

**NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
100 WALNUT STREET
NEWTON, MA 02460**

MEMORANDUM

TO: Newton School Committee

FROM: David Fleishman
Superintendent of Schools

DATE: June 6, 2012

RE: End of Year Highlights of Systemwide Goals

While we have many system goals, the items discussed in this memo received a significant amount of attention over the course of the school year. A majority of these goals will continue into the next school year. Please note that we do not expect to add many new goals for next year due to the effort required to accomplish our current initiatives and the work involved in implementing the new educator evaluation system.

EDUCATIONAL

Given the FY12 budget reductions, the year was not a time in which we added new programs or major new initiatives. Instead, our challenge was to keep the district's instructional focus while not losing ground. It is a tribute to the teachers and administrators that we were able to have a successful year with diminished resources.

Below are some areas that are worthy of mentioning.

1. Student Services

Over the course of the year, the administration carefully reviewed trend data, the Special Education Review, recommendations of consultants and the input of parents to refine and develop new programs and services. The start of a restructuring process at Newton South got off to a promising start and this work will continue into 2012-2013. Co-taught classrooms were effectively expanded during this year and will be increased next year to include 12 elementary schools. We also hired a staff member to analyze the complex web of special education finances, which has already proven to be useful.

Over the summer, there will be a retreat with all Central Staff, principals and special education administrators to determine priorities for the next few years in the area of special education. Among the topics to be addressed will be inclusion and the identification of students eligible for special education services.

2. Student Intervention Strategies

This past year, schools throughout Newton have placed an even stronger emphasis on student achievement through the Tiered Instruction Initiative. Principals are creating schedules that allow for planned intervention blocks during the school day to provide targeted, focused instruction for students in small groups identified by similar need or interest. The groups are determined through formative assessments by the grade level team, literacy specialist, math coach, and other school support staff who collaborate and review student work in Professional Learning Communities (PLC's). The intent is to provide regular education intervention and support, reducing the number of referrals to special education, while offering dedicated enrichment for those students who have demonstrated mastery.

Next year, there will be an even greater emphasis on regular education interventions. There will be an increase in elementary intervention aides that will be distributed by student need and school size. At the middle school level, reading support will be added for 6th grade regular education students, whose literacy skills need improvement. Both high schools will also expand their support of tiered instruction and interventions.

3. Beginning of Common Core Implementation

The implementation of the new Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and math is a major focus in the district. This year, new math units provided K-8 students with greater opportunities to explore topics in-depth while working in a collaborative manner.

Earlier in the year, School Committee members heard a presentation from the K-8 Social Studies coordinator regarding the increased emphasis on literacy skills in social studies, which is consistent with the common core. Over the summer and during the course of next year, new units in ELA that reflect the goals of the Common Core Standards will be implemented. The high school department heads will be working with their faculty to revise their curriculum to align with the Common Core.

4. Continued Focus on Collaboration

Developing and supporting educator collaboration continues to be a priority at all levels, whether it is sharing effective instructional practices or the analysis of data on a variety of student learning measures. Course specific collaborative teams have expanded at the high schools to both compare data and share best practices. The grade level departments at the middle schools are engaging in this work as well. Next year, there will be a greater emphasis on developing common assessment in those areas where they do not currently exist.

The middle schools have successfully worked together on the "Making Thinking Visible" initiative. They have introduced common learning strategies in order to make learning objectives and results more explicit. This focus on thinking routines explicitly aims to deepen understanding and nurture critical and creative thinking. Next year, the

elementary schools are scheduled to follow-up in this area. The high schools have also expressed an interest in working on this important topic.

The Instructional Rounds for administrators was expanded this year and has proven to be an effective vehicle to both focus on instructional practices and work with faculties on developing a common focus for their improvement efforts.

5. Technology Integration

During FY12, the Technology Department assessed the state of technology in all classrooms and focused on improving and equalizing assets to more robust digital learning tools in all classrooms. In addition, an updated technology plan was completed, which outlines priorities for the next few years. Next year there will be a technology standard that all classrooms will meet and they will be equipped with a projection and document camera.

An important goal for FY13 will be to maintain and improve the network infrastructure of both the district-wide and local area networks, improve access to classroom technology at all levels, and continue supporting administrative and instructional technology use. The focus will be on expanding wireless access at the four middle schools and both high schools, and filling in coverage where needed at the elementary schools. Plans are continuing for centralized digital resources to support *anytime anywhere* access for all curriculum areas.

6. Professional Development

While FY12 was a difficult budget year, professional learning continued to be a priority. Job-embedded coaching was expanded to include English Language Arts at the middle school level. Conferences and workshops included a focus on professional learning communities, and systems of tiered instruction and intervention.

Summer professional development and curriculum work will be expanded for the first time in a number of years. The work taking place will focus on a range of topics including aligning Newton's curriculum with the Common Core, developing common assessments, sharing effective instructional strategies, improving anti-bullying curricula, designing a more in-depth mentoring program, and collaboration between regular and special education.

MANAGERIAL AND OPERATIONAL

There are a number of highlights in the managerial and operational arena in FY13. Before discussing the highlights, it is important to acknowledge the partnership that we have established with the Mayor and his team. Our ability to accomplish important working areas, such as budget, collective bargaining and facilities is predicated on the collaborative and trustful relationships with our colleagues in city government and we are grateful for their support.

1. Collective Bargaining

a. Settlement of Contracts

The importance of settling the collective bargaining agreements cannot be underestimated. The system was able to generate significant savings in health insurance and restructure pay scales in a manner that enabled employees on the top step to receive necessary increases.

b. Agreement to Implement new Educator Evaluation System

A joint committee composed of administrators and faculty worked over 100 hours to settle on a revised evaluation model that meets the new State regulations. We are hopeful that the enhanced evaluation system will allow greater opportunities for professional growth and continuous improvement.

2. An Improved Budget Year

The FY13 Budget was a marked improvement over FY12, as it allowed us to maintain current programs, expand teaching staff for higher enrollments, and expand programs in a few distinct areas. The improved budget year was due to several factors:

- Collective bargaining
- Increased state funding
- Continued efficiencies
- Lower utility costs

3. Addressing Short and Long Term Facilities

a. Short-term Facilities

FY12 gave Newton badly needed additional classroom space at the elementary level and construction on the permanent addition at Day will begin this summer.

b. Long-term Facilities

Newton received excellent news in the middle of the year when Angier was given an invitation to enter into the MSBA grant program. Since that time, the process has been moving along smoothly and the City has made the all-important step of moving forward with the Carr swing space.

The thoughtful and comprehensive Long-Term Facilities Plan that was introduced is a valuable tool for stimulating an important community discussion. Making progress on finalizing a facilities plan will be critical as we enter the next school year.

COMMUNITY

a. External

There was an increased emphasis this year on communicating with the public through a range of meetings and presentations:

- School and City facility meetings with the Mayor
- Special Education parent meeting to discuss the Special Education Review
- PTO and School Council meetings with School Committee and Superintendent
- Innovation Lab events featuring the Governor and Secretary of Education

Expanding partnerships in order to bring additional resources and revenue to the system has also been a priority:

- Boston College – three year technology partnership
- Newton Schools Foundation - expanded partnership

b. Internal

Visiting and supporting schools was a major priority for Central Administration over the course of the year. In addition, two new employee recognition ceremonies were established and well received.

- Thirty Year employee recognition on Opening Day
- Professional Teacher Status recognition (started in October 2011 and will now be an annual tradition)