

## Leadership and Organization

### *Support Standard 5*

**5.1 The school board and superintendent of Colchester High School (CHS) ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and Essential Expectations.** The board and superintendent work with the principal in three main ways: budget, policy, and evaluation and supervision. In each, the principal is given direction for achieving relevant goals and is then allowed to guide the school and faculty as the principal deems best. The superintendent has fully supported the principal's vision for CHS as well as the annual action plan developed at the team leader retreat. *The school board has provided limited resources for achieving relevant goals due to the state of the economy and challenge of passing a school budget vote in Colchester.* The superintendent and board are willing to hear the principal's recommendations related to budget reductions. The principal has less autonomy when determining school-wide professional development, and annual school goals. In years past the building principal had a substantial amount of funds to devote towards professional development and summer curriculum work. *As a result of central office changes in practice, the central office administration now allocates the funds related to providing professional development to CHS teachers.*

**5.2 At Colchester High School the principal provides leadership in the school community by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning.** Evidence can be found in numerous places from our collaborative workgroups as a part of our professional development, to the communication our principal has with parents and faculty through the Colchester View and the Faculty Newsletter.

Professional development at Colchester High School is an ongoing process. The yearly schedule is strategically developed and publicized in the Two-Column Calendar. Underscoring our school's commitment to differentiation, the program of professional development is tailored to the individual teachers' needs while at the same time working toward common goals. An intentional effort is made to balance our professional development time between work sessions and more traditional best practices faculty meetings.

Our principal shares her vision with the community at large through the monthly publication "The View". This publication includes information such as upcoming events, what students achieve, and includes a specific section where our principal lays out the intended direction of the school. In the same fashion our principal publishes a weekly faculty newsletter which shares logistical articles and her vision for the school.

**5.3 At Colchester High School teachers and administrators, other than the principal are involved in the decision making process.** One of the clearest examples of teacher leadership in the building is the implementation of the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team is a body composed of teachers and administrators from all disciplines in the building who come together weekly to discuss issues, plan the direction of the school, make decisions based on school wide input, and implement the those decisions. Teachers on the Leadership Team also serve as Team Leaders for their departments. Team Leaders serve a dual role for their departments. In one sense they give voice to the members of their departments as their representatives on the Leadership Team. Conversely, they serve as a means to disseminate information to their respective departments from the leadership team. In addition, all administrators except the Athletic Director are members of the Leadership Team.

Many of the initiatives that positively impacted our school culture at CHS have had their origins within the Leadership Team. Differentiated Instruction has been our main educational and philosophical focus for the better part of the past decade. In an attempt to better meet our students at their zone of proximal development, cohort data concerning student readiness has been utilized in the formation of classroom populations throughout Green House core courses. This initiative began as a discussion on a Wednesday afternoon between teachers and administrators who were serving as a part of the Leadership Team.

There are four administrators other than the principal- two Assistant Principals, the Director of Student Support Services and an Athletic Director. In addition to directing their assigned departments, they also direct several programs such as the Teacher Advisory program, the Educational Support Team, and work on Collaborative Work Groups.

Teachers at Colchester High provide leadership in a variety of ways. They serve on and lead many committees, such as the Colchester Local Standards Board, the district's Professional Development Committee, many district wide curriculum, technology and wellness committees. Many teachers have taken on leadership roles in our NEASC self study. There are also many extracurricular clubs and teams at Colchester High that have faculty members as their coaches or advisors.

**5.4 The organization of Colchester High and its educational programs promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning.** The CHS Mission Statement states that "...all students will develop the academic proficiency, social skill, and character to be

fulfilled, responsible, and involved citizens...” This part of the mission is being addressed through the creation and ongoing implementation of our Essential Expectations for student learning. These Essential Expectations were created with the involvement of the faculty under the direction of the professional development committee. These four Essential Expectations are designed to involve material covered in every classroom and across all disciplines. The faculty decided that the four crucial skills that all students should be able to exhibit upon graduation are: reading, writing, problem solving, and learning habits.

Our schools structure helps personalize student learning by breaking the school into two major houses. The Green House encompasses the ninth and tenth grades while The Blue House encompasses the eleventh and twelfth grades. The focus of The Green House, through core academic courses, allows for the development of academic proficiency in a more structured environment. Academic proficiency is demonstrated through successful completion of core academic classes as students progress through The Green House and into The Blue House. As students move into The Blue House more individual choice in their learning program becomes available, students develop a sense of responsibility, social skills, and a chance to become involved in their community. One specific example can be found in the graduation requirement of Senior Seminar: Civics. This half credit course requires students to complete a community based/service learning project that is presented to the community to prove they are becoming involved citizens before they graduate. In addition Colchester High offers alternative programs to meet the individual needs of students. These experiences relate directly to our schools mission.

**5.5 At Colchester High School student grouping patterns reflect the diversity of the student body.** Student placement in academic courses is based on the student's learning needs without regard to ethnic or socioeconomic considerations. In many courses, including Green House Core classes, cohorts are formed with the intent of guaranteeing a heterogeneous learning environment for all students. Colchester High School offers a continuum of learning environments and experiences in order to offer rigorous opportunities for all students. Through differentiated instruction, mainstreaming practices and internal support personnel each student has access to all classes offered. Colchester High School's commitment to differentiated instruction is a reflection of current best practice supported by research. This commitment supports our belief in heterogeneous grouping and fulfills our mission statement of providing diverse challenging educational experiences to all students. While options are available to attempt to make all Blue House classes accessible to all students, by their nature some classes such as AP offerings tend to be less heterogeneously grouped based on students abilities and interest.

**5.6 The schedule at Colchester High, an alternating AB block schedule, is driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and supports the effective implementation of the curriculum, instruction and assessment.** Block scheduling facilitates differentiated instruction, allowing the faculty to meet the individual needs of our students and promote integrated learning. The team-taught Humanities classes in our Green House are prime examples of how the schedule allows for integrated individualized learning opportunities for our students. These longer blocks of time allow for in-depth project-based learning supporting students' progress towards essential expectations.

The extended Teacher Advisory program allows for many Guidance-related activities within the structure of our school year. Assemblies and field trips are an important part of the educational experience of the students at Colchester High; efforts are made to schedule them in a way to minimize the disruption of other academic endeavors. Each year a calendar meeting is held where major activities and /or events are planned. One of the objectives of this meeting is to attempt to avoid overlaps of major assessments.

In February each year students at Colchester High begin the process of registering for courses for the following school year. This process is done through extended Teacher Advisory times and discussions with classroom teachers and guidance counselor. The results of this process are then used to create the master schedule for the coming year.

The master schedule attempts to create opportunities for teachers to collaborate, *but is not always successful under the current system.* The master schedule also gives a majority of our students access to all the courses offered, and a limited number of classes are offered outside a typical school day. *Current research suggests that the daily schedule of 7:45 to 2:20 may not be a reflection of the best practice for adolescent developmental needs.*

**5.7 Colchester High School attempts to accord meaningful decision making roles to our students, parents and all members of the school staff in a variety of ways.** Student, faculty and parent surveys have been used to collect data from these groups on issues such as the Teacher Advisory program and how to improve our scores on NECAPs. The administrative team, through Team Leaders and their departments, get input from the faculty on issues that arise. Committees for hiring of new personnel and curriculum development have faculty

representation and include student and parent members. The student body is represented on the School Board by way of a non-voting student member. *While attempts are made to include students and community members in the decision making process, finding people willing to commit to these roles can sometimes be difficult.*

**5.8 In most classes at Colchester High, the student-teacher ratio allows teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students.** According to the self-study survey results, 70 percent of staff feel that the student load enables them to meet the needs of individual students, and approximately 60 percent of students feel that teachers meet their individual learning needs. Class size limits are established in the master scheduling process (and are aligned with the Vermont State Statutes), and are generally held to but are exceeded in some cases. *For this reason and others, some classes at Colchester High are too large and make it difficult to meet the learning needs of individual students.* There are many ways that Colchester High has tried in recent years to help teachers to meet these needs including: team teaching of classes in the Green House Humanities classes; an effort to balance the numbers of students with special needs in classes, particularly in Green House courses; basing the number of sections offered of a particular course on enrollment numbers, meeting OSHA standards in Science classes and state quality standards in other content areas; and efforts made to attract and retain support staff members in Special Education to provide more Instructional Assistants in classes.

**5.9 Colchester High School offers a Teacher Advisory (TA) Program that is used to meet student's individual needs. This program assigns each student a staff or faculty member who helps to personalize each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists that student in achieving the essential expectations for student learning.**

The teacher advisory program assigns each student a teacher that works with that student for the

first three years at Colchester High School. The programs has a scheduled 7-minute time slot each school day to meet, as well as a calendar with regularly scheduled 30-, 45- and 60-minute extended times to meet. During this advisory time students and teachers discuss topics ranging from daily activities to personal long-term goals. The extended TAs are designed to cover in depth scheduling, planning and life skills. The advisories give students a chance to interact with and be mentored by an adult in the building who may not be their classroom teacher or their guidance counselor. All students are assigned a TA based on grade level and last name. The TAs range between 8 and 14 students per advisory.

In addition to the Teacher Advisory, there are many opportunities for students to interact with and be mentored by adults in the building. These include programs and activities such as the Math Lab, Writer's Workshop, Homework Club, Special education/504 caseworkers and aides, co-curricular coaches and advisors, social workers and the SAP counselor, and adults running the alternative programs such as CAP, Target Grad, and the Senior Camp program. These formal programs and activities all give students a chance to meet with an adult who can assist them in achieving the essential expectations for the school.

*Despite the many formal programs designed to allow for student/adult interaction, many students still feel as though they do not have a strong connection to an adult in the building. According to the NEASC Self-Study Survey, 70.1 percent of students felt that there was an adult in addition to the guidance counselor that they could talk to if they had a problem. However, only 56.1 percent of the student body felt that teachers were concerned about their learning. According to the survey, while the Teacher Advisory program is school-wide and there are many programs out there, only 41.5 percent of the students felt as though they were involved*



*in a formal program for mentoring students. Currently there is a committee reviewing the TA model at CHS.*

**5.10 The professional staff at Colchester High collaborates extensively within departments in support of learning for all students.** Departmental collaboration occurs in many ways at Colchester High, including the teaming which occurs in Humanities classes, CWG work focusing on using student data to adjust curriculum and instructional strategies, grade-level or subject-level collaboration by teams of teachers to plan curriculum, instruction and assessments for classes and collaboration using summer curriculum time for additional planning. *Interdepartmental collaboration occurs on a more limited basis.* Examples of interdepartmental collaboration include CWG groups that were interdepartmental, efforts around development of our school-wide Essential Expectations and the rubrics that correspond to them, staff participation in EST, use of the CHS shared drive, 504 and IEP meetings, and individual faculty members collaborating on interdisciplinary courses or activities.

**5.11 All faculty and staff at Colchester High School are involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.** At Colchester High School every employee plays a role in supporting the well-being of students. The Guidance office is a place students can find emotional and behavioral support. School nurses are available all day long to address student health issues; they also take a proactive role in student health awareness. The food service staff is conscientious in their efforts to provide nutritious and well-balanced meals. The custodial staff takes pride creating a clean, welcoming environment for students.

In supporting our students academically, CHS utilizes instructional assistants in many classes. There are a number of supports available to students outside the classroom, including The Writers Workshop, The Math Lab, and Homework Club.

Students can access emotional and behavioral supports in a number of different places in the school. The planning room provides behavioral support and intervention for students who are having difficulty performing in the academic setting. Our substance-abuse-prevention (SAP) counselor is available for help with resources and referral for all students and provides substance abuse education through our TA program. We have two school-based clinicians (social workers) in the building regularly to provide support for students on a referral basis.

**5.12 At Colchester High School student success is acknowledged, celebrated and displayed regularly.** *Although only 53 percent of the student body felt they have been recognized for their successes according to the NEASC Self-Study Survey, Colchester High School strives on many levels to recognize its students' achievements. Walking through the school you will see many examples of student work on display in classrooms as well as in display cases. Student achievements are recognized on a daily basis through announcements that are read over the intercom, posted on the school's Web site, and displayed in the cafeteria on a scrolling message board. Press releases to local papers also highlight student successes regularly, and the Honor Roll is published in both the *Burlington Free Press* and *Colchester Sun*. The *Laker View* is sent out to the community each month by the school and reports student activities. Each month a group of students are recognized at a luncheon sponsored by area businesses for the achievements in areas ranging from academic subjects to community service or performing arts. Throughout the year there are events spotlighting students such as the Heritage Nights for American Experience classes, Senior Seminar Night, Science Essential Topics Nights, the Art Show, and Honor Society induction nights. At the end of each school year there are special events to celebrate our students' achievements: an Underclassmen awards*

night, Athletic Awards night, Honors Banquet for graduating seniors, Class Night and graduation.

**5.13 Colchester High School provides a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive environment resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.** We take pride in the fact that according to the Self-Study Survey 73 percent of students and 94 percent of staff feel safe at school. One example of how we foster a sense of belonging can be found in our Smart Start Program for students, which focuses on helping freshmen and transfer students feel comfortable in our school. Further, every student in the building is connected to an adult through our Teacher Advisory program; this is where we begin to foster a sense of community in our school, though with varying degrees of success. In addition, there are a large number of students involved in co-curricular activities, which is a clear indicator that students are invested in the climate of the school. *However, the Self-Study Survey results indicate that there are still areas where school climate could improve, including student perceptions regarding school pride, student-to-student respect and student-to-teacher respect.*

One goal of the mission statement is to foster the development of fulfilled, responsible and involved citizens. The CHS attendance and discipline policies are organized in a tiered-manner that supports the development of students as they mature. The policies define behaviors that are not indicative of a respectful, responsible member of our community. Appropriate interventions are applied from the classroom to the planning room and administrative level that include processing the behavior with the goal of continual growth.

**5.14 The CSD School Board supports the implementation of the school's mission and Essential Expectations for students.** The board's formal policy manuals and communications create the basis for decision making at CHS, and they work with the CHS

principal on action plans and budget to support the school's mission and expectations. The board advocates for learning opportunities while at the same time balancing fiscal responsibilities. They continue to communicate with the wider community and celebrate staff and student achievements. Board members have frequently sought out student and parent input, and have maintained a cordial and professional relationship with the CHS staff. The school board also regularly attends events, or student demonstrations of learning such as Trash on the Lawn Days, Forensics Meets, Debate Meets, Math League Competitions, Senior Seminar Civics Demonstration Nights, and the Essential Topics Demonstrations Nights. Additionally, the board regularly asks the principal for reports on student learning and considers current data when creating action plans and making decisions.

## **Leadership and Organization**

### *Executive Summary*

The leadership and organization of CHS support the school's mission and Essential Expectations. The school board and superintendent give direction to the principal in developing goals for the school and then allow her to guide the school and faculty as she deems best. The school board and superintendent support the school's mission and expectations for student learning, as the recent district commitment to differentiated instruction shows. The district has given the principal sufficient autonomy in most areas, although in recent years they have taken control of some items such as professional development funding and school goals that previously were entrusted entirely to the principal.

The principal provides leadership to the school in a variety of ways, maintaining a clear vision, laying out a direction and helping bolster moral throughout the school community. Her leadership is supported by the faculty and staff through the Leadership Team, which provides the opportunity for two-way communication between the administration and the faculty. Faculty members provide leadership through participation in numerous committees and by advising or coaching extracurricular activities. Students and community members also are included on many committees, although filling these roles is sometimes challenging.

Differentiated instruction (DI) has become a trademark of the educational experience at CHS, and the school's organization, student grouping patterns and schedule promote the school's

mission and expectations through DI. In addition to DI, alternative programs also help to personalize each student's education. Current student loads and staff collaboration particularly within departments and special education support, make it possible to meet the individual needs of our students.

Students and staff alike feel safe at CHS. The TA program attempts to ensure that all students are connected to at least one adult in the building. We are working toward this goal, as the Self-Study Survey results indicate that only 70 percent of students feel that they have an adult at school they can talk to if they have a problem. There are many ways CHS displays, acknowledges and celebrates the achievements of our students, but according to the Self-Study Survey results only 53 percent of the student body feel that they have been recognized for their achievements. The survey also indicates that a majority of students feel that students at the school do not respect their teachers or each other.

**The Leadership and Organization Committee feels that in many areas CHS is Exemplary in this indicator, but climate concerns from the Self-Study Survey and issues around the effectiveness of TA Program lead us to give CHS an Acceptable rating for leadership and organization.**

## Leadership and Organization

### *Strengths & Needs*

#### **Strengths:**

- The CHS administration has a strong vision for the school and widespread support within the school community.
- The CHS Leadership Team provides two-way communication between the principal and the school staff around the school's mission and expectations.
- The CHS House structure and alternative programs provide appropriate support for students at different levels of development.
- Block scheduling supports the implementation of DI, a major component of the school's mission and Essential Expectations.
- The creation of heterogeneous student cohorts in Green House core courses supports the implementation of DI and personalizes instruction.
- CHS makes efforts to celebrate the successes of students in many areas, including both academic and extracurricular arenas.
- As seen by the district-wide adoption of DI, the school board supports CHS' mission and Essential Expectations.
- Teachers collaborate regularly, formally and informally, within departments and specific course assignments.

**Needs:**

- Principal needs increased autonomy around allocation of professional development funds.
- Based on current research, the school start time in relation to the overall schedule should be evaluated and adjusted to best fit the needs of students.
- There needs to be more formalized collaboration among teachers, especially interdepartmental.
- Students and community members should have an increased role in decision making.
- The Teacher Advisory program needs to continue to be evaluated and adjusted to help ensure that all students have a connection to an adult in the school in addition to their guidance counselor.
- Examine possible strategies to promote changes to the makeup of the Leadership Team in order to introduce new ideas and develop more teachers as leaders in the school.