

**New England Association of  
Schools and Colleges**



**Commission on Public Secondary Schools**

**Report of the Visiting Committee for  
Agawam High School**

**Agawam, Massachusetts  
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## **STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS**

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

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of Agawam High School, Agawam, Massachusetts 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 Agawam High School in terms of the school's stated mission and the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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 of Teaching and Learning 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 Agawam High School, a committee of nine members, including the principal, 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. The self-study of Agawam High School extended over a period from September 2006 to October 2008.

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, Agawam High School also used questionnaires developed by The Global Institute at Endicott College to reflect the concepts contained in the Standards for Accreditation. These materials provided

discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

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

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

A visiting committee of 15 evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Agawam High School. The Committee members spent four days in Agawam, Massachusetts and reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents, shadowed students, visited classes, and interviewed teachers to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- 45 hours shadowing 15 individual students for three hours
- a total of 15 hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- individual meetings with 30 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 which will make a decision on the accreditation of Agawam High School.

### **Overview of Findings**

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

### **Quality of the Self-Study**

The self-assessment completed by the professional staff of Agawam High School was clear and well structured and indicated that the staff understood the self-assessment process. The findings of the staff provided insight for the committee and assisted in the preparation of the final report. Each indicator was addressed and rated with significant documentation by the staff. Consequently, the visiting committee was able to come to an understanding of the strengths and needs of Agawam High School prior to the visit. The quality of submitted student work was excellent with many examples of student work from across the curriculum. The visiting team was pleased with the materials provided for review before the team's arrival at the school and with the ability of the school to procure and make available other information during the four-day visit.

### **Teaching and Learning at Agawam High School**

The self-study of Agawam High School identified the school's accomplishments and needs. The visiting committee endorsed many, but not all, of the strengths and needs contained in the self-study documents, as well as adding commendations and recommendations regarding areas of concern. The report will provide general recommendations to enable Agawam High School to move beyond its present accomplishments in a continuing quest for excellence. Prescribed activities will require further commitment by both the school and community.

Agawam High School has done extensive work in integrating its high school mission statement and student expectations into many daily classroom activities so that these expectations have a greater influence on key decisions made at the high school. It is also quite clear that Agawam High School is focused on

providing a safe environment for all students and that there are many diverse activities that help foster academic, civic, and social growth. This focus on the mission and expectations for student learning must be continued and expanded in order to ensure that Agawam High School continues to have an environment that is truly conducive to learning that meets the needs of all students. For this to happen the school will need to assure that all students are provided a varied and rigorous academic program.

In the area of curriculum, it is commendable that there are so many opportunities for students to extend their learning beyond the school through co-curricular offerings. In addition, the library/media center has sufficient, updated materials and technology for all classes to use to directly support all aspects of the curriculum. While an effort has been made in certain disciplines to use a standard curriculum format for presenting content, instruction, and assessment, a common format that includes essential questions, varied assessment techniques, instructional strategies, and the clear implementation of school wide rubrics needs to be implemented to ensure that all students are able to make key connections and to strengthen learning.

The faculty has maintained a strong informal network of professional collaboration around instructional practices. However, more needs to be done to ensure that teachers have regular professional development opportunities centered around instructional needs they have identified. In addition, the provision of common planning time would allow teachers regular formal opportunities for collaboration in planning instruction both within and across curricular areas.

Agawam High School should be commended for the continued development of rubrics and scoring tools designed by the faculty that support a wide variety of learning activities. In addition, the development and use of diverse, multi-modal assessments is indicative of a commitment to accommodate the needs of all students. However, even though rubrics for each of the academic expectations have been created and these rubrics are widely used, the school must implement a process to ensure that individual student progress on achieving these expectations is measured and then reported to students and their families. This will allow AHS to continue to publicize its efforts to meet the academic needs of all students.

### **Support of Teaching and Learning at Agawam High School**

The principal's focus on student learning and his clear vision in implementing the school's mission, and the collaborative style described by the superintendent and school committee will allow AHS to make meaningful progress on critical areas of need.

Many of the critical areas of need that are cited in the area of school resources must be addressed. There is a wide range of technologies available for faculty members and students in the school library. However, the current guidance counselor to student ratio exceeds the Commission for Public Secondary School's guidelines as well as the number recommended by both the American School Counselors Association and the Massachusetts School Counselors Association.

The cleanliness and condition of the common areas, the classrooms, and restrooms is exemplary. The high school recognizes the importance of a close partnership with parents and families and works to actively engage all parties. The self-study is correct to note that a plan to address both ADA and Title IX noncompliance needs to be developed and implemented expeditiously. It is quite clear that the space available in the nurse's office is alarmingly inadequate.

## **AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PROFILE**

### **The Community**

The city, known as the "Town of Agawam", Massachusetts is a beautiful community with a rural atmosphere. It is a blend of suburban living with affordable homes, a low tax rate, highly respected schools, and safe neighborhoods. Agawam is a wonderful place to live and work, with abundant recreational opportunities, including Robinson State Park, numerous golf courses, a 1.7 mile bike path along the Connecticut River, and vast open spaces, the newest of which is a 50+acre active and passive recreation area on School Street and River Road. Agawam's picturesque setting with traditional farm fields, historic homes, and village centers among a backdrop of rolling mountains and plentiful rivers, streams and wetlands, make the community a tranquil location to live and visit.

The City of Agawam consists of both Agawam and Feeding Hills and is a suburb of Springfield in Western Massachusetts. This community is located along the Connecticut River, a ten-minute drive west of Springfield, and is thirty minutes (21 miles) north of Hartford, Connecticut. Agawam is 94 miles southwest of Boston and approximately three hours (131 miles) north of New York City.

Agawam incorporates 24.23 sq. miles of land. Agawam's population is a stable 32,000 that has changed only 1% in the past three years. The unemployment rate is 6.2 % while 9.5 % of Agawam's families are considered economically disadvantaged and qualify for free or reduced lunch. Other economic statistics state that 10.2% of the population makes less than \$15,000, 13% makes less than \$30,000 and the median family income is \$59,088.

Several major businesses and industries are located in the city of Agawam. Some of the largest employers include Berkshire Power, Six Flags New England, Sunshine Art Studio, HP Hood, and the Southworth Paper Company. There is also a large industrial area called the Agawam Regional Industrial Park. This 325 acre site consists of smaller manufacturing and high tech/research and development industries. This park is just south of Route 57, the divided highway which passes through Agawam.

### **The School and the Students**

Agawam High School (AHS) opened in 1922 at 68 Main Street and relocated to its present site in 1955. In this location, Agawam High School has undergone three major building renovations. The third project included a 35,000 square foot addition containing classrooms, a special service department wing, and an expanded cafeteria. Also, the center office area was renovated for the administrative team. In addition, the library was renovated and expanded to 8,164 square feet, including a fully automated library media technology center with 80 networked computers for students and staff. At 227,000 square feet, Agawam High School is the largest single floor high school in the state of Massachusetts.

The Agawam Public School District serves a student population of 4,288 students. The system is made up of seven schools: four elementary schools, one middle school, a junior high school, and Agawam High School. The total student population from K-12 includes 65 school choice students. Non-public schools are not located within the city of Agawam.

The enrollment at Agawam High School has remained relatively stable over the past few years. However, beginning with the 2006-2007 freshman class (2010) there is a significant increase that will continue for the next two years. For the 2005-2006 school years, 1,135 students were enrolled at Agawam High School. For the current school year 2006-2007, the enrollment increased to 1,299 students. The increase of incoming freshman is also projected to continue for the next two school years.

The number of out-of-district students at Agawam High School currently consists of: Class of 2007 – 23; Class of 2008 – 19; Class of 2009 – 13; and Class of 2010 – 16. The percentage of non-resident students is a total of 3.1%. English was not the primary language of 2.4% of the student population in the school year 2006-2007, while 0.2% has only limited English proficiency.

Current dropout rates for the Agawam school district have shown a slight decrease even with increased enrollment over the past two school years decreasing to 3.48% in 2006-2007 from 3.8% in 2005-2006. A school day at AHS consists of seven, 48 minutes periods resulting in 336 minutes of instructional time per day. Students come to school for 180 days giving Agawam

students 1,008 hours of instructional time per year compared to the Massachusetts requirement of 990 hours per year. Academic Teachers typically carry an average load of 94.8 students with an average class size of 18.3. Average student attendance rate has increased slightly from the 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 school years to just over 93%.

The Agawam High School faculty is made up of 100. Of those, 96% have advanced degrees. The percentage of teachers who teach outside of their area of certification and the percentage of teachers having provisional certification are both two percent. Subjects taught by staff that hold Provisional Certification are in the Language-Based and Inclusion programs.

Teachers at Agawam High School work 183 days, which includes one in service day, two professional development days, and 180 days of classroom instruction. Currently, common planning time among faculty members has not been scheduled. Teachers are required to attend one faculty meeting and one department meeting each month, each of which can last up to an hour. There are also two planned parent conference days, during which students are dismissed early and teachers are able to meet with parents for two hours in the afternoon and two additional hours in the evening.

Students of all abilities and interests can find a place at AHS. Students have opportunities to take AP, Honors, an off campus collaborative program, and classes in the Virtual High School which offers distance learning courses. The average student can move into regular college level classes and students with Individualized Education Plans are placed into Inclusion classes, Language-Based classes, or into the Alternative Learning Program (ALP), where instruction is modified according to the students' Individualized Education Plans.

Advanced Placement classes are offered in a variety of subject areas; approximately 8% of the student enrolls in at least one A.P. courses. The percentage of students who enroll in Honors courses 17% Honors or AP English; 11% Mathematics; 23% Science; 15% History; and 17% Foreign Languages. Honors courses are also offered in Business, Art, and Choreography. The majority of courses are heterogeneous groups, except for Honors and Advanced Placement courses. The number of students at Agawam High School taking the SAT and ACT standardized tests is significantly below the state average.

In 2007, two hundred ten students took the SAT Reasoning test. The average SAT score for this test was: Critical Reading - 479, Math - 502, and Writing - 465. Eleven students, representing twenty-eight different SAT Subject Tests, took at least one or more subject tests with an average score of 620. There were eighteen Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered at AHS. Also in 2007, fifty-four students took at least one AP test. Seventy-four percent earned a score of

three or better. In 2008, ninety-nine students out of one hundred fifty-four took the AP Test. Scores are pending.

Special Education services are given to 12.6% of students. The purpose of inclusion and language-based classes is to accommodate students with special needs. These classes are co-taught by highly-qualified content and special education faculty members. As of October 2006, Agawam High School has 160 students serviced by the Special Services Department. Currently 3% of AHS students are on 504 Plans and 3% are on DCAPs.

Agawam High School provides educational opportunities to residents, as well as non-residents through the School Choice program. As of October 1, 2006, 18 students enrolled at AHS through School Choice. This accounts for 1.4% of the student enrollment. Parents can choose to home school their children, send their children to parochial schools, or send their children to out-of-district public and private schools. Agawam High School sends 67 students to Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative Vocational Technical Center. In 2006, there were 45 out-of-district special education placements. Through the Virtual High School, students may also take on-line classes with students and teachers from around the world. In 2005-2006, 23 girls and 14 boys were involved in on-line classes.

84% of the students from Agawam Public Schools pursued post-secondary education upon graduation from the Class of 2007 which was down from 88% in 2006 and 89% in 2005.

## **AGAWAM HIGH SCHOOL MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

### **MISSION**

The Agawam High School community provides for all students a safe, technologically advanced learning environment that offers diverse, challenging learning opportunities, and extensive extra-curricular activities to foster academic, social, aesthetic, and civic growth.

### **EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

#### **Academic Expectations**

##### **Agawam High School students will:**

- Demonstrate satisfactory achievement in the standards-based curriculum at Agawam High School.
- Pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Systems (MCAS) test in the required subject areas.
- Communicate effectively through listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- Use scientific and mathematical processes to interpret and evaluate information and solve problems across the curriculum.
- Develop competency in the use of information and technology across the curriculum.
- Participate in activities to fulfill individual interests and potential.
- Explore the visual, performing, and practical arts.
- Communicate in world languages and explore the traditions of diverse cultures.
- Maintain positive health and fitness habits
- Become aware of the changing employment market by demonstrating skills and knowledge in career preparation.

#### **Social Expectations**

##### **Agawam High School students will:**

- Respect themselves, peers, teachers, staff, and school property.
- Use appropriate methods to resolve conflicts and disagreements.
- Recognize and be accountable for following the rules and regulations governing the school.
- Be aware of the availability of support services.

#### **Civic Expectations**

##### **Agawam High School students will:**

- Be encouraged to become involved citizens in school, local, and international activities.
- Value and respect the environment.
- Engage in the democratic process in school.

**COMMISSION ON  
PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**TEACHING AND LEARNING  
STANDARDS**

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**MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS  
FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

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**CURRICULUM**

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**INSTRUCTION**

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**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT  
LEARNING**

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## Teaching and Learning Standards

### **1. Mission and Expectations for Student 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 mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.
2. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning.
3. The school shall define school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that:
  - are measurable;
  - reflect the school's mission.
4. For each academic expectation in the mission, the school shall have a targeted level of successful achievement identified in a rubric.
5. The school shall have indicators by which it assesses the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations.
6. The mission statement and the school's expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.
7. The school shall review regularly the mission statement and expectations for student learning using a variety of data to ensure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards.

## CONCLUSIONS

The mission statement and expectations for student learning of Agawam High School (AHS) was adopted by the professional staff, school board, and school committee on March 22, 2005. This document went through numerous revisions by three separate committees before concluding a process that began in 2000. Each committee represented a cross-section of faculty members from various academic disciplines and administrators. Upon completion, the mission statement and expectations for student learning was published in the school's student agenda handbook and distributed to/and reviewed with students at an opening assembly each year. The document is also available in the *Agawam High School Program of Studies* booklet and displayed throughout the school. More active use of the mission and expectations as part of every school day and discussion of the meaning among the faculty, staff, and students will instill a greater sense of ownership of the school's mission statement in order to ensure that it is a driving force in all teaching and decision-making. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers)

The Agawam High School Mission Statement and Expectations for Student Learning were based on the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning. The task of revising the Agawam High School Mission Statement and Expectations was first undertaken by a committee of high school staff members and administrators in response to the 1998 accreditation report. Faculty members understand how the mission and expectations apply to the overall work and culture of the school. The school environment fosters a community of learners that honors and respects diversity. During the panel presentation, student representatives spoke eloquently about the diverse and broad academic course offerings, the plethora of clubs and after school activities, the varied learning opportunities, safe school environment, and "open door" policy instituted by the school's administrators. The mission statement is displayed in most classrooms, the rotunda and the cafeteria, included in many syllabi, the program of studies, the student agenda booklet, and the district handbook. Because the Agawam High School Mission and Expectations for Student Learning document is indicative of the strong partnership with parents and faculty and school board members, it provides a common set of principles to guide educational decisions. (self-study, panel presentation, school committee)

The Agawam High School faculty has defined school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that are measurable and reflect the school's mission. Academic expectations are defined with specific levels of proficiency through 13 school-wide rubrics. These rubrics highlight the different modalities of learning and the accompanying assessments that are implemented in all academic areas. The goal is that all students will meet each of the established expectations before graduation. At the beginning of each course, teachers distribute and discuss the various levels of expectations that are represented within course-relevant rubrics. Parents and students are asked to agree to these expectations signing and returning a copy of each of the course expectations located to be found in the

student agenda handbook. By defining a myriad of expectations, AHS strives to provide students with knowledge of the various learning experiences which will prepare them to be successful and productive members of a global society. (self-study, student work, teachers)

For each of the 13 academic expectations in the mission, the school has a targeted level of successful achievement identified in a rubric. The applicable school-wide expectations included in the mission are represented in these school-wide rubrics. These academic rubrics indicate five levels of achievement which are detailed and clear. The five levels are graded on a scale of zero to four, with an additional sixth level which indicates “student is not working.” The clarity of the AHS academic expectations provides a strong foundation allowing all students to be measured against a set of concrete standards. However, some teachers do not use the rubrics as they are, and others have modified them; many students assert that some rubrics are cumbersome. Thus, better understanding by students and teachers and greater consistency in their use would improve teaching, learning, and assessment. (self-study, student work, teachers)

The school has indicators by which it assesses the school’s progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations. Under the heading of “Civic Expectations and Social Expectations” in the student agenda handbook is the statement, “the Agawam High School student will: be encouraged to become involved citizens in school, local, and international activities; value and respect the environment; engage in the democratic process in school.” The social expectations state that students will “respect themselves, peers, teachers, staff, and school property; use appropriate methods to solve conflicts and disagreements; recognize and be accountable for following the rules and regulations governing the school; be aware of the availability of support services.” The school has recently delegated the responsibility of gathering data to study the effectiveness of these expectations to the director of the career center. The data will provide an insight into the impact of AHS clubs and extracurricular activities in supporting students in achieving the school’s civic and social expectations. Some of the data currently looked at informally for measurement of social expectations include comments on report cards, teacher individual disciplinary referrals, attendance records, feedback from coaches and advisors and analyzing the number of students who have received in-school and out-of-school suspension. These data give the school a clear indication of the various student achievements as well as any issues regarding the support services students need to meet their social and emotional needs. Overall, students are encouraged to join extracurricular activities and to become involved in the community. Organizations and events available to students include but are not limited to: Future Teachers of America; student government; the peer leadership program; National Honor Society; Rays of Hope walkathons; Diversity Leadership; Students Against Violating the Environment; and various school-wide drives to assist the less fortunate in the community. The continued

development of a formal data collection process to assess student progress in achieving the school's civic and social expectations will allow the school to better track the effectiveness of its extracurricular offerings. (self-study, students, parents)

Although the spirit of the Agawam High School Mission Statement and Expectations can be seen in the culture of the school, these documents do not currently guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school. Although there is little evidence that the mission statement is currently driving curricular and instructional decisions, the faculty is working to integrate it as a reference for both policy-making and day-to-day decisions. The ongoing publication and communication regarding the meaning of these documents and their impact as a tool for evaluating progress of individual students and of the entire school will ensure that they are valued and utilized. (students, teachers, mission standard committees)

The school does not have a formal process in place to regularly review the mission statement and expectations for student learning. The current mission and expectations was approved in March of 2005, but the school has yet to formally institute a plan to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of this document. The mission and expectations committee states that there is an awareness that the mission and expectations should be reviewed, but there is no formal plan at this time. Concerns have been raised regarding the high number of academic expectations and the fact that having ten academic expectations could be too difficult to manage. Ensuring the regular review of the mission statement and expectations and ensuring that the number of expectations is manageable will help faculty and staff more accurately assess student learning. (mission standard committee, self-study, panel presentation)

### **Commendations**

1. The strong partnership among all of the stakeholders in the Agawam High School community in developing the mission and expectations
2. The high level of communication with parents regarding the academic expectations relevant to individual courses
3. The availability of a wide variety of co-curricular activities that enable students to meet the school's social and civic expectations

### **Recommendations**

1. Implement a formal process that includes the use of data and involves representatives of all stakeholders to regularly evaluate the mission statement and expectations for student learning
2. Ensure the implementation of the academic expectations rubrics in all curricular areas

3. Ensure that number of academic expectations is manageable
4. Provide professional development support for teachers to align the specific academic and technological expectations to classroom assignments and in assessments
5. Ensure that the mission statement and expectations guide decisions

## **Standards for Accreditation Teaching and Learning Standards**

### **2. Curriculum**

The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other school-approved educational experiences, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links the school's beliefs, its expectations for student learning, and its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon the professional staff's commitment to and involvement in a comprehensive, ongoing review of the curriculum.

1. Each curriculum area shall identify those school-wide academic expectations for which it is responsible.
2. The curriculum shall be aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations.
3. The written curriculum shall:
  - prescribe content;
  - integrate relevant school-wide learning expectations;
  - identify course-specific learning goals;
  - suggest instructional strategies;
  - suggest assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics.
4. The curriculum shall engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.
5. The curriculum shall:
  - be appropriately integrated;
  - emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.
6. The school shall provide opportunities for all students to extend 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.

8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, staffing levels, and the resources of the library/media center shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.
9. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations and course-specific learning goals.
10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum.
11. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS

Most of Agawam's curriculum areas have identified those school-wide academic expectations for which they are responsible. These academic expectations are addressed throughout all courses within these curriculum areas. The focus on these school-wide rubrics is still in its infancy and even though the academic expectations are displayed in all classrooms, they are not always fully explained and incorporated into daily instruction. Because of this, many students are unfamiliar with how these expectations impact their learning. Thus, all curricula must be clearly and formally aligned with the school-wide academic expectations, and each curriculum area must clearly identify the expectation for which it has taken responsibility and must use the school-wide rubric to assess it so that all students are very familiar with what they know. (students, curriculum guides, observations)

Many curriculum documents are not aligned with the school-wide academic expectations to collectively ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve those expectations. Staff noted that this work is still taking place and that the school-wide academic expectations are "the driving force in amending the curriculum." In addition, the self study noted the incomplete nature of this work stating, "most departments have revised curricula and reviewed academic expectations." All students are required to cover the core curriculum, allowing students to achieve the academic expectations. For example, the MCAS prep class is required of all freshman as a core class that includes various academic expectations. When appropriate, alternative paths and programs are provided for those students needing additional support in achieving the expectations. Programs include tutoring opportunities after school, Study Skills classes and the AHS Alternative Learning Program during the day for special education students. The two forms of inclusion classes, language-based and inclusion, are provided for English, math, social studies, and science but not electives. In some areas, especially those including special education students, the measurement of achievement and the assurance of opportunity to practice are not clear. Further work is needed, especially in elective courses, to ensure that students have a chance to practice and achieve school wide learning expectations sufficiently. (teachers, self-study, student work)

In certain disciplines, an effort has been made to use a standard format for presenting content, suggesting varying instruction, and suggesting varying assessment focused on the essential questions delineated in their curriculum guide. However, there is no specific format provided for guides. Only the English and Foreign Language department's curriculum documents showed evidence that they have centered their written instruction and curriculum maps around essential questions. While there is a clear understanding of the school-wide expectations in most curricula, not all areas and departments of the school have shown how their students meet the expectations. Departmentalized mid-year and end-of-course exams are common in most areas. Learning goals for most

courses are given in the expectation sheets signed by all students and parents as well as in the written curriculum. However, mastery learning is not clearly described in all objectives. School-wide rubrics have been adopted, but they are not always aligned to instruction by all faculty members. Neither students nor teachers were asked for their input during rubric creation. There are inconsistencies in the use of these rubrics among teachers. Consequently, it appears that students and some teachers do not understand the purpose and objective of rubrics. Some grading is done with rubrics, yet the final scores are not always an accurate reflection of the rubrics. Examples of different methods of student assessments are listed throughout curriculum guides, but in the lower level courses, there are only a few additional forms of assessment employed. The written curriculum guides use different formats. The written curriculum from the English and Foreign Language Departments should be a model for other academic areas as a template to better suggest instructional strategies and effectively employ school-wide rubrics. The school must provide a complete format for curriculum that prescribes content, integrates relevant school-wide learning expectations, identifies course-specified learning goals, suggests instructional strategies, and suggests assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics. (course curriculum guides, student work, students)

The curriculum engages some students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking and provides some students with opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills. Student work, particularly in many honors and AP level courses, reflects the rigor of the written curriculum and provides experiences that formally challenge students beyond memorization and call for higher-order synthesis. A variety of courses calls for project-based learning and coursework that go beyond the four walls of that classroom. Certain courses call for students to effectively learn from and communicate with members of the Agawam community as well as to participate in the global educational realm through the Virtual High School opportunities. Students have the opportunity to job shadow and intern in a variety of areas. Students in the performing arts and visual arts receive deserved recognition for their public performances, displays, and initiatives throughout the Agawam community. Certain coursework calls for the use of portfolios that allow members of other disciplines as well as the outside community to see the learning over time of a student's achievement throughout a course. The course catalog is quite comprehensive and offers a variety of options for students. There is a variety of electives offered for all students but technology is not as accessible for students in elective courses. Almost all disciplines employ the services of the library/media center but elective course teachers report difficulty in scheduling their classes for time in library/media center. In the basic courses students are not being consistently challenged. Thus, curricula for many courses that are more basic must be re-written to include higher expectations, more challenge, and the same opportunities for projects and experiential learning that make some curricula engaging and more encouraging of student success. (students, curriculum guides, student shadowing).

The curriculum at Agawam High School is not appropriately integrated, and it does not emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage in all areas. There has not been an emphasis on interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction. Teachers and students agree that there are occasional examples of integration between disciplines, but they are not by design. The elective courses, such as Business and Technology Education, provide the most extensive examples of collection of cross-curricular strategies. A lack of common planning time for teachers is detrimental to development of cross-disciplinary opportunities and does not allow the creation of courses that show relationships between a variety of topics in one area rather than acting as isolated discrete courses. There are no essential questions to encourage depth of understanding in a majority of written curriculum guides. English and foreign languages are the only curriculum guides that provide essential questions to promote higher-ordering thinking. Project-based learning is a collective practice across the school, and it is clear students have opportunities for demonstration and assessment beyond objective testing with PowerPoint presentations and role-playing. However, assessment practices are limited in certain disciplines, and opportunities for higher order thinking appear to be sporadic. More time for faculty members to plan integrated curriculum and school-wide emphasis on breadth of coverage would enhance the balance between offering as “education” state-mandated basic content and teaching and practicing the upper levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. (course curriculum guides, teachers, observations)

Agawam High School provides numerous opportunities for students to extend their learning beyond regular course offerings and the school campus. Students have opportunities to participate in Virtual High School, implementing technology and global education. The college tech-prep program allows students to take up to two courses at local colleges. Students are also encouraged to participate in internships aligned with particular career interests as well as complete on the job training activities. The Lower Pioneer Valley Education Collaborative Vocational Program provides students with apprenticeships in various vocations such as medical fields and agricultural studies. Students take field trips to various institutions to support classroom curricula, and they are involved in several academic honor societies celebrating their academic achievements. Co-curricular activities provide opportunities for all students. Forty co-curricular activities and 53 athletic programs serve many students at Agawam High School. Clubs and organizations such as the academic decathlon team, American Field Service, Model Congress, SADD, the Intergenerational Book and Poetry clubs, the sign language club, and student government are a representation of activities provided that engage the majority of the student body. All of these activities allow students to foster academic, social, aesthetic, and civic growth. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers)

Curricular coordination and articulation occasionally takes place K-12, formally and informally within the high school and with its sending schools. The district employs an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction who works

with curriculum liaisons/specialists through monthly meetings. These specialists work within the junior high school and high school settings, but their time is limited as the liaisons/specialists typically carry an almost full or full teaching load, impeding visits to both schools. Further, MCAS-driven classes, math and English, are given the resources and manpower to implement coordination and articulation while classes such as science and foreign language are overlooked. Particular departments voice concerns that individuals from sending schools may duplicate curricula or may be removed from curricular connections. There may be little coordination and articulation within and between academic areas at the moment, but steps have been taken to establish common midterms and final exams. The implementation of short and long term curriculum plans, specifying completion and revision dates for all curricula areas and the scheduling of regular formal meeting times for curriculum specialists and liaisons to do their work, and work within and across departments will ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently coordinated and articulated. (department leaders, teachers, self-study)

Unequal budgeting has created inconsistencies in the successful implementation of curriculum in some departmental areas. Many of the faculty members of Agawam High School feel that, for the majority of classes, there are sufficient texts, supplies, and materials. Teachers and department liaisons who make requests for materials and supplies are almost always approved. However, there are those with insufficient materials, hindering delivery of the curriculum. Over the last three years, some departments have been budgeted with \$60,000 more in texts and supplies than other departments. Some history and science classes and the health and consumer sciences are using outdated equipment, materials, and books, and these areas as well as English and the Life Skills classes often do not have any or enough texts, equipment, or materials. In-class technology is sporadic throughout departments if accessible at all and is not always available to all students and teachers. The math department has been supplied with three SMARTBoards and graphing calculators for student use while some classes are without computers and screens for overhead projectors. Technology should be included in curricular selections and choices of instruction. The library has sufficient, updated materials and technology for all classes to use, directly supporting all aspects of Agawam's curricula. However, scheduling this space can be challenging as core classes are given priority and space is limited. As with spatial difficulty in the library, the physical space in the building is not sufficient as there are currently eighteen teachers "floating" or sharing different rooms. Teachers need blackboard and display spaces in the rooms they share as they now are limited in how much information they may leave posted on boards as they must share the board with two or possibly more other teachers. Teaching loads are varied depending upon MCAS content areas, leadership roles, and the number of faculty members per department. Certain department leaders are teaching only three courses, while others are teaching five. Further, elective courses in some departments are at risk of being cut as teachers are at the maximum number of preparations and classes they may teach by contract. Thus, the school must implement a formal transparent budget process to ensure

that all faculty members understand school-wide priorities and curricular needs from year-to-year. (panel presentation, facility tour, school support staff)

The professional staff is not involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations and course-specific learning goals. A formal, comprehensive procedure for the periodic review of the curriculum utilizing student assessment data has not been established. While two-thirds of the teachers indicated in the self-study survey that they have been involved in the development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum, most curricular documents appear only to have been completed with no formal review process for revision. In some subject areas, curriculum hasn't been updated since the last accreditation process ten years ago. In formulating revisions for the curriculum, most faculty members are using the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks and data based on the MCAS results. According to the self-study report, the school-wide academic expectations, rubric scores, and longitudinal studies are rarely used in modifying curricula. The school has recently begun examining PSAT and SAT scores and is planning to provide SAT preparation courses to students in the future. While the staff has begun evaluating some data, the school must implement a more formal, assessment-based review process to ensure the validity of the school's academic expectations and continued student success in achieving them. (self-study, teachers, curriculum specialists)

The school does not commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum. Steps to developing and revising curriculum have begun with the implementation of the positions of curriculum liaisons/specialists, but these individuals do not provide equitable assistance across the curriculum, forcing teachers to work individually. For those teachers working on curriculum development and revision, time and staff are provided only during summer or release time during the school day. During these limited times, some teachers are allocated funds for working on the curriculum while others are not. While those teachers given release time during the school day are provided with a substitute, the teachers feel their absence hinder students learning. Extensive time, resources, and personnel must be equally allocated to ensure effective curriculum work in all curricular areas. (self-study, teachers, curriculum specialists)

Individual professional development activities occasionally support the implementation of the curriculum, but infrequent opportunities are afforded for the entire faculty. While most of the faculty has completed some curriculum writing, few have attended content-specific workshops and conferences for modern material to be utilized in the classroom. There are three full days and four half days in the school year set aside for professional development, but the focus of these days is not usually curriculum. In previous years, teachers within the high school would present workshops for colleagues, but interest in organizing these

days has declined. The administration does allocate \$450.00 per faculty member to attend outside of district activities and encourages them to do so. Specific content-based workshops are attended on an individual basis, but few of these opportunities are publicized as there is no formal method of communicating professional development opportunities. The provision of additional opportunities within the district for ongoing curriculum development and implementation skills will ensure that the professional development activities support the school's mission and expectations for student learning. (teachers, self-study, curriculum specialists)

### **Commendations**

1. The core curriculum is mandated for all students
2. The AHS Alternative Learning Program guides students in achieving the academic, social, aesthetic, and civic expectations
3. Project-based learning is practiced across the curriculum
4. Students are provided numerous opportunities to extend their learning beyond regular course offerings and the school campus
5. The library has sufficient, updated materials and technology for all classes that directly support all aspects of the curriculum
6. The administration allocates individual funding and allows faculty members to look outside of district for needed professional development

### **Recommendations**

1. Align all curricula with school-wide academic expectations and clarify the connection for students
2. Provide a complete curriculum format that prescribes content, integrates relevant school-wide learning expectations, identifies course-specific learning goals, and essential questions, suggests instructional strategies, and suggests assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics and other varied assessment techniques
3. Increase the role of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction at the high school level to ensure all curriculum documents are consistent and updated
4. Design clear measurements for the practice of and achievement of academic expectations for special education students across the curriculum
5. Ensure that students in all course levels are being challenged by engaging coursework and high expectations
6. Ensure that curriculum specialists serve all subject areas equitably
7. Ensure a formal procedure for curricular coordination with sending schools
8. Establish a formal review of the curriculum with a timeline for all subjects
9. Equalize budgetary allotment of texts, materials, technology, and staffing levels to adequately implement all curricula

10. Give immediate attention to committing sufficient time, personnel, and professional development activities for developing, revising, evaluating, and implementing curricula
11. Build technology integration into all curricula

## **Standards for Accreditation Teaching and Learning Standards**

### **3. Instruction**

The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning, the achievement of expectations for student learning, the delivery of the curriculum, and the assessment of student progress. Instructional practices 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. Teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional strategies and to collaborate with their colleagues about instruction and student learning.

1. Instructional strategies shall be consistent with the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning.
2. Instructional strategies shall:
  - personalize instruction;
  - make connections across disciplines;
  - engage students as active learners;
  - engage students as self-directed learners;
  - involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding;
  - provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills;
  - promote student self-assessment and self-reflection.
3. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.
4. Teachers shall be expert in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective about their own practices.
5. Discussion of instructional strategies shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
6. Technology shall be integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning.
7. The school's professional development program shall be guided by identified instructional needs and shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies.
8. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purposes of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although Agawam High School's mission statement focuses on individualized instruction, the use of technology across the curriculum, use of rubrics, and various practices to accommodate different learning styles, these principles do not drive school-wide instructional practices. The use of technology in classrooms is not equally implemented across curriculum areas. Science and mathematics classrooms utilize a significant number of technological tools to enhance instruction, but other departments use technology only sporadically. The library/media center is well-equipped to support all classroom teachers in helping faculty members embed technology into instruction, but many teachers have yet to take advantage of this educational resource. Lists of rubrics are visible in most classrooms, but the Instruction self-study report states that classroom teachers refer to the rubrics only on a limited basis. Rubrics are not part of exemplary instructional practices, and, according to the self-study survey, fifty percent of the faculty feels that their instructional strategies are not influenced by the mission statement. There is a number of talented and dedicated classroom teachers at Agawam High School, but most instructional best practices take place in isolation with little formal sharing of successful practices among faculty members. Department meetings are limited to one per month, and a review of meeting agendas shows no emphasis on instruction. Most classroom instruction is teacher-centered and content-driven rather than student-centered and concept-driven. Students testify that lecture is the primary mode of instruction, and, despite the fact that students are asked to demonstrate their levels of understanding through class discussion and project-based activities in some courses, teacher lecture and student note-taking are the predominant instructional activity across most curriculum areas. High school teachers have three professional full days and four professional half days, but to date, professional development time has not been focused on the examination of student work nor the improvement of instructional practices. The allocation of additional time and training for faculty members to invest in instructional initiatives related to the mission and expectations for student learning will allow greater consistency and higher quality in classroom instruction. (self-study, observations, students)

The Agawam High School faculty sporadically employs instructional strategies that personalize instruction, engage students as self-directed learners, involve critical thinking, provide opportunities for students to demonstrate that they are able to apply what they have learned, and promote self-assessment and self-reflection in a limited number of classes. Most students surveyed feel that large class sizes as well as the short length of periods adversely affect teachers' abilities to offer a variety of instructional strategies, including several learning activities during a given period. Based on the current course selection list, approximately 80 classes have a student enrollment above twenty-five. According to the self-study Endicott survey data, 75% of the students feel comfortable approaching their teachers for support help. Specific after-school

help nights are established and published by all curriculum departments to help struggling students and augment the continuation of learning outside the classroom. However, even though specific extra help nights are available, few students take advantage of the support on a regular basis, with the exception of test review sessions. Inclusion classes have been established, involving co-teaching to help personalize and support the classroom experience for struggling learners. The Rosie Robotics Team is a co-curricular program that allows students the opportunity to scaffold classroom skills and individual interests in the area of engineering, science, mathematics, design and problem-solving. The English department, using library/media center resources, requires all students to partake in a yearly research project that promotes self-directed and active learning. In biology, instructional techniques utilizing Gardner's Multiple Intelligences and Socratic discussion methods promote critical thinking. Internship experiences are available inside and outside of the high school to help complement and reinforce classroom instruction. The collaboration program involves approximately 100 students who are able to combine academic courses at the high school with a vocational curriculum taken off-campus, using a split-day model. Study skills courses are also offered as interventions and safety nets for students who have a recognized learning disability. These integrated learning strategies courses complement the core subject area courses that are team taught by the subject area teacher and academic support teacher. Although there is an increasing desire to promote school-wide rubrics across all curriculum areas, there are only isolated evidence connections made across curriculum areas. The faculty feels it does a good job following curriculum maps and emphasizing essential questions to create a conceptual-based approach as compared to a content-based approach, but there is no school-wide plan in place to ensure that all students are being challenged daily in the use of higher order thinking skills in order to reach a deeper understanding of material. There is also little evidence of scaffolding to foster more rigorous application of knowledge and skills. In fact, school tours, classroom visits, and student interviews confirm a strong reliance on teacher-driven instruction. Although there are occasional project-based assignments in most subject areas that allow for student-directed and active learning, more professional development support is needed for staff members to gain expertise in the employment of instructional practices that will increase active learning activities for all students. (students, self-study committee, observations)

Teachers at Agawam High School value informal feedback from colleagues as well as evaluation feedback from administrators, but there are few opportunities to entertain feedback from students and parents as a means of improving instruction. The evaluation process at Agawam High School is the primary mechanism used to improve classroom instruction. Approximately 60% of the staff feels that the evaluation process has helped improve their classroom instruction. Non-professional status teachers are formally evaluated three times a year for the first three years of employment. Professional status teachers are formally evaluated twice every other year thereafter. Only 38% of the students

surveyed indicated that teachers asked for their opinion on improving instruction, and nearly 70% of parents surveyed do not feel that they have an impact on improving classroom instruction. Monthly department meeting agendas show that meeting protocols are not used regularly to analyze and support the improvement of classroom instruction. Science classrooms have implemented Qwizdom, a formative assessment system that provides immediate feedback to students and teacher on daily instruction. Classroom teachers have voiced concerns that large class sizes negatively impact their ability to conduct individual and small group conferencing with students. Even though a number of classroom teachers individually create surveys to obtain student feedback on the quality of instruction, there is no formal instrument in place to ensure that all teachers across curriculum areas gather feedback from students, parents, and colleagues for the purpose of improving instruction. (self-study survey, students, self-study-committee)

The professional staff members at Agawam High School are experts in their content area, and many teachers have knowledge about current research on effective instructional approaches. Opportunities to reflect on practices take place throughout the building on an informal basis. The self-study reports that 96% of teachers are highly qualified and certified within their discipline, and a majority of the teaching staff possesses a master's degree or more. Teachers are encouraged to continue professional growth, and each staff member has \$450.00 dollars available per year for course reimbursement, pending the approval of the principal and superintendent. Current statistics show that 71% of the teaching staff has taken advantage of this reimbursement incentive. The system-wide professional development log does not maintain documentation of staff members who involve themselves in activities geared towards the improvement of instructional practice. A school-wide focus on implementing and sharing best practices will increase the ability of the staff members to successfully implement the school's mission and expectations for student learning. (self-study, central office personnel, meetings with the self-study committee)

The faculty members of Agawam High School discuss instructional strategies informally only, and therefore collaboration is currently not a significant part of the professional culture of the school. There is no common planning time in the daily teacher schedule and this is cited as a critical need by teachers. Although 87% of the faculty agrees in the self-study survey that they discuss instructional strategies with colleagues on a daily basis, the majority of this collaboration exists only informally and is conducted either during lunch or after school. Thus exemplary instructional models within Agawam High School are shared only infrequently through informal discussion. The mathematics, English, social studies, science, and technical educational departments discuss MCAS data, but once, again, informally. There is a professional library and work area in the library/media center, but the workroom does not contain any meeting space. Although the mission states that the professional staff will meet the challenging needs of the school and its students, the formal ongoing sharing, modeling,

analyzing and altering of current instructional practices necessary to achieve the mission are not currently in place. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers)

Technology is integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning in some curriculum areas within Agawam High School, but it does not serve instruction across all curriculum areas. The mathematics department has three SMARTBoards installed in its classrooms, but this supportive instructional tool is not available for other departments. The computer technology department allows students to scaffold to higher levels of understanding through the creation of personalized games and other forms of programming. The science department members have embedded Internet search techniques and database use into its instructional practices with strong support from library/media center resources. Additionally, science teachers are using software-based technology kits, projection equipment, and Qwizdom formative assessment tools. Journalism classes require students to use technology extensively in the design and publication of the school newspaper, *The Mirror*. The Science Ethics curriculum involves extensive interpretation, analysis, and research into current controversial topics, such as stem-cell research, cloning, and genetic engineering. The library/media center works closely with some curriculum areas and incorporates a cooperation/collaboration/coordination technology research model, but school-wide acceptance of this integrated technology is left up to individual classroom teachers, creating a situation that leaves some students with greater opportunity to master technology depending upon individual staff preferences and technology-use comfort levels. School-wide, student computer stations in classrooms are scarce. The only way for students to have access to work stations during class time is for teachers to plan ahead and schedule their classes for the non-designated computer lab in the library. The self-study confirms the need for additional technology to enhance teaching and learning at AHS. The self-study survey showed that 57% of students indicates they use technology in classrooms, and 39% of parents feel their child has adequate access to technology in the classroom. Staff members and students interviewed concurred that there is a lack of technology access to support student learning. A coordinated technology integration plan, involving administrators and classroom teachers, technology support, library/media support services, and the system's technology department needs to be created and implemented to ensure that Agawam High School can work towards providing the "technologically advanced learning environment" described in the school's mission statement. (instruction standard committee, observations, self-study)

Agawam High School's professional development program is not guided by identified instructional needs and therefore provides few opportunities for teachers to develop and improve school-wide initiatives to improve instructional practice. Currently, there are three full professional development days for faculty members within the Agawam Public School System. One day is held before the opening of school, and two others take place during the school year. As listed in the professional development log, most of this time is spent providing training for

the school and staff members to comply with state, federal, and system-wide mandated programs, such as administrative computer software use, ELL training, restraint training, and inclusionary practices. Four professional half-days have been added to the school calendar during the 2008–2009 school year for principals' building-based priorities. The central office requires that all principals submit a professional day agenda at least a month in advance of these professional development opportunities. Since all but ninety-nine teachers in the school system have less than 15 years of teaching experience, an emphasis is being placed on additional professional development time. A professional development needs survey was completed on September 3, 2008, but this survey was limited to "technology use in the classroom" only. This survey data has not yet been analyzed by the central office. Even with the added time allotted this year for professional development, there is no formal process to allow collaboration and teacher input into the professional development topics to affect instructional practices. (central office staff, instruction standard committee, self-study)

The supervision and evaluation processes at Agawam High School are being used to improve instruction for the purposes of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs. All Agawam High School classroom teachers with less than three years experience are formally evaluated by administrators four times a year while classroom teachers with more than three years experience are formally evaluated by administrators two times every other year. Classroom teachers see the evaluation process as the only vehicle available to assess instructional practices formally. The Instruction Standard Self-Study Committee states that feedback from administrators during the evaluation process is extremely helpful in bringing about improvements to classroom instruction. Feedback from both administrators and teachers agrees that the evaluation process of four formal observations a year for non-professional status teachers and two formal observations every other year for professional status teachers provides input that assists teachers in improving instruction. ( instruction standard committee, self-study, teachers)

### **Commendations**

1. The Rosie Robotics Program that is a model of integration between science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)
2. The mathematics department has SMARTBoards and graphing calculators that ensure technology is embedded in their instruction
3. The supervision and evaluation process for professional and non-professional status classroom teachers
4. The required cooperative research project between the English Department and the library/media center

**Recommendations.**

1. Develop a comprehensive technology plan that provides ongoing maintenance of existing technology, proper staff training for technology use, and specific goals for student use of technology
2. Provide school-wide professional development opportunities on diverse instructional strategies.
3. Embed re-teaching activities into daily standards-based instruction to meet the individual needs of all students.
4. Provide formal means for students and parents to give feedback to teachers about instruction
5. Provide faculty members time for collegial discussion and reflection about instructional practices, analysis student work and assessment, and sharing “best practices”
6. Train all classroom teachers in technology integration to further expand the variety of instructional practices
7. Provide a formal means for faculty members to suggest necessary professional development opportunities
8. Use classroom evaluations as a tool to promote implementation of more diverse instructional strategies
9. Use data from student assessments to validate the need for the school and teachers to use more diverse instructional strategies

## **Standards for Accreditation Teaching and Learning Standards**

### **4. Assessment for 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 the curriculum and instruction to respond effectively to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates to the school community the progress of students in achieving the school's expectations for student learning and course-specific learning goals. Assessment results must be continually discussed to improve curriculum and instruction.

1. The school shall have a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission based on school-wide rubrics.
2. The school's professional staff shall use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations.
3. For each learning activity, teachers shall clarify to students the relevant school-wide academic expectations and course-specific learning goals that will be assessed.
4. Teachers shall base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics.
5. Teachers shall use varied assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.
6. Teachers shall meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments for the purposes of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies.
7. The school's professional development program shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.
8. The school's professional staff shall communicate:
  - individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families;
  - the school's progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community.

## CONCLUSIONS

Agawam High School has recently developed a process based on school-wide rubrics for assessing school-wide academic expectations and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission. In developing learning and assessment activities, teachers have begun to identify each of eleven possible areas of the academic expectations related to each assignment. The school-wide rubrics provide a level of flexibility that has allowed some teachers to integrate the school-wide rubrics into their own course and assignment rubrics. Although many rubrics make the expectations for student performance on assignments very clear, rubrics for some assignments were complicated or too general to be applied to the specific assignment. Student work samples show the use of rubrics for a wide variety of assignments including complex projects and presentations, writing assignments, homework, and class work. Departments have developed course-specific rubrics aligned with the school-wide rubrics and course syllabi include the mission statement. There is very limited use of technology-based assessments to inform student progress on achievement of the academic expectations. The increasing practice of assessing student work using performance criteria based on the academic expectations allows students to clearly understand the academic expectations on many assignments. (panel presentation, self-study, student work)

There are limited systemic means for faculty and staff members to use data to assess the success of the school in achieving the civic and social expectations. The school administration has begun to look at various longitudinal data sources to assess the impact of changes in policy. For example, the principal closely monitors average daily attendance in order to observe the impact of a newly adopted attendance policy. There are many school programs that provide community and school service opportunities consistent with the civic and social expectations. Attendance sheets for service clubs such as the National Honor Society, the Leo Club, student government, Future Teachers, Athletes in Motion, and the AHS Chief Program are maintained in the career center and provide a potential source of data. Violations of the school code of conduct and related disciplinary consequences are documented and kept on file by the administration. These statistics are reported to the superintendent and school committee on request and used by the school administration to evaluate student behavioral trends and discuss changes in policy. The absence of a formal vehicle to use these and other related data leaves the school missing valuable opportunities to identify the needs of the school and to celebrate the numerous successful programs related to the civic and social expectations. The school has both data and documentation and needs only to determine responsibility to begin crediting student efforts and informing the community of its efforts and successes. (self-study, school leadership team, panel presentation)

Teachers at Agawam High School are increasing the use of rubrics to clarify the specific learning goals for each learning activity. Classroom assessment of many

assignments is based on course-specific rubrics. According to the self-study survey, 89.5 % of teachers indicate that they use course-specific rubrics. Many teachers at Agawam have developed course-specific rubrics to grade routine assignments. Teachers and students report that most teachers use rubrics to assess performance-based activities that have traditionally been subjectively graded in the past such as posters, presentations, and multi-faceted projects. There are fewer classroom assessments that are based on the school-wide rubrics. Teacher use of school-wide rubrics in developing assessment tools for assignments is not consistent across departments. Some teachers find the school-wide rubrics to be helpful in developing assessment tools for students with diverse learning needs. Other teachers do not see meaningful ways to apply the school-wide rubric to the development of assessment tools for their courses. The self-study survey indicated that only 64.6% of teachers use school-wide rubrics. Some students indicated that rubrics are very frequently used to grade assignments but that the details are not always shared with students thus wasting the formative assessment value of the system. Students also felt that some rubrics are very complex, wordy, and difficult to interpret so the connection of the expectations with specific assignments was not clear. When shared with students in advance, the increased use of rubrics to assess a variety of assignments provides students with a clear set of expectations for their performance and a method of understanding where their work can be improved. (self-study, students, assessment standard committee)

Many teachers do not base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics. All students at Agawam High School are issued an agenda containing the code of conduct, the mission statement, and the academic expectations for student performance. Assessment modifications are communicated through IEP and 504 plans for individual students. All courses have well-developed syllabi. These documents provide an explanation of the grading requirements for each course. Each of the syllabi indicates that a substantial portion of the grade for each class (approx. 20%) is based on participation. The criteria listed for a student's participation grade are not related in any way to academic standards or the school's academic performance expectations. Further, there are few objective means to assess participation. The high level of subjectivity in grading students on participation, the lack of connection to academic standards and expectations, and the substantial weight that participation represents in a course grade provides a school-wide approach to assessment that promotes low levels of academic rigor and does not appropriately measure a student's mastery of the course content. (self-study, teachers, students)

Many teachers use varied assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time. Most teachers at Agawam High School use a variety of multi-faceted assessment methods such as projects, tests, quizzes, class discussions, some technology, notebook checks, presentations, and common department mid-term and final

exams. According to the self-study survey, over 90% of teachers use a variety of methods to assess student learning. The ongoing expansion of teacher rubrics allows teachers to assess elements of student growth that they could not do with traditional tests and quizzes alone. Students must also meet performance assessment criteria in order to graduate, including 24 graduation credits comprised of specific required courses and successful completion of the MCAS. The increasing variety of assessment techniques used by teachers to evaluate student growth provides students with all learning styles with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, skills, competencies, and growth over time. (student work, teachers, self-study)

Some teachers meet informally to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments for the purposes of revising the curriculum. There is no common planning time for teacher collaboration within or across disciplines, but many teachers initiate informal collaboration with their colleagues to discuss student performance. Department meetings are used for discussion and the collection of student work within grade or subject levels. Data from common course and department exams are discussed at department meetings to make adjustments in curriculum and coverage. The self-study survey indicated that 71.6% of teachers meet with colleagues to discuss and share student work. A recent revision to the curriculum was made in the history department to account for the upcoming MCAS requirement. There are now two years of U.S. History and one year of World History as opposed to two years of World History and one year of U.S. History. Math, English, science, technical education and social studies departments also meet to discuss data from MCAS exams. Department meetings and informal collaboration used to discuss student work and assessment data have resulted in frequent and productive adjustments to curriculum coverage, sequencing of content, and skill delivery. However, additional formal opportunities to meet and discuss teaching and learning would help to ensure that all teachers use available data to improve and diversify instructional strategies. (assessment standard committee, self-study, teachers)

The teachers at Agawam High School are offered some collaborative professional development opportunities to develop a broad range of student assessment strategies. Many teachers take advantage of professional opportunities geared toward assessment by filling out professional development forms and attending seminars and workshops during the school day. According to the principal, many teachers take advantage of these opportunities. In preparation for the accreditation, curriculum specialists attended workshops on the design of various rubrics with emphasis on the development of school-wide rubrics. These workshops provided the basis for professional development sessions held at the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year, resulting in the development of many excellent examples of rubrics. Professional days included a variety of assessment offerings such as Test Wiz Training, MCAS Alternative Assessment, State Art Education Curriculum Workshop, Multicultural Perspectives in Assessment Workshop, and the AP History Workshop. There

are also in house workshops that are developed and presented by AHS teachers for other faculty members. For future professional days, each department was asked to report what it wanted or needed, giving individual departments the opportunity to assess their own professional development needs and propose offerings, programs, or ideas to enhance student learning. Despite the variety of professional days offered to teachers, the self-study survey showed that only 44% of the staff believes they are provided opportunities to collaborate with other teachers. Continued professional development opportunities or a school-wide system such as critical friends groups (CFG) which allow Agawam High School teachers to collaborate on student assessment strategies will ensure an increase in the variety of assessment techniques used by faculty members to measure student progress. (panel presentation, administrators, teachers)

Agawam High School does not have a formal system to communicate individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families or the school's progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community. Because of the recent implementation of the school-wide rubrics and their varied use from one classroom to the next, AHS does not have a consistent evaluation method to report either individual student progress to parents or the school's progress as a whole. Currently, traditional progress reports and report cards are given to each student during each of the four marking periods, informing students and their families of their overall performance in each class but not their performance in regard to school-wide expectations. In addition, weekly progress reports are sometimes implemented for students who are struggling academically. Parents report satisfaction with the quality and frequency of communication regarding student academic progress, but they are not aware of the need to measure achievement of the school's stated academic expectations. The development of a formal process and delegation of responsibility to track individual and whole-school progress in achieving the stated academic expectations will ensure greater participation and understanding regarding the quality of education provided by Agawam High School. (self-study, teachers, parents)

### **Commendations**

1. The continued development of rubrics and scoring tools designed by faculty members for a variety of learning activities
2. Well-developed course syllabi that provide students and parents clarification of the expectations for each course
3. The effective use of common course exams to drive changes in curriculum
4. Increasing use of school-wide rubrics in developing course and assignment performance criteria

### **Recommendations**

1. Ensure that all teachers are consistently and regularly using the school-wide rubrics to assess student work

2. Ensure that teachers clarify to students how the academic expectations and accompanying school-wide rubrics are being used to assess their work
3. Embed technology assessment tools that will foster student growth
4. Develop and implement a formal process that will allow the school's professional staff to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations
5. Use data to improve instructional strategies
6. Ensure that all students are informed of assessment criteria in advance of learning activities
7. Ensure that students are encouraged to utilize higher levels of thinking in all classes and mastery of skills and content related to learning standards and the academic expectations
8. Implement fully the process to assess individual student and school progress in achieving the academic expectations based on the use of the school-wide rubrics
9. Implement fully the process to assess individual student and school progress in achieving the academic expectations based on the use of the school-wide rubrics

**COMMISSION ON  
PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**SUPPORT STANDARDS**

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**LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION**

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**SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

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**COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

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## Support Standards

### 5. Leadership and Organization

The way in which a school organizes learning for students, fosters leadership, and engages its members has a profound effect on teaching and learning. The professional culture of the school must be characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about decision-making and practices, which supports student learning and well-being.

1. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning.
3. Teachers as well as administrators other than the principal shall provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school.
4. The organization of the school and its educational programs 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, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
6. The schedule shall be driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and shall support the effective implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
7. Meaningful roles in the decision-making process shall be accorded to students, parents, and all members of the school staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables the teacher to meet the learning needs of individual students.
9. There shall be a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.
10. The professional staff shall collaborate within and across departments in support of learning for all students.
11. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.
12. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.
13. The climate of the school shall be safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.
14. The school board shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

## Conclusions

The school committee and superintendent ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning. The school committee members and the superintendent agree that the principal has greatly improved the climate of the school, and all parties voice confidence in the principal's ability to provide a safe, respectful environment for all students at Agawam High School. Teachers, students, and parents mention communication as a strength of this administrative team reflecting from the manner in which they make themselves available to parents, faculty and support staff members and students. All stakeholders agree that the administrators have made great strides in this area and that this change has fostered a positive and caring learning environment that allows faculty members to feel a high level of comfort in bringing forward new ideas and strategies. The principal also notes support for him in the level of decision-making authority he is given to guide the school in its mission and in meeting the school's stated expectations for student learning. There are clear expectations in the differing leadership roles among the superintendent, school committee members, and principal. These well-defined leadership roles will allow Agawam High School to continue to move forward in achieving its mission. (principal, school committee members, parents)

There have been three different principals at Agawam High School during the 2006-2007 school year, and these numerous transitions have had an impact on the vision, direction, and focus of teaching and student learning. The current principal is focused on making a positive change in teaching and learning and has instilled an atmosphere that is respectful and supportive. The administrators are in the process of gathering feedback and input from all of the stakeholders within the school community and working together with them on establishing a shared vision, direction, and focus for the student learning that will clearly define the school's priorities. The continued development of this vision and ongoing communication about the school's expectations for student learning will ensure a shared understanding within the school community as well as a sense of purpose. (shadowing students, school leadership team, teachers)

Teachers and administrators other than the principal provide leadership essential to the improvement of Agawam High School. Faculty and staff members contribute to an environment that supports the school's mission statement. Under the new principal, teachers feel they have a greater sense of autonomy and are better able to approach the principal with questions and concerns. The principal's council, comprised of faculty members elected by their peers, and the leadership team, comprised of the curriculum specialists offer formal opportunities for teachers to address school needs and stay current on initiatives. The principal's council meets with the principal on a monthly basis and the leadership team meets every other Thursday with the principal. Students report comfort in consulting teachers for guidance outside of class, and some take

advantage of after-school hours offered by the teachers. Many teachers offer their own time not just for extra academic help, but as advisors for various co-curricular activities. Continued shared leadership among teachers and administrators will allow Agawam High School to sustain its recent progress towards a common focus for student learning. (students, administration, teachers)

Since the recent leadership change at Agawam High School, there has been an increased sense of stability and a renewed focus on the promotion of the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning. The organization of Agawam High School promotes collaboration and communication towards a common vision. Administrators utilize the teacher evaluation process and frequent classroom walkthroughs to oversee the quality of teaching and student learning. Curriculum specialists also assist in the oversight of some departments, but their roles are not consistently defined across these disciplines. As a result of the absence of curriculum specialists in some areas, some teachers report that information is not disseminated to all departments consistently. Providing leadership for all departments will improve communication across disciplines and improve the school's ability to achieve its mission and help ensure that all students have an opportunity to meet expectations for student learning. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

Student grouping patterns do not foster heterogeneity. Rather than encouraging students to enroll in challenging courses, Agawam High School places students in courses at three different levels with a well-established hierarchy of learners and in the courses geared solely for students who have areas of academic challenge, students do not appear to be offered more than homework review, memorization, and old-fashioned rote learning. There is limited use of differentiated instruction. This enforced lack of challenge and engagement does not serve many students well. For a school that sends 90% of its graduates on to two and four-year colleges, more students should be encouraged to enroll in challenging courses that would improve college readiness. During the current school year, only 33% of the students are enrolled in honors or advanced placement (AP) classes. Once a student is placed within a level, it is difficult for them to enroll in a higher academic level in future years. There are substantial obstacles such as course prerequisites and school practices that inhibit students from moving from a lower level to a higher level. Admission to AP courses is based primarily on teacher recommendation. Students report difficulties enrolling in advanced placement, honors, and upper level courses because of scheduling constraints and barriers to enrollment. The current grouping practices at Agawam High School impede the academic growth of students and limit the opportunities for all students to achieve the school's mission or to challenge themselves if they choose to do so. (teachers, guidance counselors, students)

Many staff members feel that the Agawam High School schedule does not support the effective implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Teachers mention insufficient time for varied instruction, and they express a strong desire to review and modify the current schedule. The principal also designates evaluation of the current schedule as a priority. Teachers also voice a desire for common planning time to allow them time to collaborate on student work analysis on curriculum. There has also been a request for a homeroom period for announcements, student identification checks, and other miscellaneous tasks because these tasks currently take place during the first class period of each day and reduce instructional time for first period classes. Singleton courses with only one section also cause scheduling problems when students want to enroll in different classes that meet during the same period in the schedule. The partnership with a collaborative program that allows AHS students to go to a regional vocational/technical program for part of the school day seemingly limits the options of modification to the schedule. Knowing any change would come over a length of time, the administration is utilizing curriculum specialists to communicate with faculty members regarding the effect of potential changes in the schedule. A review and modification of the current schedule would improve the level of success in the implementing the mission statement as well as improving curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (students, teachers, administrators)

The principal has made a commitment to restore meaningful roles in decision-making to students, parents, and all members of the school staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership. He has engaged in a process of open communication through a school-wide decision-making process that reaches out to the stakeholders within the school community. The school leadership team that includes student representation has been developed to receive input from departments and the school council. There have been many informal meetings with various different student groups leading to the creation of the CHIEF program, a program that encourages and provides opportunities for school-based community service. The students, parents, and faculty members comment that they feel the principal and his administrative team are approachable and receptive to input. Because the principal has created an environment where input is encouraged and valued, many students, parents, teachers, and support staff confirm that they feel an increased sense of ownership for the success of their school. (self-study survey, school committee, parents)

Most teachers have a student load that enables them to meet the learning needs of individual students. Teacher to student ratio is misleading, however. Although the average class size is stated to be 18, some teachers report that there are still many classes that are near or above 30 students. Some of these classes are lacking enough books as well as desks. Some students comment on the larger class sizes during their freshman and sophomore years. Although teachers strive to reach students' needs, many feel that large class sizes have a direct negative impact on the personalization of instruction, the type of learning activities used,

and the adequacy of feedback needed to improve student learning. Many students need to meet with teachers after school hours to receive personalized attention. A review of the enrollments across all disciplines and levels and an attempt by the scheduling personnel to be equitable to both students and teachers will ensure the ability of teachers to meet the learning needs of all students. Thus, the new administration and advisors have many elements of school policy and practice to discuss and research for best practices: student grouping, the school schedule, and teacher loads. (self-study, observations, teachers)

Agawam High School does not have a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning. Upon entrance to Agawam High School, freshmen are given an orientation by student leaders, but, the program does not continue past the first few weeks of school. Although there is no ongoing mentor program for students, students state they have teachers they can go to after school for extra help and personal support. The spring 2008 Youth Risk Behavior Survey states 72% of the 795 students surveyed says they have at least one teacher to talk to with problems. Students also report a comfort level in approaching administrators with questions and concerns. However, without a formal program, in light of the more than one quarter of students who have no one to turn to, there is no assurance that all students will receive the necessary support for the successful achievement of school-wide expectations. Thus, the school needs a formal advisory or mentoring program to serve all students. (students, panel presentation, self-study survey)

The professional staff collaborates to varying degrees within departments in support of learning for all students but there is virtually no collaboration among teachers across departments at Agawam High School. Due to the lack of common planning during the school day, the only collaboration that takes place within the individual departments occurs on an informal, unscheduled basis that may not include all department members. Teachers also comment that interdisciplinary collaboration is extremely rare even informally. Most departments conduct monthly meetings to discuss curriculum and school policies and to analyze assessment results but few departments encourage teachers to share best practices during these meetings. The introduction of formal designated common planning time as well as some support for teachers in using collaborative time effectively to share best practices would allow a greater degree of support for the learning of all students. (teachers, students, self-study)

The involvement of all school staff members in promoting the well-being and learning of students is varied. Students say they feel most faculty members and staff members are concerned with their well-being. Although the extent of teacher involvement in student learning varies, parents praise the level of respect

and concern teachers show toward students. The distribution of a mid-term progress report that is distributed to all students supports communication regarding the well-being and academic progress of all students. Previous mid-term progress reports were sent home only for students in danger of failing. Parents and students also note that many teachers attend after-school events to support their students. A continued student-centered approach by all staff members will increase the well-being and the quality of learning at Agawam High School. (parents, central office staff, students)

Student success is routinely acknowledged and displayed at Agawam High School. Throughout the Agawam High School student work is displayed and achievements are highlighted on bulletin boards and in glass cases. College acceptance announcements and articles from area newspapers that highlight the high school are also displayed in the career center. The principal ensures the that community is aware of student accomplishments by communicating frequently with area newspapers. In addition, there are three honors societies that celebrate academic achievement. Beyond the common areas of the building, it is also commonplace for teachers to have work displayed in their classrooms. The Renaissance Program, an incentive-based reward program that celebrates responsible behavior as well as academic achievement also promotes student success. In addition, there is an awards/scholarship night at the end of the year that recognizes the accomplishments of some members of the senior class. The continued recognition of student achievement throughout the high school will maintain the strong sense of pride at Agawam High School. (facility tour, observations, self-study)

The climate of the school is safe, positive, respectful, and supportive and a sense of pride and ownership is evident. Teachers report that the formation of an “intervention team” has contributed to the establishment of a safer learning environment. Over the last few years, faculty and students have been required to wear an identification badge and all visitors have had to sign in at the main office. According to the self-study survey, most students and faculty members feel safe at school, and most parents surveyed trust their child is safe at school. Many faculty members, students, and parents also agree that there is a positive climate within the school. Parents report that they feel there is a high level of respect shown by teachers to the students at Agawam High. However, the self-study survey completed in 2007 revealed that only 63.5% of students believe their teachers respect them. Even though the current leadership team has made great strides in improving the climate of the school, the survey statistics are concerning. Despite the fact that many students and staff members report they feel safe in the building, there is a need to ensure that more students agree that there is a positive respectful relationship between teachers and students. (parents, teachers, self-study survey)

The Agawam School Committee has adopted the high school’s mission and expectations for student learning and has supported the administration, faculty,

and support staff in improving student learning. All parties agree that the principal is given the decision-making authority to guide the school in its mission and meeting the school's stated expectations for student learning. There are clear expectations of leadership roles among the superintendent, school committee members, and principal. These well-defined leadership roles allow Agawam High School to move forward in achieving its mission. (self-study survey, school committee members, teachers)

### **Commendations**

1. The new principal's positive leadership role in the daily life of the school
2. The principal's increased focus on the school's mission and expectations for student learning
3. The administration's collaborative relationship with the school committee and superintendent
4. The school committee's support of the school's mission and expectations for student learning
5. An increasing positive school culture that instills a sense of pride and honors the accomplishments of students
6. Dedicated administrative team that addresses school safety issues

### **Recommendations**

1. Design and implement a daily schedule that is more supportive of the school's mission and expectations for student learning
2. Provide formal time for teachers to work on curriculum development, instructional strategies and assessment emphasizing best practice strategies
3. Provide curriculum specialists or leadership for all disciplines to provide school-wide input into ongoing school improvement efforts
4. Review educational studies on the impact of grouping practices on student performance as well as 'best instructional practices' to increase the heterogeneity of enrollments in academic course offerings without lowering expectations
5. Assess the student enrollments in high and low level courses with particular attention to both gender and socio-economic demographics and develop and implement a plan to address the issue of inequitable opportunities for learning
6. Focus significant attention and time to resolving concerns related to mutual respect between teachers and students identified in the 2007 self-study survey
7. Address the range of class size
8. Provide sufficient classroom furniture for all students in all classes
9. Provide an adult member of the school community to personalize each student's educational experience

## **Support Standards**

### **6. School Resources for Learning**

Student learning and well-being are 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 well-being and to support the school's mission and expectations.

#### **All Student Support Services**

1. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.
3. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and by utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
3. All student support services shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.
4. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs.
6. Student records, including health and immunization records, shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.
7. There shall be sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services.

#### **Guidance Services**

8. The school shall provide a full range of comprehensive guidance services, including:
  - individual and group meetings with counseling personnel;

- personal, career, and college counseling;
- student course selection assistance;
- collaborative outreach to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers;
- appropriate support in the delivery of special education services for students.

### **Health Services**

9. The school's health services shall provide:
- preventive health services and direct intervention services;
  - appropriate referrals;
  - mandated services;
  - emergency response mechanisms;
  - ongoing student health assessments

### **Library Information Services**

10. The library/information services program and materials shall be fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program.
11. Library/information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation.
12. A wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population shall be available to students and faculty and utilized to improve teaching and learning.
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. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to use various school and community information resources and technologies.
15. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet.

## **Special Education Services**

16. The school shall provide special education services related to the identification, monitoring, and referral of students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Student support services have been developed in response to students' needs and the goals expressed in the school's mission and expectations for student learning. The services include a guidance counseling program, various health services, a library with a wide range of media services, and a special education program. Due to the loss of study halls throughout the school day, guidance counselors are challenged to develop new plans to meet with students on an individual and a group basis as well as teaching some classes. However, the counseling department has recently developed and started to implement a comprehensive school counseling curriculum. In order to provide a full range of these services, building administrators and guidance will need to develop additional strategies within the current schedule. (self-study, students, observations, counselors)

The needs of students vary, and the school allocates some programs and services tailored to enable students to achieve the academic expectations for student learning as delineated in the mission statement. The school offers courses at various levels of difficulty, and students are moved into these levels as a result of the recommendation of their teachers. Students can move to higher level classes with a parent signature, but few students take this route. Students can take advanced placement, honors, level three college preparatory courses, inclusion classes, or be part of language-based classes. Students report that they frequently can not access the elective courses they have chosen because of schedule conflicts. With greater than fifteen percent of the faculty sharing classrooms, the library becomes an important technological classroom. The library facilities include mobile laptop carts with up to sixty wireless laptops that are available for classroom use. However, these educational tools are underutilized as a result of inadequate access due to lack of wireless connections in the English and history wings. Some staff members report frustration regarding the following deficiencies: the redesign of the nurse's office to meet ADA requirements requires coordination between the school and the town health department that has not been accomplished; the coordination of the resources in the library requires the cooperation of the district information technology department (IT ) to deliver the service. The assurance of timely solutions to current and future problems in the area of resources and services that impact students will ensure an environment where services can be delivered and all students can experience success. (self-study, support personnel, teachers)

Despite problems with some of the physical work space for school support staff, the school's support personnel work cooperatively with other faculty members in addressing academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students. The librarian reaches out to staff members to ensure access to the library which has extraordinary resources encompassing various learning areas that include a SMARTBoard classroom and learning areas, and laptop carts. However, a problem that sometimes impacts this area is the lack of cooperative interaction with the district technology group. There is also a teacher resource room equipped with modern technology to incorporate various learning styles. Next to this area is a relaxed setting with comfortable seating for students to concentrate and read. The nursing staff's designated space, however, is inconsistent with the entire high school. The nurses report to and are part of the town of Agawam's Health Department and the nurse's office in the high school is neither adequate nor conducive to modern practices of the nursing staff in a present day high school. There is no area for confidential conversations with students or parents; there is no sterile triage area for more serious student medical treatment; and there are no private areas for students to wait for treatment or to be treated. The ongoing collaborative efforts of all stakeholders are necessary to enable AHS School Support personnel to fully meet the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students. (school leadership team, teachers, school resources standard committee)

Student support services personnel are highly credentialed and professionally recognized. Guidance counselors, adjustment counselors, nurses, and librarians are all recognized by their professional associations and licensed and certified in appropriate areas. The librarian is evaluated through the district's formal evaluation process. Each guidance counselor is evaluated individually every two years per contract with the Agawam Education Association. Special education teachers are observed and evaluated by special and general education administrators. All staff members are evaluated and held in compliance supporting the improvement of student learning. (self-study, support services personnel, school committee members)

There is a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs. Parents give positive feedback regarding ConnectEd, the telephone information system from the school. They receive more specific information about their children from the student information software that tracks student grades and attendance records. The current system allows communications between parents and teachers through the school's e-mail system. Feedback from parents and students shows that the evening hours and programs presented by the guidance department provide useful information. A senior bulletin newsletter is also distributed by the guidance department every Monday with pertinent information for students. The continued use of an array of methods to communicate

important information from AHS will allow all stakeholders to stay appropriately informed. (self-study, school leadership team, parents)

Some student records, including health and immunization records, are not maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law. Despite the appearance of organized files, some personnel have noted shortcomings with the present filing accommodations. Currently, the nursing staff does not have access to a digital database of student records that allows for vital student information to be retrieved expeditiously. In order to track down students during class time, the nursing staff has to rely on date sensitive paper copies of student schedules. There is discussion about giving the nurses access to the same on-line student information utilized by the guidance staff. In addition, there are file cabinets in the guidance department where security has been questioned. Thus, storage of the cumulative student files and health records is not up to modern standards of record-keeping regarding both security and fireproof storage. Modern record keeping procedures consistent with federal and state law will allow AHS to provide both staff and students with expected levels of security in regards to student records. (self-study, guidance counselors, nurses)

Some student support services areas have sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective services. The library is staffed by a certified professional library specialist, one secretary, and one paraprofessional. The guidance department currently has four certified/licensed counselors who deal with student schedules, college and career choices, and any other issues that arise. There are three certified/licensed school adjustment counselors who work with those students who are either out-placed, have emotional and/or substance abuse issues, attend vocational programs, or attend the alternative classes within the high school. There is one additional certified/licensed counselor who serves as department chairperson but carries no caseload. In addition, the guidance department does not meet the Commission for Public Secondary Schools maximum ratio of counselors to students (300:1). All members of the special education department are certified in special education, and the department is also trying to ensure that staff members are also certified in specific subject areas in which they are inclusion teachers. All support service areas must have sufficient, licensed personnel in order to provide adequate support for all students. (self-study, counselors, meetings administrators)

The guidance department provides a full range of comprehensive services to assist students. They provide academic counseling including course selection and post high school planning in meeting the needs of students throughout their high school career. Counselors meet with each student individually, but this is often difficult because students have little free time during the school day. In order for counselors to meet with students, the meeting must take place before or after school or during class time. Some students interviewed noted trouble accessing guidance staff members in support of the college application process. An adjustment counselor runs the following counseling groups – anger

management, dialectical behavior therapy, non-user support group, substance abuse education, and a grief group. Counselors make referrals to outside agencies for those students needing additional support services. In addition, the coordination of required services is managed adequately in the special education department. The ongoing review of guidance services is necessary to ensure that students are receiving the assistance necessary for success both during and after high school. (self-study, counselors, administrators)

The school's health services department strives to make appropriate health services available to all students. Prevention and intervention services are limited by the inadequate space allocated to the nurse's office. Pamphlets on sensitive topics are reviewed and made available to age appropriate students. Discussion of information is limited to public areas, providing no privacy for telephone and in-person conversations with students and parents. The emergency response plan includes medical supplies for individual students, a list of critical students with medical needs, and a walkie-talkie for communication. For daily medical accommodations, individual student medical information is shared with school staff and/or others who may be involved in the student's care (at or in-transit to or from school): teachers, administrators, lunchroom personnel, bus drivers and monitors, and other school staff members, to better serve the needs of the student. The staff, consisting of two nurses, is highly qualified and certified in the proper areas to meet the requirements of the position. However there are concerns about the fact that they sometimes must provide medical care on an office desk or within the lone examination room with other students in the same room separated by a curtain. The reporting and structure of the nurse support services sometimes causes problems because the nurses report to the town health department. This arrangement has hindered efforts to modify or redesign the nurse's office into a present day health service within the school. Better coordination between the town and school will assure a higher quality of health services for the students and staff at Agawam High School. (self-study, nurses, school leadership team)

The library media program and materials are partially integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program. This initiative has been ongoing and developed according to the Massachusetts School Library Association's standards. There is a continuous phase-in of skills. The library allows teachers the chance to supplement their curriculum by utilizing library offerings with students, but some teachers and some departments make better use of this resource. One problem is the fact that the library has become a high tech alternative to low tech classrooms. The accidental outcome of this has been that the librarian spends a great deal of her time training faculty members in the use and benefits of the electronic media. Ensuring more equitable access to the resources in the library will ensure that all curricular areas are integrated. (self-study, librarians, support personnel)

Library services personnel are knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation. The librarian is given advance notice of class needs for a library visit. She assigns a class an area appropriate to the request, provides resources, and assigns personnel for technical support. The librarian serves on the leadership team and the professional development committee. She works with curriculum specialists in several academic departments to develop curricula that will integrate library skills with various assignments. The school benefits from the library services program and its personnel. (self-study, librarians, teacher interviews)

The library services program provides a wide range of materials, technology, and information resources available in a variety of formats. The library's print collection supports all areas of the curriculum and showcases books in a display for students that is effective to introduce topics. In addition, this showcase of books lures students by attracting readers and non-readers. Electronic databases connect student to the outside world, giving them access to information. The librarian manages a website so students, faculty members, and parents can access resources available from their homes. The print collection is regularly weeded to ensure the availability of relevant resources within the school curriculum. The library at Agawam High School is a high tech facility with an appropriate blend of print and non-print resources, electronic hardware, and computer labs. (self-study, observations, librarians)

Students, faculty, and support staff members have regular access to the library. The library has a range of hours, before, during, and after school daily until 3:00pm. Most students access the library through classroom assignments. Students report that they understand the process of finding materials. Library use and instructional collaboration are extensively documented to track students' educational experiences. There is sufficient space and technology available to accommodate simultaneous use of the library by groups and by individuals. (self-study, observations, librarians)

The library services program encourages students and faculty members to use a variety of school and community information resources and technology. The library offers online subscription databases in addition to the state-provided electronic resources (Massachusetts Library Consortium). The subscription cost for the databases is an annual fee of eight thousand dollars. These include ABC, CLIO, The Facts on File, Today's Science, Science Online, Bloom's Literary Reference Online, and Ebsco. Although these databases are available, many faculty members do not take advantage of the tremendous resources at their fingertips. (self-study, librarians, teachers)

The library has various policies that guide the use of resources, technologies, and the Internet. These include copyright laws and policies such as Agawam Public School Policy on Library Materials Withdrawal, Library Materials Selection and Adoption, Reconsideration of Instructional Material, and Agawam High

School Library Collection Plan. The library materials development process includes the use of standardized professional selection tools which include School Library Journal, Booklist, Library Journal, Books for Senior High School and College Bound Seniors, Fiction Collection, and other specialized reference collection books when the budget provides. The teachers, students, and specialists are asked for their input as well. There is also an acceptable use policy in place for technology. The faculty is required to review the administrative procedures in the acceptable Internet use policy and sign the employee acceptable use agreement. In addition, staff members must review and be familiar with the AHS Student Individual Responsibility Policy as outlined in the AHS Acceptable Internet Use Policy. Compliance with policies that govern library services is in place. (self-study, librarian, library documentation)

A full range of special education services is provided to meet the needs of students. Most students who require special education services come to the high school already identified as students with an individualized education plan (I.E.P.) or '504' Accommodations. When there are concerns regarding the behavior or academic achievement of a regular education student, a pre-referral to the instructional support team (IST) can be initiated by teachers, parents, or other school personnel. Some sort of academic or behavioral intervention would be put in place and evaluated before any decision to refer to special education would take place. There are three self-contained classrooms, one for students with autism, one for students needing basic lifeskills training, and one for behavioral needs. Other students with special education needs attend regular education classes, sometimes with co-teachers and/or paraprofessionals for student assistance. In addition, students in the AHS Alternative Learning Program (ALP) have current IEPs or '504' plans. The final report of the coordinated program review (January 23, 2007) rated all aspects of the identification, implementation of special education services, and monitoring of student progress as commendable. (self-study, meeting with teachers, meeting with support personnel)

## **Commendations**

1. The availability of online databases which provide current information from e-books and on-line information services in the library/media center
2. The guidance staff evening programs and hours for students and parents
3. The user-friendly, well-equipped library
4. The print collections support all curriculum areas
5. The library/media center's website that supports students' electronic access during non-school hours
6. The development and implementation of a comprehensive school guidance curriculum

## **Recommendations**

1. Comply with the commission's suggested 300:1 ratio of counselor to students
2. Continue to Write and implement a comprehensive school counseling guidance curriculum
3. Provide guidance office with adequate space to maintain privacy and confidentiality
4. Provide the nurse's office with appropriate record-keeping resources to effectively serve student and staff needs
5. Increase student access to library services
6. Address inadequacies of the school health office space

## **Standards for Accreditation Support Standards**

### **7. 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 parents and families as partners in each student's education and shall 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 and plant shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.
  4. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and shall be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
  5. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.
  6. A planned and adequately funded program of building and site management shall ensure the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant.
  7. There shall be ongoing planning to address future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility, and technology needs as well as capital improvements.
  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.
7. Faculty and building administrators shall have active involvement in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation.

## Conclusions

The school recognizes the importance of a close partnership with parents and families, and AHS is working to actively engage all parties in a more collaborative community of learning. Communication between school and parents is enhanced by the use of Connect-Ed, a program that allows the administration to call each household with important information from the school. Teachers send home mid-quarter reports to all students, and weekly reports are sent home as requested. There are two parent conference days during the school year as well as a "Back to School Night" in the fall. In addition, guidance counselors hold evening hours every month to meet with parents. While there is a school website, few faculty members have their own websites. There is a core of energetic, dedicated parents who are running the parent teacher student organization (PTSO), but attendance at meetings is not large. Teachers are described by parents as being "accessible." Consequently, communication between the school and parents is enabling a growing sense of collaboration among the stakeholders in education at Agawam High School. (parents, teachers, self-study)

The school fosters productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning. During the 2006-2007 school year, AHS was able to send 94 students out on job shadowing opportunities through its career center which is part of the Business Department. Students were able to learn first-hand at local job sites about careers such as a police detective, chef, zoologist, aeronautical engineer, interior decorator, and cosmetologist. In addition, 160 students participated in internships at jobs including *The Republican* newspaper, Springfield Falcons Hockey Organization, and Healthtrax Fitness and Wellness. Many students also chose to intern with teachers at AHS and at other Agawam schools. Not only is this a benefit to the students, helping them learn about a career in teaching, it also helps with organizational, time management, and professional skills. Junior Achievement is an active participant in the school store classroom and the Agawam Chamber of Commerce is an active participant in entrepreneurial courses and career center programs. A job board is also maintained through the career center, listing employment opportunities for students that allows local businesses to advertise positions throughout the year. The career center offers student participation in Tech Prep, Bay State Medical Educational Partnership, Mercy Hospital Community Service Program, Life Science Career Development, Engineering Projects in Community Service, and Virtual High School. These programs are actively promoted by the career center and have good participation. The AHS Counseling Center is in regular contact with representatives from private and public colleges, community colleges, state universities, and military branches. Representatives are hosted at the high school each year to meet with students to discuss college/university programs, admissions requirements, and eligibility criteria. As a result of the various partnerships that AHS has built both locally and regionally, students have numerous opportunities to achieve the school's mission. (community resources for learning subcommittee, guidance counselors, students)

The school site is sufficient to support all aspects of the educational program and to support services for student learning. However, the school plant is not adequate to support either one. Problems with the school plant can be divided into two categories: space needs and safety problems. The self-study is justifiably critical of the inadequate space and the needs of the school. Classroom space is limited and there are not enough classrooms to support program needs. Teachers spoke of the need for dedicated classrooms for every teacher so no teachers have to “travel”. The visiting team noted the space taken up by town offices and suggested that the necessary rooms could be gained by reconfiguring these spaces. The mayor and the female students both mentioned the lack of privacy in the nurse’s office and the substandard bathroom facilities. Other space issues are also clearly outlined in the self-study, including replacement or improvement of a substandard gym and locker room facility, include the need for parent/teacher meeting rooms and for secure storage facilities. The older classrooms are small (768 square feet), filled with 30 student desks and two teacher desks, offering little room for teachers to move around the classroom and only limited access to board space. The newer classrooms are roomier (1,064 square feet). Negotiating the school can also be problematic for students as bottlenecks often exist at the intersection of the old and new parts of the school, and with a four-minute passing time, students are often late to class. The first-listed critical need of the self-study was “develop a plan to eliminate the deterioration of the physical plant.” Indeed, there are numerous specific needs identified in the self-study that fall under the category of maintenance needs that must be addressed. These run the gamut from the need for room keys to the lack of white boards to problems with conditions in the bathrooms. Some of these needs are room- specific while others are much more general. On the positive side, the level of cleanliness of the hallways is exemplary. The building is maintained by the town’s maintenance department, and this arrangement has some faculty members concerned about the efficiency of such a practice. The athletic director was most complimentary about the work of building maintenance and its ability to reconfigure of school spaces during the summer. During the self-study a CD was produced identifying all of these issues which were confirmed by the visiting committee during tours of the facility, student shadowing, and classroom observations. (panel presentation, parents, teachers)

The physical plant is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); there are Title IX concerns in the athletic facilities; and, there are important safety concerns. During the 2006-2007 school year, Agawam High School conducted an audit to determine compliance with the ADA. Despite this audit, there are still a number of ongoing issues with ADA compliance. Most bathrooms are not handicapped accessible, and even in bathrooms that are designed for the handicapped, there is not enough transfer room or ease of access. Other problems in the bathrooms include lack of safety pull-chains and uncovered hot water feeds under the sinks. The ramps in the math area and the auditorium are steeper than code, and there is no push button for opening

exterior doors, and wheelchair-bound students who gesture for help cannot be seen from the school because the glass pane in the door is too high. The office counter is too high as well. In the cafeteria, a person in a wheelchair cannot make a continuous trip through the lunch line and must back up through the line after they get their food. The other cafeteria line turns too sharply for wheelchair access. In addition, not all interior rooms have Braille numbering. There is a Coordinated Program Review “Checklist for existing facilities” in the files which was conducted by the director of building maintenance that also mentions some problems with signage, accessibility, and usability of rest rooms that need to be remediated. There also appear to be Title IX violations in the athletic locker rooms. First, the boys have a team room while the girls do not and, second, the boys have a shower facility that is separate from the locker room while the size of the girls’ locker room has less usable space because the center of the girls’ locker room is filled with unusable shower stalls. Other violations include the fact that the girls only have one toilet (the boys have two) and that the girls’ lockers are smaller than the boys’. There are also safety issues that are of concern. Outdoor issues focus on the inadequacies of the stadium – especially the unsafe bleachers and barbed wire hanging from the fence surrounding the stadium. Locker room safety issues include lack of privacy, poor heating, water leaks, holes in the wall, exposed pipes, and lights without covers. There are electrical hazards noted as well with exposed wires, uncovered electrical outlets, and the use of multiple extension cords and socket multipliers. HVAC issues that need to be addressed include inconsistent heating from room to room and air circulation problems resulting in the build up of chalk dust in classrooms and mold in bathrooms and some ceiling tiles in classrooms. Consequently, the ADA compliance issues must be addressed immediately and the Title IX and other concerns need to be addressed as soon as possible to ensure that AHS will be a safe, clean, and healthy school for all students. (teachers, self-study, students)

There is no school-wide approach to equipment acquisition, maintenance, oversight, or replacement. Departments handle these responsibilities individually. Departmental liaisons are consulted when the budget is created, and adequate resources are reported by most departments. There seem to be inequities in funding beyond what might be expected for inherently differing needs of departments, however. The combined FY 07, FY 08, and projected FY 09 budgets illustrate this discrepancy with totals as follows: English -\$13,800, math-\$36,905, science-\$75,645, social studies - \$20,990, and world language-\$57,350. Specifically cited departmental needs found in the self-study include inadequate print/technology delivery resources for the library, the need for more computers in all departments, the need for more SMARTBoards, the need for more materials in Art, and need for storage spaces in all areas. The self-study survey also indicates that fewer than half of the teachers (43.6%) feels that they have “sufficient access to technological resources.” Maintenance of computers is also a problem with teachers reporting non-functioning computers in computer labs and an insufficient number of computers for each student in technology classes. A school-wide approach with greater input from all staff members

regarding equipment needs would help assure a more equitable distribution of resources at AHS. (school resources standard committee, self-study, teachers)

Due to the number of facility issues at AHS that have gone unaddressed over years, it is clear that the AHS budget is inadequate. Funding for AHS comes from a variety of sources. While the budget is funded primarily through the tax base, other revenue sources include school choice money, grants obtained by individual departments, donations, and fundraisers. The budget for the district has increased from FY 06 through FY 09 by 14.31%. Through this funding process, AHS has increased its technology in addition to providing the basic funding for all school programs. The support of the community for building the new trainer's room through the support of a golf tournament fundraiser is an example of town support and is laudable but points to a lack of funding through the regular budgetary process. Consequently, assurances need to be made that priority budget areas are not dependent upon the assistance of grants, school choice funds, and the donations of a limited number of people. (school resources standard committee, self-study, teachers)

Despite some perceived inequities in funding, most faculty members feel that the budgeting process is fair. The budgetary process includes input from curriculum specialists, the audio-visual aide, and the librarian. Because needs and goals are discussed within each department, many voices are heard before the budget is finalized. There also appears to be an extra-budgetary avenue to funding larger than normal expenses through the use of school choice money. However, not all departments are offered this money, leading some staff members to feel as if inequitable textbook replacement opportunities favor certain departments. Overall, the faculty involvement in the budgetary process is considered a critical strength by the faculty. Because budgets are increased based on a percentage of the previous year's budget, it is imperative to ensure that input from all staff members continues to be sought and evaluated and that the budget represents the real needs of the school without extra-budget expectations. (school leadership team, self-study, teachers)

### **Commendations**

1. The recognition by the school of the importance of a close partnership with parents and families
2. The level of communication between the school and parents which fosters a growing sense of collaboration among the stakeholders in education at Agawam High School
3. The reconfigured spaces that meet the changing needs of the school
4. Cleanliness of the hallways and common areas
5. The career center programs that expand opportunities for students to explore career paths

6. The numerous formal partnerships with businesses, community service agencies, and local colleges which provide extended learning opportunities for students

## **Recommendations**

1. Immediately comply with all ADA requirements
2. Immediately comply with all Title IX requirements
3. Address all safety and HVAC concerns
4. Ensure that the building of the budget is an open process so that all parties can see the differing needs of each department
5. Expand technological resources in the building in order to meet the school's stated mission
6. Ensure that there are sufficient computers for students in computer-based technology classes
7. Reexamine the relationship between town services and school services to ensure a higher level of communication on priority needs
8. Develop a tracking system so that maintenance issues are resolved in a timely manner
9. Expand the nurses' area to allow for privacy and comfortable handling of medical needs
10. Expand the counseling areas to allow adequate space that will help eliminate confidentiality issues
11. Address inconsistent building temperature

## **FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES**

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

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

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

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring the principals of member schools to report to the Commission, within sixty (60) days of occurrence, any substantive change that negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact that the change has had on the school's ability to meeting CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two- and Five-year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report. Each member school is required to submit an Annual Report form to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

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

In closing, the members of the Agawam High School Visiting Team wishes to express their appreciation to the entire school staff, students, and community of Agawam, Massachusetts for the hospitality that was extended to the team during its visit to the school. The team found all members of the school community welcoming and eager to participate in the work of the visiting team and unified by their common goal to improve Agawam High School.

## **Appendix A**

### ***ROSTER OF TEAM MEMBERS***

Brian Beck (Asst. Chair)  
MohawkTrail Regional High School  
Shelburne Falls, MA

Peter Breen  
Hoosac Valley High School  
Cheshire, MA

Mr. Rob Brown-Lavoie  
Ayer High School  
Ayer, MA

Raisa Bublick  
Rocky Hill High School  
Rocky Hill, CT

Ms. Paula Chapin  
Palmer High School  
Palmer, MA

Mr. Robert Furey, Jr.  
Concord Carlisle Regional High School  
Concord, MA

Megan Sudak  
Beverly High School  
Beverly, MA

Jacqueline Gange  
Belmont High School  
Belmont, MA

Patrick Larkin (Chair)  
Burlington High School  
Burlington, MA

Colleen Love  
Newington High School  
Newington, CT

Richard Masciarelli  
Fitchburg High School  
Fitchburg, MA

James Marzec  
Hopkinton High School  
Hopkinton, MA

Sean Gallagher  
Beverly High School  
Beverly, MA

Jennifer Lofberg  
Marlborough High School  
Marlborough, MA

