

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

Commission on Public Schools



**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

Commission on Public Schools

**Report of the Visiting Team for
Waterbury Career Academy High School**

Waterbury, CT

03-10-2024 - 03-13-2024

**Ms. Cathy Sosnowski, Chair
Mary C. DeMarchi, Assistant Chair
Michael Harris, Principal**

School and Community Summary

School and Community Summary

Waterbury Career Academy High School, established in 2013, is in Waterbury, Connecticut, Northern New Haven County in the southwestern section of Connecticut. The school's learning model is unique to Connecticut as a comprehensive high school with a built-in, direct-to-career option. Students are eligible to attend from anywhere in the Waterbury Public Schools district, and each student enrolled, upon completing ninth grade, chooses a career pathway of health services, education and training, manufacturing, or information technology and engineering.

The current population of Waterbury is 114,403. One-fifth of the city's population has not earned a high school diploma, 37 percent have earned a high school diploma, 26 percent have some college education, and 16 percent have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. According to the 2021 Waterbury Equity Profile, the median household income in 2020 was \$42,401 compared to the state average of \$78,444, with an unemployment rate of 8.3 percent. According to city-data.com, 26.8 percent of Waterbury residents had an income below the poverty level in 2019, 62.6 percent greater than 10.0 percent across Connecticut.

Retail trade, health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and manufacturing and construction are the main industries in Waterbury. Waterbury is a very diverse city. Forty percent of Waterbury's population identifies as Latino, 19 percent black or African American, 33 percent White, less than 2 percent Native American, and 6 percent as other. Waterbury has 43 schools, with 13 private schools. Waterbury's per pupil expenditure for students is \$17,466.00 compared to the state average of \$22,769. The percentage of local resources spent on public education is 27.1 percent.

The Waterbury Public Schools welcome center works with families, linking parents, principals, teachers, school staff, and the community to available resources while ensuring accurate information and quality education assistance. The center works closely with schools and parent liaisons to build connections between schools and families to help improve student academic outcomes and encourage improved behavior, attendance, graduation, and college enrollment rates.

Waterbury Career Academy High School serves students in grades 9-12 and provides for a single pre-K classroom. The current 2021-2022 school year enrollment is 753 high school students and 18 pre-K students. The school maintains a steady enrollment between 750-810 accepted students. Incoming students undergo an application process that includes seven criteria points reviewed by Waterbury middle school educators. Enrollment closes once the new school year begins. In 2021-2022, the four-year graduation rate was 97.3 percent, and 14.1 percent of the student body has been identified as having chronic absenteeism. The average number of days absent for teachers was 17.7 for the 2018-2019 school year.

Based on preliminary numbers for 2022-2023, the graduation rate is 98.4 percent. The two-year average drop-out rate is 2 percent. In 2019-2020, 68 percent of graduates went on to a four-year college, 19 percent to a two-year college, and 12 percent either entered the workforce or planned on attending a trade school.

Waterbury Career Academy High School has higher education partnerships with Naugatuck Valley Community College, the University of Connecticut, and Post University. With the four distinct academies, the partners with CVS, Abbott Terrace nursing home, Cly-Del Manufacturing, H&T Manufacturing, Platt Brothers, Eyelet Crafters, Eyelet Designers, Ametek-Haydon Kerk, Sperry, and Waterbury Public Schools for internships.

Celebrating students is essential to the school's mission. Students are recognized through PBIS, Student of the Month, National Honor Society, Science National Honor Society, and The Global Leadership Initiative.

Core Values, Beliefs, and Vision of the Graduate

The Spartan Mission

In a welcoming, safe environment, in collaboration with the school community, Waterbury Career Academy will provide a challenging, student-driven, self-reflective education, ensuring all students acquire STEM-based career skills, college readiness, and the traits and habits of responsible global citizenship.

Spartan HONOR

H is for Honest

O is for Organized

N is for Noble

O is for Optimistic

R is for Respectful

District Portrait of the Graduate

Students will become:

Communicators

Collaborators

Lifelong Learners

Problem-Solvers

Students are to exhibit:

Social and Emotional Intelligence

Grit

Growth Mindset

Knowledge

School Improvement/Growth Plan

The school improvement/growth plan is attached.

Related Files

- [2024_02_08-10_37_2024_01_09-10_00_Copy_of_WCA_School_Improvement_Plan_2023-2024.xlsx](#)

LEARNING CULTURE

Learning Culture

The school provides a safe learning culture that ensures equity and fosters shared values among learners, educators, families, and members of the school community. These shared values drive student learning as well as policy, practice, and decision-making while promoting a spirit of collaboration, shared ownership, pride, leadership, social responsibility, and civic engagement. The school community sets high standards for student learning, fosters a growth mindset, and facilitates continuous school improvement to realize the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.

1. The school community provides a safe, positive, respectful, and inclusive culture that ensures equity and honors diversity in identity and thought.
 - 1a. The school community provides a safe environment.
2. The school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate drive student learning, professional practices, learning support, and the provision and allocation of learning resources.
 - 2a. The school has a written document describing its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.
3. The school community takes collective responsibility for the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional well-being of every student and can demonstrate how each student is known, valued, and connected to the school community.
4. The school community's professional culture demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement through the use of research, collaborative learning, innovation, and reflection.
5. The school's culture promotes intellectual risk taking and personal and professional growth.
6. The school has an inclusive definition of leadership and provides school leaders with the authority and responsibility to improve student learning.
7. The school culture fosters civic engagement and social and personal responsibility.

STUDENT LEARNING

Student Learning

The school has a vision of the graduate that includes the attainment of transferable skills, disciplinary/interdisciplinary knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary to prepare learners for their future. Students are assured consistent learning outcomes through a defined curricular experience and have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in a variety of creative ways. Students actively participate in authentic learning experiences while practicing the skills and habits of mind to regularly reflect upon, and take ownership of, their learning.

1. The school has a vision of the graduate that includes the attainment of transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for future success and provides feedback to learners and their families on each learner's progress in achieving this vision.
2. There is a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills and integrates the school's vision of the graduate.
 - 2a. There is a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments.
3. Curriculum ensures that learners demonstrate a depth of understanding over a breadth of knowledge.
4. Instructional practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.
5. Students are active learners who have opportunities to lead their own learning.
6. Learners regularly engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills.
7. Learners demonstrate their learning through a variety of assessment strategies that inform classroom instruction and curriculum.
8. Learners have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning, receive corrective feedback, and use this feedback in meaningful ways to support their learning.
9. Learners use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

Professional Practices

The school maintains and implements a school improvement/growth plan, organizational practices, and productive community relationships to meet and support student learning needs. Educators engage in ongoing reflection, collaboration, and professional development to improve their practice and examine evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, programs, and services.

1. The school engages all stakeholders in the development and implementation of a school improvement/growth plan, which reflects the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.
 - 1a. The school has a current school improvement/growth plan.
2. Educators engage in ongoing reflection, formal and informal collaboration, and professional development to improve student learning and well-being.
3. Educators examine evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, and programs and services.
4. Collaborative structures and processes support coordination and implementation of curriculum.
5. School-wide organizational practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.
6. Educators develop productive student, family, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support learning.

LEARNING SUPPORT

Learning Support

The school has timely, directed, and coordinated interventions for all students. The school provides targeted supports to meet each student's individual needs, including counseling services, health services, library/information services, and other appropriate support services to assist each student in meeting the school's vision of the graduate.

1. All students receive appropriate intervention strategies to support their academic, social, and emotional success.
 - 1a. The school has intervention strategies designed to support students.
2. All students receive counseling services that meet their personal, social, emotional, academic, career, and college counseling needs from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
3. All students receive health services that ensure their physical and emotional well-being from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
4. All students receive library/information services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
5. Identified English Language Learners and students with special needs and 504 plans receive appropriate programs and services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning Resources

The school has adequate and appropriate time, funding, and facilities to support the realization of its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate. The school and school community provide time, funding, and facilities for student learning and support; teacher collaboration and professional growth; and full implementation of curricular and co-curricular programs in the school. The school has appropriate plans, protocols, and infrastructure in place to ensure consistent delivery of its curriculum, programs, and services.

1. The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of high-quality curriculum, programs, and services.
 - 1a. The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of curriculum, programs, and services.
2. The school/district provides time and financial resources to enable researched-based instruction, professional growth, and the development, implementation, and improvement of school programs and services.
3. The community and the district's governing body provide adequate and dependable funding to fully implement the curriculum, including co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities.
4. The school/district has short-term and long-term plans to address the capital and maintenance needs of its building and facilities.
5. The school has infrastructure and protocols in place to ensure effective responses in crisis situations.

Introduction

Introduction

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

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees, which supervises the work of three Commissions: the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public Schools (CPS), and the Commission on International Education (CIE).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public school member institutions, CPS requires visiting teams to assess the degree to which schools align with the qualitative Standards for Accreditation. The Standards are *Learning Culture, Student Learning, Professional Practices, Learning Support, and Learning Resources*.

The accreditation program for public schools involves a five-step process: the self-reflection conducted by stakeholders at the school; the Collaborative Conference visit conducted by a team of peer educators and NEASC representatives; the school's development and implementation of a growth/improvement plan; the Decennial Accreditation visit conducted by a team of peer educators and NEASC representatives; and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its self-reflection, the recommendations of the visiting team, and those identified by the Committee in the follow-up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school participate in the accreditation process over the ten-year cycle and that it shows continued progress in addressing identified needs.

Preparation for the Accreditation Visit

Accreditation coordinators and a steering committee composed of professional staff were appointed to supervise the school's Accreditation process, which includes the self-reflection, the Collaborative Conference visit, the development and implementation of a growth plan, and the Decennial Accreditation Visit.

Public schools seeking accreditation through the Commission on Public Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their alignment with the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's core values, beliefs, vision of the graduate, and unique student population. In preparation for the decennial visit, schools are required to complete a Decennial Summary Report to inform the team about their progress since the time of the Collaborative Conference visit.

In addition, the professional staff was required to read and come to a consensus on the summary report to ensure that all voices were heard related to the school's progress on their priority areas for growth.

The Process Used by the Visiting Team

A visiting team of seven members was assigned by the Commission on Public Schools to conduct an Initial Accreditation visit to Waterbury Career Academy in Waterbury, Connecticut. The visiting team members spent four days conducting a virtual visit to the school; reviewed the self-reflection, Collaborative Conference report, and School Summary Report documents; met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents; and visited classes to determine the degree to which the school aligns with the Commission on Public Schools' Standards for Accreditation and the degree to which the school is making progress toward their identified priority areas for growth as indicated in the school's improvement/growth plan.

Each conclusion in the report was agreed upon by visiting team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting team are included in each report section. The report consists of commendations

and recommendations that, in the visiting team's judgment, will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and implement its plan for growth and improvement. The report also includes an analysis of the conceptual understanding, commitment, competency, and capacity (4Cs), a framework used to evaluate the school's ability for continuous growth and improvement as a learning organization.

This report of the findings of the visiting team will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Schools, which will decide on the school's accreditation.

Foundational Element 1.1a - Learning Culture

Foundational Element 1.1a

The school community provides a safe environment. The school deliberately builds and maintains a physically safe environment for learners and adults. All entrance doors are locked at 7:20 a.m. each morning and remain locked throughout the school day. Late students and visitors use a video call box to enter the building. Visitors with valid identification sign in at the main office and wear a lanyard with a badge indicating they are permitted visitors. The school is equipped with surveillance cameras to monitor potential concerns. The school maintains policies and procedures to ensure the safety of learners and adults. Progressive discipline and counseling services address physical and social-emotional safety concerns with students. Staff at the school are assigned a daily duty period where hallways, bathrooms, and cafeterias are monitored. Policies related to shelter-in-place and lock-down are in place, and staff are well-versed in these procedures. The crisis team is used for emergency preparedness, and a safety committee holds monthly meetings.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 1.2a - Learning Culture

Foundational Element 1.2a

The school community has a written document describing its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate. In addition, the school has a Spartan Mission. The core values, Spartan HONOR, represent honest, organized, noble, optimistic, and respectful. The core values are displayed on posters throughout the school. The Waterbury Career Academy Portrait of the Graduate is aligned with the district's portrait of the graduate. The document is shown on television monitors at the main entrance and in the cafeteria.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 2.2a - Student Learning

Foundational Element 2.2a

The school has yet to have a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments. Since the Collaborative Conference visit, updates have been made to write a standardized curriculum for all courses. With help from the Waterbury Public School District and the curriculum committees across disciplines, the entire district has a standardized format for all curricula. All curricula are being moved to the Atlas Rubicon platform to make them available to staff. The curricula are living documents, with yearly reviews and updates performed by teachers in all disciplines who are paid for this work. All disciplines are progressing toward full inclusion of all courses into a standardized format, with the expectation that all curricula, except career and technical education, are scheduled for completion by the beginning of the 2024-2025 academic year. Approximately 60 percent of the curriculum has been uploaded into Atlas. Another 20 percent is written and will be uploaded.

Rating

Does Not Meet the Standard

Foundational Element 3.1a - Professional Practices

Foundational Element 3.1a

The school has a current school improvement plan (SIP). The SIP includes school-specific academic goals for literacy, numeracy, and chronic absenteeism, specifies responsible staff for implementation, outlines strategies, shows how progress is measured, and provides the timeline for each goal. The plan is modified and reviewed annually by administrators and department chairs. The plan informs decision-making in the school, and goals are discussed at faculty meetings.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Elements 4.1a - Learning Support

Foundational Elements 4.1a

The school provides a range of intervention strategies designed to support learners. A formal Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) has been implemented. Gear Up and the homework club offer weekly tutoring for all students. English and math teachers provide opportunities for individualized tutoring before school as needed. School counselors meet with individual students regularly to discuss possible classroom interventions when required. Teachers use Parent Square and PowerSchool to track student progress and to communicate with parents. Progress reports are sent halfway through every marking period. The school has a process to identify and refer students who need additional assistance. Instructional data teams (IDTs) collect, analyze, and report student failures to each department chair, who then presents this information to the school-wide data team (SWDT). The SWDT tracks and monitors student failures every month. Informally, members of this team will either follow up directly with specific students or refer them to school counseling.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 5.1a - Learning Resources

Foundational Element 5.1a

The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of high-quality curriculum, programs, and services. The school offers a safe, secure, healthy environment. Visitors are buzzed in, and cameras are located around the facility. All systems are in working order. A safety committee monitors much of the safety and maintenance. However, the school lacks some spaces to gather students or conduct student performances, such as no auditorium. As classes are added, spaces for health services, music, art, and the sciences are at a premium. The school is cleaned daily and well-maintained. The school and district maintain short-term and long-term plans to address the capital and maintenance needs of the school; however, the school reached its capacity of 800. For next year, 653 students applied for the 250 freshmen spots. The building meets all applicable federal and state laws and complies with local fire, health, and safety regulations.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Elements Ratings

Foundational Element Ratings

| Foundational Elements | Collaborative Conference School's Rating | Collaborative Conference Visitors' Rating | Decennial School's Rating | Decennial Visitors' Rating |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1.1a - Learning Culture | Meets | Meets | Meets | Meets |
| 1.2a - Learning Culture | Meets | Meets | Meets | Meets |
| 2.2a - Student Learning | Does not meet | Does not meet | Does not meet | Does not meet |
| 3.1a - Professional Practices | Meets | Meets | Meets | Meets |
| 4.1a - Learning Support | Meets | Meets | Meets | Meets |
| 5.1a - Learning Resources | Meets | Meets | Meets | Meets |

Priority Area 1

Priority Area

Provide intervention strategies designed to support learners by formulating an early intervention plan (EIP) team and creating a process for referring students to help meet the academic and social-emotional needs of all learners (4.1a, 4.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.4, 3.5)

Action, Impact, and Growth

The school has taken steps to create a formal process to refer students for academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions. Teachers fill out a Google Form to refer students they feel need extra help or support. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team, comprised of three school counselors, one attendance counselor, one social worker, one behavioral technician, one special education teacher, and one teacher from each core subject area, meets regularly to review concerns and referrals. Once the intervention is determined, the team follows up with students and teachers to make sure the interventions are effective and ongoing or if further assistance is needed.

Individual academic and social-emotional needs are being met through the implementation of Tier 1 interventions. Scores from the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) are used to identify students who need Tier 2 interventions. For example, a behavioral technician meets with students monthly during their lunch block; currently, 10 groups of students are meeting for eight weeks. At the end of the eight weeks, students will complete a follow-up DESSA self-rating to see if further intervention is needed.

Several other supports help meet various student needs. An attendance counselor is dedicated to reversing chronic absenteeism. Academic support outside the classroom includes after-school programs, such as homework club and SAT prep, and electronic or virtual resources for extra support, such as varsity tutors, student success agency, and Gear Up. The school counseling department pushes into history and English classes four times per year per grade level to offer lessons to students. Many core classes are offered in a co-taught format with a general education teacher and a special education or multilingual teacher as needed.

The impacts of these action steps can be seen in the assessment of students and their health and well-being. For instance, students can identify their feelings and needs and get support within the school to help them achieve their behavioral or social-emotional goals. Students can receive academic assistance during and after the school day. Teachers collaborate with their colleagues and get ideas to help students. Students reflect on their growth when they retake the DESSA screening and work with a staff member to determine what they need and the next steps they should take.

The growth from these actions is indicated by assessing the data from the DESSA screening. One hundred and seventy students were identified as needing social-emotional support. There have been over 20 formal referrals to the MTSS team and some successes to date. The school can already measure some individual student successes from the interventions.

Recommended Next Steps

Implement MTSS fully by creating a procedure for implementation and evaluation

Provide professional learning for staff on differentiated instruction, assessment, screening, and progress monitoring, prevention and intervention strategies

Strengthen Tier 1 and 2 supports

Ensure teachers are fully aware of intervention processes and procedures, along with referrals and consults with the MTSS team

Formalize analysis of DESSA and other data to monitor student concerns, progress, and behaviors

Use data to inform decision-making and make any adjustments to the program

Ensure all stakeholders, including parents, are involved and informed

Sources of Evidence

- central office personnel
- community members
- priority area meetings
- school leadership
- school support staff

Priority Area 2

Priority Area

Complete updating and writing curriculum for all courses in all departments that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and integrate the district/school's portrait of the graduate (2.2a, 2.2)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Since the Collaborative Conference visit, the school has made significant progress in developing a standardized curriculum for all content courses. The school uses Atlas Rubicon, and the common template includes guiding/essential questions, learning targets, success criteria, depth of knowledge questioning, units of study, rubrics, and assessments. Using Atlas Rubicon allows for equitable access to the curriculum for all staff, and all teachers can understand the common concepts, terminology, and strategies.

To date, 60 percent of all courses have standardized course curricula in a common template uploaded into Atlas Rubicon. Some courses are still under development or awaiting transfer into Atlas. All curricula are anticipated to be written and transferred to Atlas by the end of the 2024-2025 school year.

The development of a standard curriculum template allows for continuity within the district, particularly with the district's size and transient nature. The standardized curriculum format provides instructional guidance for teachers and the resources necessary to ensure instruction, including using depth of knowledge (DOK) questioning. Implementing the course curriculum ensures all students enrolled in the same course experience the same level of rigor and content. Teachers are creating lesson plans for each unit of study.

The school's growth in this Priority Area is indicated by the number of courses from which curricula have been developed and published. Most of the curricula have been written and are simply awaiting transfer into the platform. The standardized curriculum format allows all teachers to create a shared understanding of essential components of high-quality instruction across the school and the other district high schools.

The continued growth of available uniform curricula has directly impacted teaching and learning. All teachers are now familiar with the concepts, terminology, and strategies common to all disciplines. They use guiding/essential questions, learning targets, success criteria, and depth of knowledge questioning and create lesson plans based on the units of study available in their curricula.

Recommended Next Steps

Complete and upload all remaining course curricula into the Atlas platform

Ensure all teachers receive the necessary support to ensure the curriculum for each course is implemented with fidelity

Establish a formal course curriculum review cycle to ensure all curricula undergo timely review and revision

Include teachers in the curriculum writing process to ensure the building of capacity and sustainability

Create a common definition and shared understanding of rigor across the curriculum

Sources of Evidence

- central office personnel
- priority area meetings
- school leadership
- school summary report

Priority Area 3

Priority Area

Modify the school schedule to provide more formal collaborative time, flexibility for student elective offerings, and attainment of credits for graduation (2.4, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 5.2)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Waterbury Career Academy modified the schedule to provide more formal collaborative time, flexibility for student elective offerings, and attainment of credits for graduation. Space and time were added to the schedule for faculty to meet once per week for 45 minutes in instructional data teams (IDTs) and work on common formative assessments (CFAs), scope, pacing, sequencing, and improved instructional practices. For example, social studies teachers developed a U.S. History, ten-question formative assessment asking students to determine whether past Americans such as John D. Rockefeller were robber barons or industry icons. In a math IDT, teachers work on pacing and sequencing for the school and other schools in the district. They developed another CFA, having students prepare for SAT math on quadratic equations and using parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction. The school-wide data team can meet during the school day to identify failing students.

The schedule offers more flexibility for student elective offerings, including an EKG course in the CTE Health Strand and a Naugatuck Valley Community College Manufacturing course in the College and Career Pathway. Art and music courses, College Seminars, Money Management, and Mastery Credit have been added to meet state and school requirements. The school intends to offer another CTE course in Game Design and Development 1 and 2 next year.

The impact of these actions can be seen in the school's culture through students' behavior and behavioral data, the teachers' rapport with one another and the administrative team, student achievement, and time spent by faculty in IDTs. The school culture and climate remain respectful, caring, warm, and supportive, developing courses to spark student interest. Students are respectful and quiet, have excellent manners, express interest, offer to help people with doors, elevators, and directions, and welcome visitors.

The school has shown growth in several areas, but 30 of the 56 teachers carry at least one extra class daily to keep pace with the classes needed and current vacancies. The graduation rate is increasing; many students have completed the mastery-based credit requirement. Enrollment in the new electives has been successful, and students have already requested the Game Design course in their schedules for next year.

Recommended Next Steps

Ensure sufficient time for formal teacher collaboration and examining a wide range of evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment, and programs and services

Use the data analysis to respond to inequities in student achievement and ensure grading and assessment practices are aligned with the school's beliefs about learning

Evaluate course offerings and adjust as needed to meet student needs

Determine specific measurements to indicate achievement of this priority area

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school leadership
- school summary report

Priority Area 4

Priority Area

Design instructional practices to meet the learning needs of each student (2.4)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Staff, administrators, and district personnel have made a concerted effort to increase rigor throughout the school. The district hired a consultant to help staff develop and increase instructional rigor across the district. The target is to increase Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questioning in all classes. Teachers have been asked to standardize learning targets and success criteria across all levels and to make them visible to students.

The consultant led three staff professional training days. The district may decide, should funding allow, to extend the consulting contract for another two to five years to solidify and complete this work. Teachers submit lesson plans every two weeks to a digital folder to which everyone can review. However, formal feedback has yet to be provided to teachers on those lessons.

School administrators, department heads, and the consultant created walkthroughs for teachers to receive feedback on these strategies. The consultant provides support with learning walkthroughs to improve understanding, set expectations, and develop better, creative, consistent teacher practices. The learning walk debrief is designed to provide meaningful feedback on instruction, assessment, and student engagement and is shared with teachers to calibrate teaching and help increase rigor. Department leaders have been doing the learning walks with the consultant; the next level will include teacher participants.

These action steps have led to posting learning target goals and success outcome indicators in classrooms throughout the school. Many teachers use exit tickets to assess success in targeted areas. However, this is still being embedded into all classrooms. For example, some English and history teachers refer to the learning target to guide students. In a Spanish class, the teacher relates to the learning target and asks students how she would know when they achieved it. In honors biology, students are asked how brain damage to the frontal lobe would impact daily life. Thus, teachers are using coaching strategies to make improvements in their instruction.

There have been changes to instruction, curriculum, assessments, and the health and safety of the students. Instructional strategies have improved. Teachers are more consistent in asking higher order thinking questions, which require critical thinking, problem-solving, and persistence, thus increasing rigor and student-centered learning environments. The walkthroughs by the consultant and school leaders support teachers in their endeavors to raise the level of instruction. There is a pervasive use and posting of learning targets, success criteria, and questions grounded in upper levels of Webb's Depth of Knowledge.

The growth from these actions has yet to be measured formally, but many teachers are learning and incorporating more higher order questioning, focusing on learning targets, and setting clear expectations.

Recommended Next Steps

Implement and embed the walkthrough protocol more fully, including teacher participants as planned

Ensure instructional practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student, such as strategically differentiating, individualizing or personalizing based on needs, using formative assessment to adjust instruction, purposefully organizing group learning, providing additional support and alternative strategies in the regular classroom, structure and support to provide all learners with rigorous learning opportunities

Develop a clear definition of rigor and activities that support rigor in the classroom to ensure common commitment, conceptual understanding, and competency by all

Consider feedback on shared lesson plans or use collaboration time for peer feedback on lessons

Develop measurements to determine the achievement of this priority area

Sources of Evidence

- central office personnel
- classroom observations
- priority area meetings
- school leadership
- school summary report

Part 3 - Reflection on Student Learning

Reflection on Student Learning

Instructional practices designed to meet each student's learning needs have become more evident since the collaborative conference two years ago. Strategic differentiation, individualization, and personalization based on student learning needs continue to expand across the school, especially in career and technical education (CTE) and arts courses. Students often work at their own pace and receive timely support when needed. Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) helps teachers incorporate Tier 1 strategies and interventions to provide students with additional support in the classroom. Formative assessment is used across disciplines but is often limited to call and response with whole-group instruction rather than to adjust instruction.

Students are active learners who have opportunities to lead their own learning. Students engage in projects such as creating websites, devising a crime scene scenario and a visual representation for forensics class, and using parallel lines and transversal properties in municipal layouts. In Spanish class, students apply their knowledge and skills to authentic interpersonal conversations with peers. In chemistry, students use testing to eliminate options and identify an unknown substance. Students in civics class apply their knowledge of amendments to determine the legality of a series of scenarios. Ninth-grade students are enrolled in exploratory courses for each of the specialty areas, and providing this exposure to the pathways for manufacturing, educator training/health services, and information technology (IT)/business allows students to make informed decisions about which pathway they will choose for the remainder of their high school career. These courses enable students to apply knowledge and skills to authentic tasks, and some students have opportunities to learn outside of school through work and internships with local businesses.

Learners engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills. Educators are working on increasing the use of Depth of Knowledge questioning. In the health department, students in the surgical tech class were instructed in procedures for the safe use of sharps and the implications for their and their team's performance if injuries occurred. Additional classroom discussion focused on various types of surgical tools, their uses, and contraindications. In an Algebra 2 class, groups of students were each given polynomial equations of varying degrees and asked to graph them in Desmos. Each group observes the number of roots, leading their inquiry to make connections related to their understanding of the fundamental theorem of algebra. In some areas, while student tasks still reside at a lower depth of knowledge level, students' critical thinking and persistence levels are increased. For example, in an Algebra II class, the teacher tells students there are multiple ways to subtract polynomials, but he does not tell students which method to use, so they have to decide which they like best. In a physics class, students watch a demonstration of the axis of rotation and work in groups to predict the different forces that would be measured. Leveraging these pockets of instructional rigor through the current professional development will help spread this shift in pedagogy.

Some learners demonstrate their learning through a variety of assessment strategies that inform classroom instruction and curriculum. Demonstration of learning is primarily centered on informal formative and summative assessments. Learning targets and success criteria are posted in each classroom to guide students in framing learning and will help teachers with regular and consistent checks for understanding. Once the curriculum is completed, departmental teams can systematically review their assessment practices. Measurable assessment outcomes will provide data that informs specific shifts in instructional practice to support student learning. Each course has a summative project at the end of the year. CTE courses administer precision exams and content-specific single assessments after pre- and post-opportunities. Rubrics are provided to students for some of their work and are posted in Atlas Rubicon. Some students have opportunities to present to authentic audiences, including other students, for various projects.

Learners have some opportunities to demonstrate their learning, receive corrective feedback, and use this

feedback in meaningful ways to support learning. Teachers provide time for feedback and revision so that students may continue to work towards mastery of the learning expectations. Some teachers provide consistent, systematic, specific, timely, and corrective feedback, verbal or written, depending on the assignment. Many teachers provide verbal feedback during class, circulate, ask questions, provide cues, and support students as they work individually or in groups. Thus, by using teacher feedback, students are encouraged to improve their work toward mastery. Some students have opportunities to revise and improve their work, but this has yet to be consistent or pervasive across the school. Using the learning targets will support teacher and peer feedback to guide the next steps in learning and self-reflection on learning. The school has yet to offer separate grading and feedback for work habits and academic skills. Student habits such as preparedness and dress are reported as part of academic grades.

Learners use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning. All students have a school-issued Chromebook for students to access, support, and supplement their learning. Students use multiple educational platforms daily to access, support, document, and supplement their learning. Teachers use Google Classroom to post materials, make inquiries, and conduct activities for students. During classes, teachers use their interactive whiteboards to initiate lessons. For example, in a math class, equations are posted for students to use Desmos, problem-solve, and make observations. Other educational platforms, like Formative.com, are used to enhance student participation. In some cases, software is used to personalize the pace of learning.

Part 4 - Capacity for Continuous Growth as a Learning Organization

Conceptual Understanding

There is a shared understanding of effective learning, the priority areas, and the vision of the graduate. Two of the school's main priorities are student and staff safety and supporting students' social-emotional health to ensure a healthy and productive learning environment. The school uses and understands the core values as a way to enhance the school's supportive culture and care about students. A consultant works with the school to ensure teachers have the professional development and tools to continually review practices and improve instruction.

Teachers understand the need to integrate higher order thinking, ensure all students have rigorous learning opportunities, and that classrooms support student discourse and student-centered learning. Teachers understand the need to collect and analyze data to support student learning and make growth. Teachers are posting learning targets and assisting students with areas of need.

Staff believes in, uses, and advocates for the core values, Spartan HONOR, and the district's portrait of the graduate, emphasizing the district's and school's focus on students; however, these ideals, particularly the vision of the graduate, have yet to be embedded into all aspects of curriculum and instruction. The district has mastery-based learning as a target for its graduation requirements; however, the school will need to adjust the measurement of the vision of the graduate with its specific programs and services in the career and technical field.

The school has four priority areas for growth, including curriculum, intervention strategies, school schedule modification, and instructional practices. The staff understands the work that needs to be done in all priority areas and has made progress on each. Working with a consultant, about 60 percent of all courses have a curriculum in a common template uploaded into Atlas. Other curriculum areas are in progress and will be finished by the end of the next school year. Intervention strategies focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) and implementing a formal Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Teachers can access, complete, and send a form to the MTSS team for further action to support struggling learners. The school schedule has been modified to seven daily periods, including 45 minutes per week for formal collaboration and additional courses for students. Instructional practices are entwined with the consultant and curriculum work, and continued efforts will be made to deepen the focus on depth of knowledge to increase instructional rigor and move to more student-centered learning.

Commitment

The overall commitment to effective learning, the priority areas, and the vision of the graduate is exceptionally high. Staff is enthusiastic about completing the curriculum and improving instructional practices, which leads to the school's understanding of effective learning. Teacher commitment is demonstrated through their willingness to take additional classes to support their students and ongoing departmental meetings to review student work and data to improve scores.

The district is committed to the vision of the graduate so that all students in grades PK-12 in Waterbury are supported and leave each school with transferable skills and understandings. The district supports a consultant to expedite the standardized creation of the curriculum and coach staff and administrators on effective instruction. The district uses grants to supplement the budget but is firmly committed to avoiding the cycle of a funding cliff when grants sunset. The board of education is committed to its role in approving curriculum and electives for trade and non-traditional classes and to standardizing the formatting and availability of curriculum materials for shared access. The district is committed to addressing the teacher shortage issues that impact the pathways curricula through a potential teacher residency program with Central Connecticut State University

supported by passion and alternative thinking about how to support learning and the school.

School administrators are committed and enthusiastic about improving student and staff schedules, improving instruction, documenting curriculum, and working on SEL considerations.

Competency

Faculty members, staff members, and school and district leaders have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to implement effective learning, the priority areas, and the vision of the graduate. The dedication and commitment to students' well-being are commendable, creating a warm, supportive climate and culture to set the stage for learning, boding well for students and staff with the goal of continually improving instruction to meet the needs of all students.

The school is competent in achieving its priority areas. Several major actions have been taken and impacts and measurable growth can be seen in several areas. The school and the district are working with a consultant to improve curriculum and instruction to support effective learning and improve competency with research-based best practices. Teachers are writing the curriculum, increasing rigor by instituting learning targets and adjusting instruction to improve students' higher order thinking skills, and developing assessments, rubrics, and unit plans. School administrators and teachers are working tirelessly with the consultant to promote effective student learning. The consultant leads monthly professional development to increase teachers' skills across the school. The debriefs after learning walks are helping teachers with more student-centered instruction. Because the consultant's time in the school will be limited or stop at some point, the ongoing ownership of curriculum and instruction will directly involve the teachers in maintaining their competency, capacity, and sustainability.

Teachers will develop competency in understanding how well students are achieving the vision of a graduate once the school or district determines a formal process to assess and communicate individual and whole-school progress toward achieving it.

Capacity

The school has some time, resources, and support needed to implement effective learning, make progress on priority areas, and implement the vision of the graduate. Waterbury Career Academy opened as a new school in 2013 with ninth graders. Each year, a grade was added. Staff and programs increased each year. Over time, the school adjusted programs and services and acclimated new teachers. Early on, the school chose to become accredited and has been very involved in the process.

The schedule was changed to accommodate students and staff. Students can take more electives, and teachers can collaborate with their assigned data team for 45 minutes weekly. The time added to the schedule is an accomplishment; however, given the tasks to be done, 45 minutes per week has yet to be sufficient time to analyze all of the data, look for inequities in student achievement, share instructional practices, and work on curriculum, among other things. Teachers will also need time to integrate the vision of the graduate into the curriculum and lessons, determine how to measure student progress toward achieving the vision of the graduate, and create a formal process to report that achievement for individual students and the whole school.

The enrollment is 753, and the school's capacity is 800. Given the number of pathways and added courses and electives to fulfill requirements, classroom space is becoming an issue. Art and music classes are held in traditional classrooms, which lack space, appropriate furniture, and storage. The schedule has been thoughtfully and painstakingly designed to maximize the classes offered.

This year, the school has found it challenging to fill vacancies. As a result, 54 percent of staff teach six or more classes due to a lack of certified teachers available. Given this and the teacher schedules, the time for teachers to collaborate becomes limited. The district and the school provide professional development focusing on curriculum and instruction. The district is amenable to outside professional development opportunities, yet there

is little time, given teachers' workloads.

The district financially supports writing the curriculum by providing stipends to teachers working on the curriculum and purchased Atlas Rubicon to house the curriculum in a common area accessible to all. In addition, a consultant has been supporting teachers by helping them gain depth of knowledge to increase higher order thinking and rigor. The school and district support in-district professional development, such as training teachers on MTSS and the use of DESSA data. Out-of-district professional development is supported financially, but many teachers lack the time to take advantage of available opportunities.

Additional Information

Additional Information

Changes in the Ratings of Principles since the Collaborative Conference

Standard 2 Principle 2

School's rating in the Self-Reflection Report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

Explanation from the School

The school has made excellent progress since the self-study in producing a standardized curriculum for all courses. With help from the Waterbury School District and the curriculum committees across disciplines, the entire district has moved to a standardized format for all curricula. It is moving all disciplines' curricula to the Atlas program, making them available to all appropriate staff. The school's curricula are living documents, with yearly reviews and updates performed by paid teachers in all disciplines. All disciplines are progressing toward full inclusion of all courses into a standardized format, with the full expectation that all curricula except career and technical education (CTE), which is aiming for completion sometime during the next academic school year, will be completed and uniform by the beginning of the 2024-2025 academic year.

Standard 2 Principle 3

School's rating in the Self-Reflection Report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

Explanation from the School

After the self-reflection, the school and the district began planning strategies to increase rigor. Administrator walk-throughs focused on higher-level learning. In 2023, a consultant began working with staff, providing professional development, specifically focusing on developing rigorous instructional practices that allow students to exhibit their depth of knowledge.

Visiting Team Response

This work is starting to gain traction in the school.

Standard 4 Principle 3

School's rating in the Self-Reflection Report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

Explanation from the School

Since the collaborative conference, the school has hired a school social worker and a school psychologist to ensure students' physical and emotional well-being. We also filled the vacant English language learner teacher position and have a fully-staffed counseling department, a new behavior technician, and a school resource officer.

Standard 5 Principle 2

School's rating in the Self-Reflection Report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

Explanation from the School

Teachers are given formal collaborative time to work in IDT meetings once per week to analyze data and make informed decisions about adjusting instruction.

Standard 5 Principle 4

School's rating in the Self-Reflection Report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

Explanation from the School

Additional security was installed in the front of the school. A second lock was installed within the breezeway, so visitors must buzz in twice to enter. Cameras and doorbells have been installed at side entrances to monitor deliveries. All cameras inside and outside the building have been updated and are fully functioning.

Commendations

Commendation

The implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to provide students with targeted intervention strategies

The use of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) to determine students needs and act on them

Commendation

The intervention strategies provided to help meet the social-emotional needs of students by a behavioral technician

The creation of time during the school day to help students needing social-emotional support

Commendation

The efforts and interventions to decrease chronic absenteeism

The progress made on writing the curriculum in a consistent format and the use of Atlas to house the curriculum

Commendation

The development of a new schedule to provide faculty with some collaboration time for instructional data teams

The addition of CTE, pathways, electives, and required courses

Commendation

The robust academic pathways in manufacturing, educator operation, health services, and IT/business that provide extensive real-world experiences and preparation for the workforce

The warm, vibrant school culture

Commendation

The learning environment in which students and staff are respectful of one another

Commendation

The willingness of staff to take on extra classes to fill teacher vacancies and ensure classes are in place for students

Commendation

The efforts and professional learning to increase rigor, improve instructional practices, and increase higher order thinking

Commendation

The implementation of walkthroughs to support teachers in improving instruction

The additional security features added at the entrance and with monitoring the school and grounds

Commendation

The dedication to making improvements in the school from the time Waterbury Career Academy opened in 2013 and adding one grade per year for four years by staff and administrators

Additional Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop and implement a formal process to assess and communicate individual learner progress toward achieving the vision of a graduate and an annual report on whole-school progress

Recommendation

Ensure the facility is adequately sized and has sufficient and appropriate spaces to support student learning and the curriculum as the school expands its offerings to support the delivery of high-quality curriculum, programs, and services to all learners

FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This Initial/Decennial Accreditation Report of the Visiting Team reflects the findings of the school's Summary Report and those of the visiting team. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administrators, and other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for the students in this school. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administrators yearly of progress made in aligning with the Standards for Accreditation.

A school's initial/continued Accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing the school's improvement/growth plan based on the Priority Areas validated by the visiting team and recommendations identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle.

To monitor the school's progress, the Commission requires that the principal submit a First Report of Progress and Planning and routine Three- and Six-Year Reports of Progress and Planning describing the school's progress implementing the Priority Areas as well as submitting an updated improvement/growth plan. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards or Priority Areas for Growth are not being met in a satisfactory manner, if additional information is needed on matters relating to the school's alignment with the Standards for Accreditation, or substantive changes occur in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Substantive Change Policy requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty days of occurrence any substantive change which impacts the school's alignment with the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The Report of Substantive Change must describe the change itself and detail the impacts the change has had on the school's ability to meet the Standards for Accreditation. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included on the next page. All other substantive changes should be included in the Reports on Progress and Planning and/or the Annual Information Report (AIR) which is required of each member school to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

The visiting team would like to express thanks to the community for the hospitality and welcome. The school community completed a Self-Reflection that clearly identified the school's strengths and areas of need, hosted a Collaborative Conference, developed an improvement/growth plan, and completed a Summary Report. The time and effort dedicated to the Accreditation process, school improvement/growth, the Summary Report, and the preparation for the visit ensured a successful Initial/Decennial Accreditation visit.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES Commission on Public Schools

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

- elimination of fine arts, practical arts, and student activities
- diminished upkeep and maintenance of facilities
- significantly decreased funding - cuts in the level of administrative and supervisory staffing
- cuts in the number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
- grade level responsibilities of the principal
- cuts in the number of support staff
- decreases in student services
- cuts in the educational media staffing
- increases in student enrollment that cannot be accommodated
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees
- changes in the student population that warrant program or staffing modification(s) that cannot be accommodated, e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency

Roster of Team Members

Chair(s)

Chair: Ms. Cathy Sosnowski - New England Association of Schools & Colleges

Assistant Chair: Mary C. DeMarchi - Torrington High School

Team Members

Ms. Amy Begue - Bacon Academy

Lynn Estey -

Kristen Garcia - Wolcott High School

Carolyn Holmy - Plainfield High School

David Oestreicher - Bridgeport Military Academy