

CHS administrators study up

Association making evaluation of school for accreditation

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COVENTRY — Typically it is the students that are graded, but this time, the entire school population and the property at Coventry High School are going to be evaluated.

It's a process that happens every ten years. Representatives from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) come to visit local high schools to make sure they are adhering to the teaching and learning standards established by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools.

Teachers, staff and administrators from the New England area are asked by NEASC to serve on assessment teams to evaluate schools based on seven standards. According to information provided by

NEASC, the team will look at things like academic expectations, school-wide civic and social expectations, procedures and policies, technology or lack thereof, and mission statement adherence. They will also assess other aspects of the school ranging from curriculum, instruction, school resources, community resources, assessment, and the overall culture and climate.

A team was formed to assess Coventry High School and they will be here through the first half of this week to work on their evaluation.

Coventry High School principal Michael Hobin began preparing for

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Michael Hobin
Coventry High School principal

this visit several years ago. He asked science teacher Steven Lukowicz and Amy Cronin, a special education teacher, if they would be willing to co-chair the accreditation process. Together, the chairs assigned each teacher in the school to a committee and each committee was assigned one of the seven standards in the accreditation process.

Lukowicz said each committee had to "put into words" information that pertains to the standards about what is going on in the school. It was all part of what is known in the accreditation process as a self-study.

Hobin explained that the teams

of teachers were asked to do exactly what the NEASC team will be doing — "looking at everything" about the school. Hobin said they will be considering the setup of the building, its floor plan, if passing time is chaotic, where certain things are inside the building, what classroom sizes are like, if the community supports the school and more, he said.

Lukowicz said the committees looked at the teaching and learning standards practiced at the school, including everything from the lobby to the cafeteria, the gymnasium, the classrooms and the structure of the building.

He said through that inside review it was determined that there were things the school excelled at

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and other areas the school was weak in. The committees developed a list of 6 critical strengths and needs. He said the committee determined that Coventry High School "is a safe, positive and supportive environment," but that "budget restraints and the rejection of a school improvement bond have delayed improvements in certain areas of the building," such as the replacement of the school's roof, "certain spacing needs and the entire athletic complex, most notably the track."

He said the inside committees also determined through the self study that the "highly qualified CHS teaching staff" provide students with "numerous extra help opportunities including before, and after school as well as during academic lab," but that "increased demands on student achievement and graduation requirements place an additional burden on staff."

Cronin said the committees were not asked to sugar coat any of the needs in the school and to be open and honest about both the strengths and the needs. The intention of the NEASC visit and the self study prior to their visit is to "represent the school accurately" despite its flaws.

The committees also had to provide evidence using examples of student work, photos and be able to explain grading processes to back up their findings. All of that information was formulated into evidence binders which were mailed out to the members of the NEASC evaluation team prior to their visit this weekend.

"This is a very formal process and it is quite in-depth," Cronin said. "The team from NEASC will tour the physical plant, eat with the students, meet with the food service directors, the school nurse, aides even custodians and parents and hopefully they will see the same concerns

we did and the same strengths that we did."

The purpose of the visit, Lukowicz said, is not to bash any one person or aspect of the school, but rather to initiate "positive change."

"Ten years ago we were cited for not having enough technology during the accreditation process," he said. "It immediately became a district priority and now every classroom has a computer in it and they are all on a school-wide network. Teachers have smart boards in their classrooms now too and we have even changed our learning expectations based on that. The entire process is created to help the school make positive changes."

Hobin said the NEASC team will be at the school for a four-day visit and members of the association will establish a report card for the school. He said the school will be graded on all of the seven standards.

"The report card is a good motivator to set goals to move forward," Hobin said. "There are no guarantees that something cited in the report will be fixed, but you do have to do a two-year follow up report and then a five-year follow up to report to them what your progress is, so it is a good tool to help keep schools on track with their goal plans."

Cronin explained that the NEASC team "may not be able to provide solutions to the schools needs-based issues," but that they will be able to serve as "an objective voice" that can "validate in-house concerns" and "make recommendations and commendations."

The visit officially started yesterday and will continue through Wednesday.

Parents and residents interested in voicing concerns or applause can come to the school today at 3:30 to speak.

Anyone with questions should call the school at 822-9499.