

Communication about HVRHS schedule and NEASC

Submitted by Jose Martinez, Principal of Housatonic Valley Regional HS

I want to give you a brief update about the progress with developing a new schedule for Housatonic next year. Also a quick overview of the NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) process.

Last Tuesday (April 4th) a parent group meeting was held. This was the second such meeting. The group has 10 members. Much of the meeting was about different ways schools can organize the teaching day to maximize instructional time for students. The group discussed the four stated goals to consider when thinking about a new schedule. These goals were shared parents, faculty, and many students. These goals are:

1. Intervention time for all students,
2. Time in the school day for teachers from community and area colleges to teach dual credit classes,
3. Allow students to be released at the same time every day for internships/work experiences, and
4. Allow common planning time for teachers.

The parents also spent some time discussing grading practices at the high school. The group has one more meeting planned for April 17th.

The plan is to have the parent group share ideas and recommendations with the Leadership Team at the High School. The recently revised structure of the Leadership Team (department chairs and teachers - 17 people) should allow for a good representation from our faculty.

Over the next couple of days I will work to develop a timeline that represents these steps and ultimately a date for the master schedule finished product. The goal is to have a new master schedule for the high school in place this spring. More to come soon.

There have also been some questions about the NEASC accreditation process. Maybe I can shed some light on this. In the 2007 accreditation visit, HVRHS was put on “warning” status for deficiencies in two areas: curriculum and instruction. It took two years of concentrated effort from the faculty to get the warning status removed.

We’ve recently begun work with a consultant (Warren Logee). Warren is a veteran administrator and has worked with many schools on developing cohesive leadership teams to support high student achievement. Our leadership team will be working with teachers to accomplish goals from the School Improvement Plan. One of our main priorities will be focused on continued professional development dedicated to improving teacher effectiveness in the classroom. How we structure the master schedule is a key part of providing optimal instructional time for students, which will be observed and evaluated by the NEASC visiting team.

I think that Warren will be able to support us in a way that will produce good results for our students.

We know there are many great things going on here at Housy- but we also recognize we have areas where we can improve. We work on these things constantly.

I’ve also included a document “Why Accreditation is Important” (pages 3 & 4) as a good reference for you and/or the public. This information was distributed at the April 6th budget hearing.

Information from The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)

NEASC Link: <https://cpss.neasc.org/about-accreditation/meaning-and-value#value>

The Meaning of Accreditation

Accreditation of public schools by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) indicates that the educational institution has conducted a self-evaluation of all of its programs and hosted a visiting team to evaluate the institution in terms of its own stated educational goals and the Standards for Accreditation. The Standards for Accreditation are a research-based set of practices and concepts that provide guidance to schools on all aspects of the education — academic, civic, and social — of the young people under their care. The Standards are considered to be living documents and are reviewed and revised as necessary. The process of review includes surveys of all member schools, specific consideration of feedback provided by schools that have recently undergone an Accreditation visit, an appraisal of recent, relevant educational literature, and in-depth discussions. As needed, third parties, including consultants, are contracted to conduct relevant research to inform the revision of the Standards. The Standards tend to be reflective of current trends in research on public education without espousing one particular mode of thought. The awarding of Accreditation signifies that the school has met the Standards for Accreditation at an acceptable level and is committed to both maintain those Standards and to improve its educational program by implementing the recommendations of the visiting team and the Commission. Continued Accreditation is dependent upon a school demonstrating ongoing, reflective progress to improve teaching and learning and the support of teaching and learning. Membership in and Accreditation by NEASC is similar to membership in professional organizations such as the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association. In each case, a commitment toward continual self-evaluation, a pledge to self-improvement, and a desire to maintain the Standards for Accreditation are necessary.

Value to Students and Families

Students are most affected by Accreditation since they are the central focus of the educational process. Accreditation assures them that their needs are being met through a quality educational program, that a vehicle exists to correct deficiencies in the school program, that their transfer credits will more likely be accepted should their family move, and that college representatives have the assurance of the quality of their preparation. Their confidence in their school and teachers, their attitude toward academic work, and their personal development are all fostered by seeing their school invite, and respond to, constructive criticism. Alignment to the Standards also ensures the singular focus of school resources on students' achievement of valued learning expectations that address academic, civic, and social competencies articulated in the school's public statement of core values, beliefs about learning, and 21st century learning expectations.

Value to Local Citizens and Taxpayers

Accreditation of a local public school by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges assures that tax money is supporting a school facility and programs that have been judged worthwhile by a visiting team of evaluators, both in terms of the school's stated core values, beliefs about learning, and student learning expectations, and in terms of the school's alignment to the Standards for Accreditation. Through the process of Accreditation, the citizen is advised of the strengths, needs, and long-range plans of the school. Finally, the reputation of the community benefits from Accreditation since the retention or the loss of Accreditation has a demonstrable effect on local property values. It is quite common for principals of member schools to receive inquiries from potential homebuyers or renters in a given community seeking information about the nature and quality of programs in that community's schools. In addition to requests for information about the breadth of curricular and co-curricular programs, and about standardized and state test results, those inquiries often include specific questions about a school's Accreditation status. Assumedly, a lack of Accreditation would discourage individuals so informed from pursuing residency in communities whose school lacked accredited status.