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

October 1, 2015

Dear Principals and Superintendents:

I am writing to provide you and your school community with an update on the efforts of the Committee on Public Secondary Schools at the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to redesign the Accreditation process.

The work began about 18 months ago and continues today. It has taken a number of different forms. We have engaged many educators from all six New England states to assist us with this important work.

Web-based Portal

The Association has been working to develop and implement a web-based portal. This portal will be the method for schools, visiting teams, and the Association to communicate and transmit information. The portal was piloted last spring with a number of schools using it to record their self-study. Schools can also upload evidence rather than organizing it in bins for the visiting teams. The portal was also used on visiting teams in Connecticut and New Hampshire.

Reviews from the pilot schools have been very positive. The portal will reduce the time it takes for schools and visiting teams to write their reports. It will also greatly reduce the use of paper as requested by our members. As a result of these successful pilots the portal is now being used by all schools writing their self-studies in preparation of hosting a visit in 2017. It is also being used on a majority of visiting teams this school year.

An additional function of the portal will be to communicate notification letters and follow-up reports in a more efficient manner. These functions are being developed and will be implemented in 2016.

Shorter Self-Study

As a result of the use of the web-based portal and the revision of the Self-Study Guides schools will be able to reduce the length of their Self-Study by as much as 50 percent. Schools preparing to host a visiting team in 2017 will be asked to limit their self-study to 12 months. This means that schools hosting a visit in the spring of 2017 should begin their Self-Study in the early winter of 2015 and schools who are hosting a visiting team in the fall of 2017 should begin their Self-Study in the late spring of 2016. Self-Study Seminars for these schools are being held this fall instead of the traditional spring dates.

Smaller Visiting Teams

The Committee on Public Secondary Schools piloted the use of smaller visiting teams in the spring of 2015. The results from this pilot were successful leading to an expansion of the pilot this fall. There are currently six schools piloting smaller visiting teams. These smaller teams have allowed schools to reduce the cost of the accommodations for visiting teams by up to 25 percent. CPSS will continue this effort to reduce the size of visiting teams and the associated costs for member schools.

Differentiated Use of School Staff During the Self-Study

Schools will be able to differentiate the use of their staff during the Self-Study. This means that schools will no longer be required to have all staff members assigned to a Standard Committee during the Self-Study. A representative number of staff members should be assigned to each Standard Committee and all staff will be required to approve the reports of these Standard Committees. This will allow the school to continue to work on other initiatives while conducting a Self-Study and addresses the concern that all other work in the school had to cease during the Self-Study.

Focusing on School/District Priorities

Schools will be encouraged to focus on areas they have identified as their priorities or priorities on their district during the Self-Study. This will allow schools to align their school improvement initiatives more closely with the Accreditation process. It will also provide schools and districts with support and feedback as they implement these initiatives.

Use of Existing Evidence/Artifacts during the Self-Study

Schools are being encouraged to use existing artifacts as evidence of alignment with the Standards for Accreditation. This will allow schools to utilize reports, school improvement plans, and assessments created for or by the school as part of the Accreditation process. The goal is to reduce the duplication of efforts that have been experienced in the past. Cross-walks that show the alignment of the Standards for Accreditation with state requirements have been developed and are available to assist schools in identifying these areas.

Self-Study Redesign Committee

The Self-Study Redesign Committee was formed in February 2015 and is comprised of 20 educators from a variety of positions and all six New England states. The committee has met four times and has developed a series of guiding principles and recommendations. These have been shared with the Committee on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS) at their summer retreat in August.

The Committee on Public Secondary Schools indicated their general agreement with the direction taken in the guiding principles and recommendations. They also approved the formation of a small committee to work out the details and bring more definition to the work. They approved sharing the work to date with our members to begin (on a conceptual level) getting feedback. Finally, they approved piloting some aspects of the work with schools actively engaged in the Accreditation process. The redesigned Accreditation process is being redesigned to:

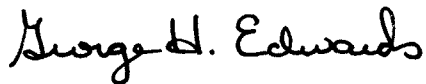
- focus on and support school improvement goals as identified by the school/district and aligned with the Standards;
- be less prescriptive and more flexible;
- focus on a school's capacity for continuous self-reflection and growth;
- emphasize formative feedback and continual planning and improvement;
- develop manageable recommendations based on the Standards;
- provide clear guidelines for achieving those recommendations;
- be complementary to ongoing school initiatives.

Standards Review and Revision

Another important decision by the Committee on Public Secondary Schools was to approve the formation of a committee to review and revise the Standards for Accreditation. This committee will be comprised of members from all six New England states. The committee will review and revise the Standards and complete this work by the end of the 2015-2016 school year. The goal of this review will be Standards that are: less prescriptive, more flexible, have a greater emphasis on goals rather than specific strategies to accomplish the goals, focus on Standards using Indicators as guidance, encourage schools to adopt a “growth mindset.”

I am pleased to update you on the progress that has been made to address the concerns of our membership and redesign the Accreditation process. We look forward to continuing this important work and providing you with an Accreditation process that meets your school's needs for quality assurance and school improvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George H. Edwards".

George H. Edwards