
Office of Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education
& Special Programs

MEMO

To: David Fleishman, Superintendent

From: Cynthia Bergan, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary
Education & Special Programs

Date: November 5, 2012

Re: High School Achievement Initiatives

I. Introduction

During the past several years, the high school principals, Joel Stembridge at Newton South and Jennifer Price at Newton North, have presented reports that articulated the well-defined achievement gaps in the Newton Public Schools at the high school level. In the past two years, they have been able to show a decrease in these gaps, to a near closing of most of the gaps as indicated by the 10th grade ELA and math MCAS results.

Last September, Joel, Jen and members of their staff were able to describe effective programs that are continuing to help targeted groups of students to see improved academic achievement and engagement. The results of these interventions were demonstrated using data collected from the individual programs. The After-School Programs and others continue to thrive and the principals will give a brief update on these successes.

This year, the principals are also going to bring information concerning ongoing and new initiatives available to students at the high schools. In schools with populations closing in on 2,000 students each, one of the challenges is making this type of program available to broader numbers. Identifying the students who will benefit from an intervention and then keeping track of the impact is a difficult series of tasks. The principals will also help the School Committee understand how this process is beginning to take place.

II. Initiatives

Some of the support programs available to all students that will be discussed on Monday night are:

Tutoring Centers/Help Rooms

These rooms offer students academic support in every major content area. Each period, a teacher from one specific department is assigned to these rooms. A schedule is posted on the Help Room door so that students can see when there is a teacher available from the department in which they need assistance.

Focused/Smaller Studies

Focused/Smaller Study Halls are comprised of small groups of students who need extra support in one or more of their classes. A Focused Study has fewer students than a regular study and a teacher is available to provide academic guidance. In small studies, it is easier for housemasters, teachers and counselors to track student attendance and monitor academic progress.

Peer Tutoring

The Peer Tutoring Program pairs 9th and 10th graders with upperclassmen to get help in specific subject areas. Students commit to Peer Tutoring for a semester. The tutoring session replaces a study hall, so attendance is mandatory. Tutors are selected after being recommended and interviewed by teachers. Teachers may also recommend students to be tutored in the program.

After School Program

The After School Program is a free tutorial program that takes place two days a week after school. Staff serve as the tutors, and provide support with homework completion, test and quiz preparation, time management and organization. Tutors also communicate with students, parents and teachers. Tutoring is offered in all major subject areas including English, math, science, history, Spanish and French.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are teacher teams that meet in learning-focused meetings on a regular basis. These PLCs provide opportunities for faculty to share best practices, examine student work, develop common assessments and articulate coherent curriculum.

Transition Specialist

Our transition specialist focuses on ensuring a smooth transition for all students new to Newton North, with a particular focus on 9th graders. These supports include meeting with middle school faculty, meeting with parents and students, assigning students appropriately to regular and special education supports before they enter North and providing individual and group supports during the first semester at North.

Ninth Grade Cluster

Clusters aim to ease the transition to high school and to promote connections between and among students and teachers. Each cluster includes approximately one-third of the ninth-grade class and those students' teachers in History, English and Science, with support from Special Education faculty (schedule permitting). Clusters are designed to foster consistent communication among teachers, students, parents and counselors.

Student Support Initiative

The Student Support Program is designed to identify regular education students who would benefit from interventions (tier two interventions).

Teachers are responsible for tier one interventions. If a student requires further support, then teachers "flag" the student on SMS. Student Support Coordinators meet weekly with Guidance Counselors and housemasters to identify specific interventions for students.

Dover Legacy Scholars

The mission of the Dover Legacy Scholars Program, a partnership between Newton North High School and the Myrtle Baptist Church of Newton, is to enhance and expand the academic experience and achievement of children of African descent. We seek to challenge our young people to achieve greater heights of intellectual growth, personal development, and community service through participating in a program which will forge a strong bond among themselves as young, gifted Black people and also between themselves and the living legacy of African-American struggle present in the Newton community. Our scholars will be challenged to maintain good grades and to take higher and higher level courses, while participating in a variety of service opportunities, historical seminars, and extracurricular activities.

AP US History Initiative

This program is for students who are at the Curriculum I level of 10th grade history and from an underrepresented population as identified by our achievement gap data. In addition, these are students who are not in honors courses and who would otherwise not have taken an AP class at South and would like to take AP US History. Students are identified by the department chair and by their 10th grade teachers.