teachers have shown some use of the results of classroom assessment of student learning to both evaluate and revise the curriculum. Individual teachers tend to use the results of classroom assessment to modify their own instruction rather than to make changes to their course curriculum. However, the limited instructional strategies displayed indicate the need to develop a formal process to use the results of classroom assessment to revise instruction in all disciplines at all levels. Teachers report that most curricular revisions and changes are made in response to MCAS testing results. These curricular revisions are usually done by individual teachers and at the department level. For example, the mathematics department has revised curriculum over the last few summers. Advanced placement test scores are used to guide the instruction of the AP courses, and low scores in AP physics warranted an examination of that course in an effort to improve student achievement in that area (self-study, teachers, panel presentation).

Teachers provide feedback to students about their learning and progress in an effort to improve student achievement. Some teachers have initiated the use of rubrics to evaluate student work. The English department has created a rubric for writing, and the world language department has a rubric that assesses students on their abilities to read, write, listen, and speak in the target language. The development of rubrics as the basis for assessment in many academic areas is underway. Although many of the rubrics describe the point values of different components of the assignment, the lack of specificity of indicators affects the accuracy of evaluation. Rubrics tend to lack performance indicators for each level of performance along a continuum (student work, self-study, teachers).

The examination of student work demonstrates that the grading process does identify student strengths and weaknesses, but not all teachers provide sufficient comments and feedback on how to improve the work. According to students, some teachers distribute materials that explain

the expectations and descriptions of how assignments will be evaluated before the students submit their work, but not all teachers are providing adequate expectations or descriptions of how work will be evaluated when the assignment is initially given. Some teachers provide exemplars of student work to illustrate a benchmark. This use of exemplars in addition to clearly outlined expectations promotes high levels of achievement for these students. A challenge for the future is the need for professional development opportunities in the area of assessment of student learning. In the Billerica Memorial High School self-study, only 41% of teachers agree that professional development opportunities helped them to develop authentic assessment strategies (self-study, teachers, examination of student work, shadowing, panel presentation).

## **COMMENDATIONS**

1. The use of a variety of assessment tools to measure student achievement
2. The initiative of individual teachers to adjust their teaching strategies and curriculum in light of student assessment data
3. The initiative of individual teachers to begin to develop and use rubrics to evaluate student work
4. The efforts of teachers to communicate progress to students and parents throughout the school term
5. The appropriate selection of assessment strategies by many teachers to measure course proficiencies
6. The practice of individual teachers to inform students about expectations and grading procedures for assignments
7. The use of formative assessments to gauge student progress towards course proficiencies and to guide future instruction
8. The willingness of individual teachers to share instructional practices and assessment tools with colleagues

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Develop and implement a professional development plan to expand teachers' repertoire in the use of rubrics with a range of clear performance indicators that guide assessment
2. Increase the use of a variety of assessment strategies in all academic areas at all levels

3. Develop and implement a time for teachers to meet in and across departments to share information about techniques and results to improve the use and quality of assessment strategies
4. Ensure that all proficiencies are written in measurable terms
5. Provide increased time for parents to confer with teachers to review student performance
6. Increase opportunities for faculty members to communicate with parents
7. Increase the amount of written and verbal feedback given to students in an effort to improve student learning and performance
8. Develop and implement a plan to use the results of assessments to guide revisions in curriculum and instruction

**COMMISSION  
PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**SUPPORT STANDARDS**

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**LEARNING AND  
ORGANIZATION**

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**SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR  
LEARNING**

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**COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR  
LEARNING**

## **5 SUPPORT STANDARD**

### **Leadership and Organization**

The manner in which a school provides leadership, organizes itself, makes decisions, and treats its members profoundly affects teaching and learning. Faculty and administration must be clear and reflective about and responsible for the decisions and practices they have implemented in organizing and structuring their programs and in creating a culture that supports learning for all students.

1. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by building and maintaining a vision, direction, and focus for student learning.
2. Teachers shall provide leadership essential to the success of school improvement.
3. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and authority to guide the school in its mission and in meeting the school's stated expectations for student learning.
4. The organization and structure of the educational program shall promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student grouping patterns shall reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, and be consistent with the school's mission and expectations of student learning as well as current educational research.
6. The schedule shall support the school's mission and expectations for student learning and should be designed to provide the most effective implementation of curriculum and instruction.
7. School leaders shall accord meaningful roles in the decision-making process to students, parents, and members of the staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables him/her to provide sufficient attention to the needs of individual students.
9. The schools shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate within and across departments.
10. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.
11. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.
12. The climate of the school shall be positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.
13. The professional culture of the school shall be characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about student learning and well being both in the formal and informal settings.

## CONCLUSIONS

The principal has been instrumental in developing the new mission statement for the BMHS. He is viewed within the community as the educational leader in the school. In conjunction with the assistant principals he has established a vision, direction, and focus for student learning. Through his collegial leadership style he listens and responds to the faculty's ideas and makes himself available to students and parents. He is an effective communicator who champions the achievements of students and staff through daily announcements and monthly newsletters. He has also earned the confidence of the superintendent and the members of the school committee. There is some concern that budgetary constraints and contractual agreements prohibit the implementation of new programs (staff members, central office staff, school committee).

Teachers contribute to the school improvement process. The teachers of BMHS are committed to providing a meaningful, high quality, and challenging educational experience for every student. Teachers serve as assistant department heads, mentors to new teachers, advisors to clubs and activities, as well as members of various committees and review boards. Teachers serve as homeroom advisors for the same students for four years. BMHS is organized as a house system enabling the principal to focus on improving student learning. However, more needs to be done to further personalize the learning environment for all students. Communication patterns and decision-making lines of command are not always clear to teachers who are interested in making changes in curriculum. The school needs to develop long-range plans in several areas, including curriculum development, technology, and facilities. There should also be greater faculty participation in the creation and implementation of the professional-development program (staff members, central office staff, school committee).

In 1995 BMHS implemented a six period rotating block schedule. There is significant disagreement among the faculty members about the effectiveness of the schedule. Some perceive the schedule to limit student participation in community-based programs while others believe that meeting students on a daily basis to be more effective. The administration and faculty have spent considerable effort in discussing the strengths and weakness of the present schedule and in general it serves the mission of the school. However, a re-evaluation of the existing schedule is advocated by some (staff members, central office staff, school committee)

The Billerica Memorial High School truly projects an atmosphere in keeping with the mission statement's promotion of dignity, respect, community, and enrichment. The relationships between the students and teachers show a degree of warmth and trust. The parents, faculty members, and students are comfortable with current instructional grouping patterns. Many faculty members believe that heterogeneous grouping of students is not always sound practice. Some electives are unlevelled. Billerica Memorial High School must make a concerted effort towards greater heterogeneity in order to insure equity and rigor for all students (staff members, central office staff, school committee, self-study, parents, students).

The parent advisory council and the school council are evidence that school leaders have given a meaningful voice to the parents in the community. Student opinions are sought through the formal and informal channels. Recent efforts to reinvigorate the student council will give a greater voice to the student body. The open-door policy of the principal is highly regarded by students. It is the intention of the principal to include this input in the formulation of the school improvement plan (staff members, central office staff, school committee).

Student success is celebrated in the school as a whole. Artwork is visible in the hallways. Student achievements are announced on the morning television broadcast, and student-produced creations are displayed in the classrooms. However, there are some display cases in the building that appear to be neglected. Approximately \$185,000 in scholarship funds is awarded annually. The national Honor Society Induction and the Senior and Underclassman Awards Nights are well attended each year. Local media is used appropriately to further publicize student achievement (self-study, staff members, students, parents).

Teachers meet monthly as departments and also monthly with the principal in a full staff meeting. There are district-wide study groups to provide a forum for curriculum development. While a number of faculty members do engage in informal review of student work and issues, there is no formal opportunity for all staff members to engage in thoughtful, reflective and constructive discussion of student work. Teachers in the freshman cluster and the MCAS duty periods do provide some opportunity for certain teachers to collaborate. Many teachers advocate expansion of these opportunities. Further there is no plan to use the results of assessment to revise curriculum and instruction (self-study, staff members, students, parents).

BMHS staff provides an array of social services for students. The house system is designed to provide “relationship building” between students and staff. The five guidance counselors, the social worker, school psychologist, and the school nurse provide further services. The Staff Intervention Team addresses the needs of students who are in crises or at risk. Still, there remains the need for further personalization of the school environment for all students. Most parents, students, and staff view the climate of BMHS in a positive manner. Most students report there is at least one adult who sincerely cares about them. The Diversity Club provides a forum for discussion of issues around climate. However, staff and students report a concern regarding the need to improve student-to-student respect (self-study, staff members, students, parents).

## **COMMENDATIONS:**

1. The principal has fostered an open and congenial school atmosphere
2. The positive learning environment
3. The involvement of parents through the school council and parent advisory council
4. The commitment to quality education demonstrated by the faculty
5. The celebration of student achievement

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Design and implement a plan for ongoing review and revision of curriculum
2. Formulate a process for providing professional development with faculty input determining the direction and specific needs
3. Develop a schedule and school organization that moves students toward a greater heterogeneity
4. Develop and implement a formal plan and provide time for teachers to collaborate within and across departments
5. Refurbish and maintain all display areas for current student work, artwork and trophies as needed
6. Develop and implement a plan to further personalize the learning environment for all students
7. Formulate a plan to address concerns regarding student-to-student respect

## **6** **SUPPORT STANDARD** **School Resources for Learning**

The school's student support services include guidance and health services, special education, personal, career, and social counseling, and access to outside referrals along with library/information services. Student learning is dependent upon adequate and appropriate support programs and services. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of integrated resources to enhance and improve student learning and to support the school's mission and expectations.

1. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's stated academic expectations for student learning and to participate in the educational program.
2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve stated civic and social expectations.
3. Each student shall have an adult member of the school community who serves to personalize that student's educational experience.
4. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student support and library/information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and involved in its implementation, evaluation, and revision.
6. All school resources for learning shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.
7. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff, and utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
8. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communications with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and about identified student needs.
9. The school shall provide and maintain library/information services program and materials that are fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program and are consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
10. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to utilize various school and community information resources and technologies.

11. A wide range of materials, technology and other library/information resources shall be available to students and faculty in a variety of formats and utilized to improve teaching and learning and be reflective of the school's student population.

12. Library/information services shall include, but not be limited to, sufficient certified professional personnel.

13. Students, faculty, and support staff shall have regular and frequent access to library/information services facilities and programs as an integral part of their educational experience before, during, and after the school day.

14. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet.

15. Student records shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.

## CONCLUSIONS

The adequacy of school resources impacts a school's ability to fulfill its mission and expectations for student learning. Billerica Memorial High School has worked to allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's stated academic expectations for student learning. The school, however, does need to reassess the use of support services in order to assure that all students may be exposed to a rigorous curriculum. Classes at Billerica Memorial High School are homogeneously grouped with movement between levels based on staff recommendations. The Billerica Memorial High School Special Education Department consists of a chairperson who also coordinates services in two middle schools, an assistant chairperson (full-time teacher), five teachers, para-professionals, and appropriate specialists (self-study, teachers, support staff).

The guidance program at Billerica Memorial High School is comprehensive and utilizes school and community resources effectively to address the social, emotional, and physical development of all students. Post high school planning reflects the diversity of student interests and needs. A career specialist staffs a resource room that includes material on both employment and post-secondary educational programs. Interest inventory tests and computer software are available. Each student is connected with the same guidance counselor throughout the student's high school career. All students meet with counselors at specified times during high school and may meet more often as students' needs require. Counselors visit homerooms and English and social studies classes to discuss such issues as orientation to the high school, college admissions, and available guidance services. An alternative, evening program is available to at-risk students and the guidance director is currently in charge of the program. There is an attendance officer who helps with students who are truant or tardy. Good communication between various members of the department and others such as teachers, nurses, the school psychologist, and the attendance officer facilitates a sharing of information about students. The BMHS Grief/Crisis Team used recently in the aftermath of the death of a student facilitated the availability of counselors and clergy to students and informed teachers of what had happened and of the school response (parents, students, observation, self-study).

Counselors currently work with a counselor/student ratio approaching 300 to one. An increasing student population, a staff reduction from 7 to 5 guidance counselors, more restrictive insurance policies relating to covering student costs for out-of-school counseling, and increased demands on the guidance department as a result of home issues are among the factors that make significant demands on counselors. A result of more demands and restricted time could be a compromising of the efficacy of the current programs and practices. And, appropriate student services cannot be expanded. More time would help the guidance department to develop its sophomore career programs, meet with sophomores individually as is currently done with freshmen, juniors, and seniors, allow counselors to be more pro-active in their work with students, and provide an opportunity to plan for the significant increase in student population forecast for the high school (teachers, guidance, nurse, self-study).

The majority of students with special needs are served through four resource classes in areas of math, English, science, and social studies along with academic support classes for students in levels two and three. Levels one, honors, and AP include very few students with special needs. Integration of special education students must occur at all levels. While collegiality between the special education staff and other departments at Billerica Memorial High School exists, the special education department has had a high turnover in staff and is not represented at decision-making meetings between department chairs and administrators for program development and transition planning (self-study, teachers, support staff).

The two extremely dedicated nurses provide health services to over 1,600 students and staff members. In addition, they are assigned to be substitutes in other buildings and serve the pre-school programs at the high school. This dual role restricts health coverage for daily needs when an emergency situation arises. The Massachusetts Public Health recommendation specifies a caseload of 750 clients per nurse (nurse, self-study, support staff).

The social worker, the psychologist, the Title I staff, the attendance officer, and the clerical staff provide invaluable academic, social, and emotional support for all students. The social worker provides daily assistance in the development of coping strategies and problem-solving skills. The psychologist serves the most emotionally involved students and provides necessary diagnostic information. The Title I teachers offer excellent academic support. The attendance officer deals with truancy, tardiness, and issues of social responsibility. The clerical staff supports both staff and students in innumerable ways everyday (support staff, standards committee, students).

Technology is appropriately used to deliver guidance services. Transcripts, rank, scheduling is all computerized. Career and college research may be done through the Internet and through school-owned software. Counselors are available to students and families through e-mail. Counselors have computers in their individual offices (observation, students, student services).

There is ongoing and effective communication with students, families, and school personnel to inform those groups of guidance services and to identify student needs. Newsletters, parent evenings, announcements, local newspaper publicity, telephone calls, e-mail, and parental requests are examples of such communication (parents, students, self-study).

Students at BMHS are actively engaged in programs that support their achievement of the school's civic and social expectations. Various programs are designed to support students and enable them to work in the community and enroll in post-secondary education. These programs include the Diversity Club, conflict mediation, National Honor Society, Peer Leadership Team, community service, and Amnesty International. The library media center's web page links students to a wide reach of information and social resources; it also links the parents to the activities of the school community. Under the supervision of the librarian, the AV club broadcasts the morning announcements of student accomplishments.

The library media center is large and well designed, with designated areas for individual seating, group instruction, and media use. Students feel welcomed to use the LMC for productive work, and teachers regularly bring their classes to the LMC for curricular research work. The library media specialist instructs students in information literacy in the LMC's lab of 21 computers, which teachers regularly schedule for student research projects. The librarian also supervises the AV club's daily broadcasting of the morning announcements in a well-designed video broadcasting area of the LMC (support staff, teachers, students).

A wide range of materials, technology, and other resources is available to students and faculty members. The library maintains an excellent website, fully integrated with the needs of the curriculum. The collection of books and other materials is selected to support the needs of the curriculum and weeded to delete outdated materials. The number of titles is limited for a school of this size and are also dated (support staff, teachers, observation).

The library media specialist is respected for her attentiveness to teachers' needs and interests and her willingness to provide instruction in information literacy and assist the students during their work in the LMC. While the library is well managed and maintained, current staffing levels leave the library media specialist solely responsible for the LMC for several hours of each day, as the library aide is needed in another part of the building. For the healthy demands on the library and its services, sufficient clerical support is not available to the library media specialist to be able to meet with teachers to design research activities that integrate information literacy standards into the curriculum. With the amount of technology located in the LMC and its continuous use during the school day, maintenance and supervision of the equipment is a growing concern. Given the importance of the LMC computer lab to the instructional program of the school, even a temporary loss of its use would be of consequence to curricular instruction (students, teachers, observation).

Although the library media specialist actively informs herself of the school curricula and cooperates with teachers in planning research, the library program is not fully integrated into the curriculum development process. This leaves research components left implicit in the curricula, rather than explicitly described and articulated as to how they coordinate with instruction and research activities in the library media center. Teachers are involved in making decisions about the selection of materials to meet the needs of their students; the library media specialist regularly elicits purchasing suggestions from the faculty and communicates with them regarding possible purchases. Further, the library media specialist needs to be informed about and included in the curriculum revision process to ensure that appropriate supporting resources are purchased and maintained (support staff, teachers, observation).

## **COMMENDATIONS**

1. The excellent efforts and abilities of the guidance department, especially the effective and ongoing communication with students, staff, and community
2. The excellent efforts and abilities of the special education department to support special needs students

3. The excellent efforts and abilities of the social worker, psychologist, attendance officer, and the Title I teachers
4. The excellent efforts and abilities of the clerical and secretarial staff to make the school community's work cohesive
5. The excellent efforts and ability of the library media specialist to optimize library services
6. The library media center's website, an excellent school and community service
7. The curriculum support given to all students and faculty members by the library media specialist
8. The support provided by the learning center

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Extend access to the full scope of special education services to students through graduation as needed
2. Include the special education director in administrative meetings for planning and program development and reassess the extent of the duties of the special education chairpersons at the secondary level
3. Develop and implement a systematic approach for the monitoring and tracking of mandated timelines and services, and for the assignment of necessary evaluations in special education
4. Maintain sufficient nursing services throughout the day
5. Provide maximum guidance support through the entire day to students
6. Include the library media specialist in the curriculum development process
7. Provide sufficient clerical support to maximize the library services available to students and faculty
8. Provide clerical support in the media center throughout the school day
9. Provide sufficient technology support to maintain and expand services to students and staff
10. Update and expand the print and non-print collection of the library media center

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## **SUPPORT STANDARD**

### **Community Resources for Learning**

Active community and parent participation, facilities which support school programs and services, and dependable and adequate funding are necessary for the school to achieve its mission and expectations for student learning.

1. The school shall engage students and their families as partners in the students' education as well as encourage their participation in school programs and parent support groups.
2. The school shall foster productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning.
3. The school site, plant, and equipment shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.
4. The school site, plant, and equipment shall be maintained to ensure an environment that is healthy and safe for all occupants.
5. There shall be a planned and adequately funded program of building and site management that ensures the maintenance and repair of facilities and equipment as well as the thorough and ongoing cleaning of the facility.
6. There shall be ongoing planning to address future program, staffing, facility, and technology needs as well as capital improvements.
7. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
8. The community and the district's governing body shall ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning.
9. Faculty and building administrators shall have active involvement in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation.
10. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.
11. School board decisions, policies, and procedures and district plans shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.