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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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May 12, 2011

Mario Almeida
Principal
Rocky Hill High School
50 Chapin Avenue
Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Dear Mr. Almeida:

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools, at its March 27-28, 2011 meeting, reviewed the decennial evaluation report from the recent visit to Rocky Hill High School and voted to award the school continued accreditation in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

The Commission commends the school on the following:

- the incorporation of community values into a comprehensive statement of mission and expectations for student learning
- the development and implementation of school-wide rubrics that assess academic expectations for student learning
- the infusion of the core values into the school culture as reflected by students, teachers, and emerging curricular initiatives
- the assumption by content area for teaching and assessing each of the academic expectations
- the collaborative effort amongst ninth grade core curriculum teachers during common planning time to develop and revise components of the Balanced Curriculum model
- the variety of opportunities to extend learning beyond the formal curriculum and classroom
- the personalization of instruction by many teachers in many courses
- the provision of real-world and critical thinking opportunities, especially as demonstrated by technology education, family and consumer science, business education, and art programs
- teachers' willingness to engage informally in discourse to modify and improve instruction
- the introduction of common planning time in order for teachers to collaborate within ninth grade content areas

- the acquisition of classroom technology and training through the Explore and Soar and the Perkins grants
- the ongoing use of the school-wide rubrics with all students across the content areas
- the variety of methods used to communicate individual student achievement to students and families

The Commission was equally pleased to acknowledge the following:

- the newly instituted administrative council that affords faculty, students, and parents meaningful input into decision-making
- the implementation of an advisory program for all students that features planned activities
- the acknowledgement, celebration, and displays of student achievements
- the efforts of building administrators to ensure a climate that foster the core values in the mission
- the effective student support services programs that contribute to the achievement of the mission
- a full range of developmentally appropriate services provided by guidance counselors
- a favorable ratio of students to guidance counselors in order to promote personalization and individualized assistance
- the variety of materials and technology in the library/media center that supports instruction
- the extensive collaboration between classroom teachers and the library/media specialist
- the co-teaching partnerships between special and regular education teachers
- the collaboration between student support services and outside community agencies

Nevertheless, the Commission expressed concern regarding the school's adherence to the Standards for Accreditation on Curriculum and Community Resources for Learning. Concerns include, but are not limited to, the following:

Curriculum:

- the lack of adequate and consistent funding to provide a sufficient number of textbooks, instructional materials and supplies to deliver the curriculum and fully support student learning given fiscal constraints
- the limited number of science labs which negatively impacts the delivery of the curriculum and students' opportunities to apply their knowledge
- the use of the media center as a classroom given space limitations which negatively impacts the delivery of both the curriculum and library/media programs and services
- the chemical hygiene violations creating unsafe conditions in the pool area and in science classrooms and labs

Community Resources for Learning:

- the inadequate and inconsistent level of funding to provide appropriate numbers of textbooks, instructional materials, and supplies
- the multiple unresolved fire code violations, including storage of materials and supplies in the electrical and boiler rooms which present serious safety concerns for all building occupants
- the practice of propping open some fire doors

- the lack of handicapped accessibility to several sections of the building, including but not limited to, the front entrance door; the bathrooms located near classrooms; accessibility to and from the third floor; seating in the auditorium and to and from the stage; accessibility to the guidance area: spectator seating in the pool area: and to all drinking fountains
- the lack of proper ventilation in the chemical storage room
- the wide variations in climate control with temperatures exceeding 90 degrees in some months resulting from an aging and outdated HVAC system
- the lack of fresh-air intake,
- the limited level of funding to adequately support the five-year capital improvement plan that can only address minimal facilities concerns
- the inadequate number of science laboratories to support the delivery of the curriculum
- the significant lack of storage, causing materials and supplies to be stored in unsafe conditions

Given these concerns, the Commission voted to place the school on warning for the Standards on Curriculum and Community Resources for Learning. Consistent with Commission policies, the school's warning status will not be removed until the school can demonstrate that it has satisfactorily addressed the cited areas of concern.

The Commission requests that school officials submit a Special Progress Report by November 1, 2011 indicating how the following recommendations have been addressed:

- provide adequate textbooks and instructional materials and supplies for all teachers to implement the curriculum and for all students to support their learning
- develop and begin to implement a plan to address space limitations and scheduling of classes which are impacting access to the library media center
- immediately address all health and safety concerns identified above, including, but not limited to, fire code violations, unsafe storage of chemicals, temperature control, and HVAC exhaust issues
- cease the practice of propping open some fire doors
- develop and submit a short-term plan, including a timeline and funding, to address all facilities concerns identified above

The Special Progress Report should also include a detailed response to the following:

- ensure the Balanced Curriculum template includes, in addition to its other components, the integration of school-wide learning expectations, including use of the accompanying rubrics, suggested teaching strategies, assessment strategies, and essential questions
- ensure that the principal has the authority and autonomy to lead the school in achieving the school-wide learning expectations

All accredited schools must submit a required Two-Year Progress Report, which in the case of Rocky Hill High School is due on October 1, 2012. Information about the proper preparation of the Two-Year Progress Report was provided to school representatives at the Follow-Up Seminar and is included in *Directions for the Preparation of the Two-Year Progress Report* which can be

found at <http://cpss.neasc.org>. In that report school officials are required to respond to two types of recommendations: (1) highlighted recommendations from notification letter(s) and (2) general recommendations from within the school's decennial evaluation report.

With regard to the reporting of action taken on evaluation report recommendations school officials should indicate the status of each recommendation by classifying it in one of five categories: Completed, In Progress, Planned for the Future, Rejected, or No Action. In addition, for each valid recommendation in the evaluation report there should be a brief description of the action that has been taken to address the recommendations, including anticipated dates of completion where applicable. Special care should be taken to include appropriate information to justify the Rejected or No Action status of any recommendation.

In addition to providing information on action taken to address each evaluation report recommendation, the Two-Year Progress Report should also provide detailed explanations regarding the manner in which each of the following highlighted recommendations has been addressed:

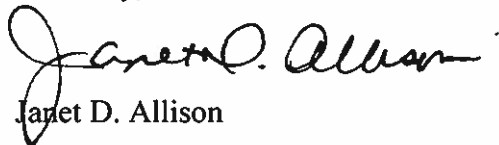
- develop analytic rubrics to assess individual achievement of the social and civic expectations
- develop a focused plan to ensure the school's core values and beliefs about learning are a guiding force in school-wide decision-making, including resource allocations
- ensure that teachers are regularly involved in the review, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum, including the Balanced Curriculum documents
- ensure that all curricula in all courses includes the integration of inquiry, problem-solving, and critical thinking
- develop and implement a plan, including professional development, to ensure that all teachers consistently employ teaching practices which engage students and afford student-centered instruction
- ensure that all teachers regularly engage students in self-assessment and reflection
- implement a plan to provide increased formal time for all teachers to collaborate for the purposes of improving instruction and student achievement
- develop, fund, and implement a program of professional development for all teachers to ensure best teaching practices, the use of technology to improve learning, and other topics identified by the professional staff
- implement fully the teacher evaluation and professional improvement plan so that it meaningfully supports the improvement of instruction
- ensure that all teachers are involved in the regular review of student work for the purposes of improving the curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment practices
- develop and implement 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
- cite specific progress made to engage in a formal long-term planning process to fully address all facilities concerns identified above

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The Commission congratulates the school administration and faculty for completing the first two phases of the accreditation program: the self-study and the evaluation visit. The next step will be the follow-up process during which the school will implement valid recommendations in the evaluation report. The Commission's Follow-Up Seminars should help you and your faculty develop a schedule for implementing valid recommendations. In addition, the Commission's *Accreditation Handbook* provides information on follow-up procedures.

The school's warning status will be next reviewed when the Commission considers the Special Progress Report. Consistent with the Commission's follow-up procedures, the Special Progress Report should include an electronic signature of the principal and chair of the Follow-Up Committee and be sent electronically to the Commission office at the following address: cpsreports@neasc.org.

Sincerely,



Janet D. Allison

JDA/mms

cc: Jeffrey Villar, Superintendent, Rocky Hill Public Schools
William MacDonald, Chair, Rocky Hill Board of Education
Francis T. Kennedy, Chair of the Visiting Committee
Scott Leslie, Chair, Commission on Public Secondary Schools