

**NEWBURYPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**SUPERINTENDENT'S ENTRY PLAN REPORT**

**KEVIN M. LYONS, Ed.D.**

**SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

**REPORT TO THE NEWBURYPORT SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**December 18, 2006**

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This entry plan process was designed to assist me in developing a comprehensive picture of the Newburyport Public Schools that included the students, staff and community stakeholders. My plan consisted of conducting interviews with various individuals and groups, as well as reviewing a number of plans and documents, in an effort to develop a sense of the system and provide a basis for future goals, objectives and activities. As a candidate I stated that I would utilize a standard reference model in order to learn about the operations and systems within the district. To that end, I have employed *Effective School District Management: A Self Review Instrument and Guide* (Dembowski, Fred, et. al., American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, VA, 1999.) This report will use the categories of this guide as a rough template for organizing and ordering the content. In addition to these categories, I have included *Communication, Customer Service, and Parent-Community Relations* where I believe some very important findings justify this additional category. In a letter to all School Committee members, dated August 21, 2006, I outlined my intent to conduct an entry plan. In a series of August 2006 meetings, every member provided some insight for me as to how to conduct an entry plan to best effect. I am grateful for that guidance and the Committee's support for my conducting this process. It has been an invaluable learning experience for me.

#### General Goals of the Entry Plan Process

- ✓ To get to know the school district and its people as fully as possible in a brief period of time, outside the daily context of crisis and problem solving;
- ✓ To examine key issues in the school system's past, in order to make sense of how such issues were handled and to identify the norms which affect how the organization may function in the future;
- ✓ To perform a critical scan of categorical functions:
  1. Policy and Governance
  2. Human Resources and Business Operations
  3. Budget, Finance, and School Funding
  4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
  5. Student Academic Performance
  6. Special Education
  7. Technology
  8. Safety and Security
  9. Leadership, Management, and Supervision of Staff
  10. Education Program Partners
  11. Communication, Customer Service, Parent Community Relations
- ✓ To identify the tasks which need to be done and to prioritize them; and
- ✓ To establish how these tasks should be accomplished.

### Specific Objectives of the Entry Plan Process

- ✓ To examine the ground rules and procedures which have governed how the School Committee has conducted business in the past.
- ✓ To develop with the School Committee a set of ground rules and procedures that will govern how we operate in the future.
- ✓ To determine the *ends* which the Committee believes we should concentrate on in the next year and years then to ask the Committee to prioritize them considering these findings and recommendations.
- ✓ To develop a needs assessment relative to the *predicted ends* priorities of the School Committee and provide the educational leader's identification of means to achieve the ends.
- ✓ To add a needs assessment based on a "critical categories scan" management system in form of a set of findings and recommendations
- ✓ To develop work plans for the predictable tasks which District and school leadership need to undertake next year and in the next several years – activities that are not substantially dependent upon additional funding.
- ✓ To develop recommendations relative to the completion of the *Strategic Plan* and predicted ends of the School Committee needs assessments that will require a substantial investment of money (compared to funding for the 2006-2007 school year) in a five year time frame.
- ✓ To determine what the key issues are for teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders, and,
- ✓ To develop preliminary plans to address the important issues of key stakeholders.

### Interviews and Events

The following interviews and events provided rich dialogue opportunities with key stakeholders and provided a most significant basis from which to draw impressions about the school system, school community, and the City:

- ✓ School Committee Members (individual interviews and ongoing subcommittee work)
- ✓ School Administration (individual interviews and regular individual and group meetings)
- ✓ Selected City Administration and Key Department Heads (8 individual interviews)
- ✓ Key School Personnel (10 individual interviews and multiple conversations)
- ✓ 35 Parents ± (individual semi-structured interviews)
- ✓ 45 Parents± (extended conversation with recordable information and advice)
- ✓ 25 Teachers± (individual semi-structured interviews)
- ✓ 25 Classroom Visits± (in company of building administrator)
- ✓ High School Department Chairs (individual and group interviews)
- ✓ NTA President and Executive Board (individual and group interviews, regular meetings)
- ✓ PTO Presidents (individual and group interviews, regular meetings)
- ✓ PTO General Meetings at Each School (forum style)
- ✓ Open Houses at Bresnahan, Brown, Kelley, R.A.N. (multiple mini-interviews)

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- ✓ Newburyport Education Foundation Executive Board and Members (5 individual interviews and several meetings and Board meetings)
- ✓ Newburyport Business Education Coalition (5 individual interviews and several meetings and Board meetings)
- ✓ Special Education Parent Advisory Council (attended meeting)
- ✓ Meetings with I.C. Principal Reardon and R.V.C.S. Director Dale Bishop
- ✓ Police Citizen's Advisory Council (presented to meeting)
- ✓ Beacon Coalition (participated in vision workshop)
- ✓ Varsity Athletics Events (5± games and Wall of Fame Dinner)
- ✓ Chamber of Commerce (multiple meetings)
- ✓ Field Trip to MFA in Boston- Docents with 4<sup>th</sup> graders, H.S. Students
- ✓ Newburyport Learning Enrichment Center (multiple Board Meetings and events)
- ✓ Multiple School Social events and Playground Meet and Greets

#### Document Review

The following documents were collected and reviewed as part of the entry plan process:

- ✓ Education Strategic Plan (2003-2008)
- ✓ Historical District and School Improvement Plans
- ✓ School Committee Policies
- ✓ School System Policy Manual (Administrative Policies)
- ✓ *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* (Jossey-Bass, 1990; 2nd edition, 1997; 3rd edition, 2006)
- ✓ "Le modèle Policy Governance et les organismes sans but lucratif." *Gouvernance Revue Internationale* (Canada), Vol. 2 - No. 1, Winter 2001, pp. 30-48. Co-authored with Miriam Carver (Translated to English).
- ✓ School Committee Meeting Minutes and Agendas
- ✓ School Committee Newsletters
- ✓ City of Newburyport-Whittier Vo-Tech Agreement
- ✓ Budget Documents (FY06 & FY07)
- ✓ Capital Plan
- ✓ Administrator Job Descriptions and Evaluations
- ✓ Administrator Personnel Files
- ✓ Collective Bargaining Agreements and Grievances
- ✓ Teacher Evaluation Process and Products
- ✓ Elementary Building Needs Reports and Documents
- ✓ English Language Arts Curriculum Review Report (June 2006)
- ✓ Curriculum Mapping Guidance Documents and Books
- ✓ Educational Quality and Accountability Office Communications and Documents
- ✓ Communication Survey Completed by Parents 11/06
- ✓ Historical MCAS Performance Data
- ✓ Curriculum Guides
- ✓ District Professional Development Plan
- ✓ Student-Parent Handbooks

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- ✓ High School Program of Studies
- ✓ New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Accreditation Reports  
(Newburyport High School)
- ✓ Special Education Appeals, Hearings and Decisions
- ✓ Coordinated Program Review and Corrective Action Requirements(2006)

The focus of an administrative scan is to find problems. This report is of that nature and should not be misread to mean that the author views the Newburyport school system as mostly a collection of needs improvement areas. To the contrary, this is a good school system with much strength and many areas of excellence. If my children were younger and I lived in town, they would attend these schools and I wouldn't feel just good about it – I'd feel *great* about it. I would also recognize that there is always room for improvement and there is always the imperative to get better. Please read these findings and recommendations with that in mind.

### ***Major Findings***

This Entry Plan process has allowed me to interact with a significant number of stakeholders, outside the normal daily routine of the school system, in order to focus on areas of concern. In addition, the document review provided me with a history of what is already in place, as well as how effectively these materials are utilized. Major findings of this process include the following:

#### *Policy and Governance*

1. The Newburyport School Committee governance structure (Carver Model) is a progressive one that supports the letter and spirit of educational reform in Massachusetts far better than traditional models that can lead school committees to inappropriate micro-management. In this respect, Newburyport is ahead of the vast majority of municipalities in the state.
2. The Newburyport School Committee has an excellent understanding of the respective roles of the School Committee and Superintendent as evidenced by the open, direct, and respectful communication from all members to the Superintendent and his administrative staff. This bodes well for the positive direction of the school system. Continuing to work together with the singular purpose of improving education for our students ensures that we will not squander the energy needed to make continuous improvement despite the most challenging of budgetary environments.
3. The cohesive long-range vision set forth in the Education Strategic Plan in 2003 has served the District well in both direction and focus. The Strategic Plan, Mission, and Core Values have real meaning for the staff and these are truly guiding practice and decision-making to a greater degree than I have seen in other school districts and organizations. This is a testament to the good work of all who participated in making the plan during 2002 and 2003. The previous Superintendent's commitment to the plan and her leadership toward its objectives resulted in tangible and significant improvement in many key areas over the past three years of the plan.
4. The District's Administrative Policy Manual requires a complete review to ensure that all policies are consistent with law, regulations, and School Committee policies. Several

critical areas have been identified for revision and a preliminary review identified the need to “fill in” where essential policies do not exist.

*Human Resources, Finance and Business Operations including  
Transportation, Facilities Maintenance and Food Services*

5. Newburyport employs a significant number of outstanding educational leaders and professional teachers. During classroom visits, I have witnessed truly outstanding teaching and learning, as well as a focus on students and their needs. We have outstanding employees in every support area and I am continually impressed and sometimes surprised by the level of commitment to the job and to the organization. This is the most committed work force that I have ever served with. Human Resources are what drive excellent education and no more critical function occurs in a school district.
6. The District has no human resource department and has no single position that is dedicated to human resources management. Functions are divided between an administrative assistant, the Assistant Superintendent, the four Principals, and the Superintendent. The lack of a single-focused manager of basic functions has resulted in areas of non-compliance, a lack of appropriate checks and balances in key areas, and low efficiency in terms of managing routine tasks such as annual hiring cycles, teacher credential management, and administration of employee leave. What may have been an adequate infrastructure for human resources management ten years ago is wholly inadequate in an environment where the human resources mandated reporting on compliance issues has increased enormously in recent years and when the supply and demand constraints on attracting and retaining quality staff becomes increasingly more difficult each year.
7. The Administrative Assistant who has core function responsibilities also has significant responsibilities for managing financial software and personnel software systems, salary administration, budget transfers and amendments in MUNIS, preparation of salary roll-overs, creation of reports and data entry to support the Assistant Superintendent’s functions, tracking and reporting of staff attendance and staff leave. The person in this position is extremely competent and works beyond paid hours to complete critical tasks. State and federal reporting alone require hundreds of hours of staff time annually and it gets worse each and every year.
8. Human resources management, including recruiting, hiring, credential management, benefits administration, leave administration, attendance administration, and attendant records administration and also including myriad miscellaneous responsibility areas needs to be an improvement focus in order to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness and to better limit organization liability.
9. Significant improvements have been made in finance and budget operations in the last three years consistent with the expectations set forth in the Strategic Plan and with the guidance of the School Committee. An annual revenue report is now published, the budget process is much more transparent, budget reports and presentations are now

much more in the line of best practices and a Procedures Manual that guides operations was produced by the Assistant Superintendent.

10. Bi-monthly meetings between the Assistant Superintendent and the City Auditor now contribute to better communication between school administration and City Hall.
11. Regular "Joint-Ed" meetings between the School Committee and the City Council have improved that line of communication, especially in regard to finance and budget.
12. The District's "chart of accounts" needs reformatting and changes in GASB and Department of Education reporting requirements require retooling of accounting and reporting systems.
13. A five-year Capital Plan has been developed to aid planning and prioritization.
14. Excellent strides have been made in recent years in the development of a facilities Preventative Maintenance Program and a system that has resulted in numerous improvements in maintenance and repair of buildings. Cost efficiencies have been achieved, particularly in HVAC maintenance and repair.
15. Student Transportation is provided mainly through contracted services with a local company. The contractor is performing well.
16. Transportation fees are one of the most unpopular fees for parents in the community.
17. The school system employee that performs routine transportation functions (Administrative Secretary to the Assistant Superintendent) including bus registration, accounting, and records keeping is spread much too thinly across this and many other responsibilities in the human resources and business operations area. See related findings above.
18. The system does not own or license transportation software that would enable better transportation planning, efficiencies, and customer service.
19. The Assistant Superintendent has a broad range of responsibilities including oversight of finance, business operations, personnel, facilities, transportation, food services, and civil rights administration. The Assistant Superintendent manages these areas extraordinarily well, but is limited in the time available to further develop the system infrastructure in each area noted above.
20. The in-house food service has not been comprehensively evaluated in recent memory. Such evaluations should be undertaken every few years to determine the levels of quality, participation, price, and cost effectiveness.
21. The District's new Wellness Policy has not yet been implemented.

#### *Budget, Finance and School Funding*

22. The purchasing power of the District's budget has been significantly cut in each of the last four years diminishing services, eliminating programs and positions, negatively

impacting educational opportunities for students and negatively impacting the Strategic Plan goals for District and school improvement.

23. The City is caught in an economic squeeze where growth has slowed and the ability to raise new revenues through taxes, without an operational budget override, is severely limited.
24. Severe overcrowding at the elementary level, most notably at the Bresnahan School that was built for 350 students but that now houses 550 students has been studied and talked about for years, but has not been moved forward to the voters for a vote necessary to authorize a debt exclusion to fund new school construction. Many of the 550 students are housed in ten modular classrooms, two of which are in failing condition. The education of a generation of students is being compromised.
25. State and federal governments continue to fail in providing sufficient funding for local education resulting in an overdependence on the local property tax to fund education, yet state and local governments continue to mandate additional school programs and requirements that cost districts more money.

#### *Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment*

26. The 2003 Strategic Plan wisely focused energy on student achievement and the vision for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in 2008 was progressive, aggressive, and remains an essential vision.
27. The District is significantly behind in the development of a standards-based platform of curriculum and assessment that will be essential for the District to advance student achievement. Documentation of consensus curriculum is only emerging at the High School and Middle School and is in early stages of development at the elementary level.
28. The District made a commitment to an established methodology of building a standards-based curriculum platform three years ago. This was a wise decision that has resulted in progress, but progress has been slow due primarily to time constraints.
29. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is the only standardized achievement measure utilized in the District with the exception of the recent introduction of DIBELS in kindergarten and first grade.
30. Parents in the City have not generally become familiar with the MCAS, how it is constructed, related to the curriculum frameworks, and what purpose the frameworks serves. There is some confusion among parents about whether the school system “supports or buys in to MCAS” and what the options are in respect to preparing students to take the MCAS tests.
31. Common assessments are not yet well understood in the District with some limited examples in practice. The most progress has been made at the High School – progress fueled by NEASC work and by commendable faculty/department chair leadership. A full-time Technology/Curriculum Coordinator for three years, a position eliminated in the FY07 budget, helped the Middle School to make significant progress. Examples of

common assessments across the District are still limited to final exams, some mid-terms, and some book/novel common assessments.

32. No comprehensive K-12 assessment of time on learning in each academic discipline has been conducted resulting in inconsistencies across grade levels and in instructional progressions. One example is the average of fifty minutes per day allotted for mathematics instruction in grades 5-8 where a reform math program that requires a minimum of seventy minutes per day is implemented. The National Council Teachers of Mathematics has taken the position that a minimum of one hour of mathematics instruction at the middle level should be required.
33. There are no District standards for time of instruction in disciplines at the elementary level or middle level and there is substantial inconsistency across grade levels.
34. The literacy program and curriculum in use from K-6 is outdated and inadequate for the needs of current students. This is the number one curricular weakness cited by teachers K-6.
35. Advances in research on the teaching of reading, writing, spelling, listening, and speaking at the elementary level have not fully informed instructional practices in the District due to the absence of supporting programs and materials.
36. Elementary teachers have been creative in supplementing the existing program and have compensated for its inadequacy with their own professional development activities, by purchasing materials and by inventing their own units and assessments. This effort has maintained a high quality of instruction but is not sustainable beyond the present.
37. The Connected Math Program (CMP) used in grades 5-8 has been replaced by the publisher with an updated and improved edition. No new modules have been purchased to update and upgrade this program.
38. Middle School and High School mathematics course sequences have not been sufficiently coordinated and defined in terms of goals.
39. Algebra is offered to selected eighth-graders only as an after school program.
40. 2006 MCAS performance in mathematics at the middle level indicates substantial non-alignment of instruction with the state curriculum framework.
41. Reduction of foreign language in grades 5-8 has resulted in a substantially different program preparatory to high school language study. This has led to confusion at both middle and high levels about what should be taught in grades 5-8, how, and what the grade 8 exit standards should be. The foreign language program philosophy of instruction is not clearly articulated or coordinated especially between middle and high school levels.
42. High School foreign language instruction in German and Spanish lags French and other departments in curriculum articulation and materials. These two languages have difficulty using the excellent language lab effectively for want of materials.

43. A significant number of parents and teachers believe that Middle School instruction and learning expectations need to be more rigorous across all disciplines.
44. A shortage of vertical planning time for teachers limits the opportunities to minimize the impact of transitions from elementary to middle level and from middle level to high school.
45. It is hard to find evidence of collaboration between middle school staff and high school staff to develop parallelism in teacher expectations and congruence with assignment type and learning and study strategies, and agreement on the content and skills levels students are expected to have when entering grade 9.
46. School staff and parents cite progress and improvement in transitions over recent years but most acknowledge that the District has a significant way to go.
47. *Parent* anxiety about transition is greatest at the elementary to middle school change. This is not atypical. Negative myths about middle school exist in most school systems and seem to be quite alive in Newburyport. A number of middle school parents have told me that their fears were mostly unjustified and the District needs to do a better job of working more effectively with parents and students and earlier with grade 3 and grade 4 parents to smooth this transition.
48. Many *students* seem to experience the most difficult transition from grade 8 to high school – also not atypical. The shift from a team-centered looping middle school experience to a departmentalized environment with no team “home base” is a significant adjustment for many ninth graders.
49. The School Committee has been able to hold class size at reasonable levels despite four consecutive years of budget cuts. This is, perhaps, the single most appreciated School Committee priority and action in the last four years by our instructional staff.
50. Staff development is a highly valued activity by professional staff and the District has engaged in excellent initiatives over recent years consistent with the Strategic Plan.
51. Professional development is driven by Central Office.
52. Data has an important but still limited impact on professional development focus.
53. Teachers and administration clearly identify the lack of sufficient contractual professional development time as an impediment to positive systemic change.
54. Recent budgets have not supported teacher attendance at out-of-district professional workshops, seminars, and conferences. Fortunately, foundation grants have provided some funding.
55. Professional Learning Communities, as a concept, has been supported through professional development activities but time constraints have prevented their full development.
56. The absence of common planning time at all levels except middle impedes the development of learning communities and progress on the establishment of a guaranteed curriculum.

57. There is a clear need for more professional development programming for non-teacher employees.
58. Private and foundation grants and contributions continue to provide an incredible level of support for professional activities. Most notably, the Newburyport Education Foundation, the Newburyport Education Business Coalition, and the Swasey and Arakelian Foundations provide for professional learning opportunities not supported by the local education budget.
59. Parent-teacher organizations provide important monetary support for professional learning and instructional tools for teachers.

#### *Student Academic Performance*

60. As described in our November presentation on MCAS to the School Committee, student academic performance is mixed across the grades and disciplines. Student performance rises dramatically in Mathematics at grade ten. The instructional staff is not pleased with the overall performance and everyone believes that our students should be performing at higher levels.
61. Many parents have also shared concerns about MCAS scores, particularly performances in Middle School mathematics.
62. The District has few measures of student achievement in place, other than MCAS.

#### *Special Education*

63. The District's special education program provides in-District education for a number of severely disabled students who, in most other districts, would be in out of town placements at some distance from Newburyport. These home-grown programs are outstanding and include ABA programs, Language Based Programs, IDC Program, and the Post-Graduate Program.
64. The Massachusetts Department of Education, Office of Program Quality Assurance conducted a Comprehensive Program Review (CPR) of special education in the spring of 2006. The report was substantially and significantly positive and included a clear corrective action requirement to remedy instances where the program does not meet standards.
65. Substantial progress has been made in addressing the corrective action items from the CPR.
66. There are too many examples of substantially separate instruction for students with disabilities across the District. This is also true in some instances of individual and small group interventions in regular education.
67. Technology support for the delivery of special education instruction is below standards.

68. Special Education continues to excel at anticipating low-incident populations and developing tailored programs to provide education at home in our own district.

*Regular Education Programs Serving Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties*

69. Section 504 program and process was extensively out of compliance with law and regulations as cited in the CPR. Policy and practice differed from school to school and resulted in over identification of eligible students and inappropriate accommodation plans. Substantial progress is being made in the development of a compliant and best-practices model.
70. The District's pre-referral program, or STAT as it is called, lacks district cohesion. There are examples of good practice but there is a lack of best practice across the District. A good pre-referral program positively supports special education and therefore this is a critical area for improvement.
71. The system has no remedial mathematics support for elementary students having difficulty acquiring fundamental math skills in regular classroom instruction.

*Technology*

72. The new Middle School Science Labs are a shining example of extraordinary community support (NEF, Institution for Savings, et. al.) and the labs are truly cutting edge technology.
73. In the last five years the District has made excellent strides towards building an effective technology infrastructure to support the integration of technology into instruction and to serve the administrative computing needs of the school system. However, progress has been reversed by recent budget cuts and the lack of a viable technology component replacement program. The District is at current risk of losing the gains in current years and falling far behind today's standards as established by the Massachusetts Department of Education.
74. Salaries that support technology integration, contractual services that support infrastructure, and hardware that provides teacher and student access, have been significantly cut over the past three years. The elimination of the Middle School technology integrator position in the FY'07 budget has seriously compromised the good progress being made at the Middle School. Additionally, the loss of this position resulted in the need to change the remaining elementary technology integrator from a K-4 to a K-8 position, severely compromising service to all three elementary schools. Elementary technology integration and access to technology is a decade behind where it should be. At one time, there were three K-4 elementary tech integrators.
75. The state standard ratio for technology teachers to teachers is one technology teacher per 40 - 80 instructional staff. The District ratio was 1:51 in FY'06; it is 1:138 in FY'07. Teachers are using less technology; use of labs has decreased and requests for classroom integration support have declined. The current one technology integrator position for

K-8 is totally inadequate to maintain the status quo despite the fact that we have a very talented and dedicated teacher in that position.

76. Internet speed is not sufficient to allow elementary teachers to utilize curriculum mapping software without frustration and surrender. Curriculum mapping is a critical function that needs to move forward. It appears that internet speed is also going to be a negative factor in the use of MCAS remediation web-based programs by students.
77. Internet access speed at the elementary schools is slow enough to discourage its use by teachers. We hope that a new City initiative for an enhanced fiber optic network infrastructure, to include the schools, will improve the speed.
78. District and school web pages lack robustness and lack the utility to make them positive communication tools for parents and the public. We are introducing some changes in the near future that will improve sites significantly, but there is not staff with the time to maintain and update sites on a consistent basis. Please see customer service findings regarding websites and the District's internal telephone system.
79. The High School, with the best technology in place of all schools, is at risk due to aging computers that are showing their age (5 years). All of the High School computers will go out of warranty in June 2007. There is no budgetary commitment to a technology replacement plan. These excellent resources and the high levels of technology integration in evidence at the High School are in jeopardy for lack of a funded replacement plan.
80. This is the only school district of which I am aware that has had the internal expertise to develop its own student information management system, NIMS. This has not only worked well but it has saved the District thousands of dollars. In the current trend of integration of data systems to be required by the DOE and in light of internal needs to better integrate student data systems, employee data systems, scheduling systems, special education IEP software, student health records management and the like, there is great need for a comprehensive commercial software program to ensure effective operations, data efficiencies, and compliance with increasingly complex state and federal reporting requirements.

### *Safety and Security*

81. The suicide of a High School student and the murder of a Middle School teacher in recent years presented extreme school crises. The community, led by the school system, responded to these crises in an exemplary manner demonstrating the capacity to respond quickly and intelligently in actual crisis situations.
82. The District has published an emergency plan that is quite comprehensive and it would prove useful in many emergency situations.
83. The emergency plan was developed by the District without sufficient collaboration of public safety agencies and first responders. This is an inherent weakness.

84. Tabletop drills involving school administration, police, and fire personnel have been conducted in recent years.
85. School crisis teams have existed but have not practiced or drilled emergency scenarios. School teams have not universally included teachers.
86. Site-based building security assessments that include perimeter security lock down readiness, and communication tools have not been regularly conducted.
87. There has been no regular planning and assessment meetings that include schools, public safety, and public health agencies.

*Leadership, Management, and Supervision of Staff*

88. The present leadership team has tremendous potential to produce exceptional results. There is a sound blend of successful and experienced administrators and talented newcomers to administration. This is a high-functioning team of professionals much better than a new Superintendent should expect to inherit.
89. The current leadership team is committed to openness and honesty in all transactions with District staff, parents, and the public. I believe we have 100% buy-in with that philosophy.
90. One K-12 curriculum administrator position is insufficient curriculum staffing to coordinate curriculum development and implementation in a manner consistent with advancing student achievement. This is especially true at the elementary and middle levels where there is no department chair structure. The position is also over-burdened with non-curriculum and instruction responsibilities that have piled up the position through years of staff reductions.
91. One principal serving as the administrator for Brown and Kelley Schools is a less than optimal situation that impedes staff and instructional development at both schools. There is more liability exposure when there is no administrator on site at one school, which is always the case. Strengths of the incumbent principal may partially overcome this deficiency but this is not an ideal situation.
92. Central Office operations are supported by staff who have excellent multi-tasking abilities and who are committed to working whatever time is necessary to accomplish what must be done. There is increased opportunity for error and omission in operations as a result.
93. Some areas that require high level maintenance and time on task are compromised for lack of available time. Continuously increasing complexity and additional unfunded mandates make "doing more with less" an empty proposition.
94. Special education coordinators lack the clerical support necessary to their effective function. This compromises the IEP process and the support of special education teachers and therapists.

### *Education Program Partners*

95. Newburyport Adult and Community Education offers a very diverse selection of courses and learning opportunities to the Greater Newburyport Community. This well run organization has very high participation of citizens from all age groups. It is wonderful to see our High School full of eager learners in the evenings; it is a wonderful partnership of combined resources that serves the community well.
96. The Newburyport Learning Enrichment Center (NLEC) mentors students and provides outstanding educational support for students who are struggling academically, emotionally and socially. This program is a safety net for a population of students that has historically low graduation rates from Newburyport High School. The school system is fortunate to be able to partner with an organization that serves such a crucial need of our students.

### *Communication, Customer Service, Parent-Community Relations*

Note: This section is not suggested by the administrative manual used to organize this report.. However, the themes included in this section are so prevalent, recurring and, I believe, important, that I have included these themes as a major section.

97. A significant number of parents has expressed concern about the hospitality of the school system in regard to parents who visit schools or who wish to meet with teachers or conduct school or central office business in relation to their child.
98. A significant number of parents has expressed concern about communication, or more precisely the lack of *effective* communication from the schools and Central Office in regard to school events, school issues, and school and school district news.
99. A significant number of parents has expressed a lack of trust in the school system to provide honest responses to questions and complaints.
100. A significant number of parents has expressed a concern that the school system is not always *open* to the discussion of problems and issues that it faces.
101. As a result of hearing these concerns over four months of interviews and conversations, I conducted an e-mail survey, a "Parent Communication Survey", of District parents and received 275 survey responses, a significant sample. I will categorize the responses below.
102. Parents recognize excellent examples of teacher communication about their children's progress and about what is happening in the classroom, but they want more communication and more consistent communication through web sites, newsletters, phone calls and progress reports.
103. When asked to rank each of 15 different communication means from least to most useful in communicating important school news, 58% of respondents identified Ed-Connect telephone messages as most useful, 54% identified list-servs as most useful, 45% ranked parent conferences as most useful, and 44% identified backpack flyers as

most useful. School newsletters and open houses were ranked most useful by greater than 30% of respondents.

104. Open-ended responses reiterated the themes of the schools and District needing to be open and honest in public matters and to be open to and not defensive about constructive criticism.
105. Many open-ended responses were highly positive in regard to school communication and responsiveness and the survey suggests to me a bi-polar response on these questions, parents are very pleased or not generally pleased.
106. When asked, "What advice would you give to a new Superintendent that wants to communicate effectively with parents?", a significant number of respondents emphasized the importance of visibility and availability of the Superintendent.
107. Respondents found District and school web pages of little use in problem solving and getting information about school events and programs.
108. In regard to needed information, respondents ranked 10 categories of topics from greatest to least as follows: 1. School and district academic performance, 2. Budget and funding issues, 3. Overcrowding and building needs, 4. School safety planning, 5. Curriculum initiatives, 6. Parent volunteer opportunities, 7. Student and team accomplishments, 8. School Improvement Plans, 9. The District's Strategic Plan, and 10. School Committee and District Policies.
109. A great deal of unsolicited but useful information and opinion was offered by respondents and the data will be made available to the Committee at a later date.
110. The school system internal telephone system is antiquated, does not provide enough voicemail boxes or access lines, is difficult to program, and is inadequate to support a high level of customer service for callers.

## **Recommendations**

### *Policy and Governance*

1. The School Committee work plan should include the annual review of the Committee's ends policy to annually review the Committee's work in goal setting, reviewing the District and school improvement plans, and performing the evaluation of the Superintendent.
2. The school administration should systematically review and revise the District Administrative Policy Manual to ensure conformity with School Committee ends and executive limitation policies and compliance with law and regulations.
3. The School Committee and Superintendent should review the Strategic Plan FY08 actions and timeframes and review the Strategic Plan goals that have not been completed and the Committee's ends policies. Using this review, the School Committee should consider making a bridge document of focused goals including important unfinished goals and newly identified needs and goals that can form a work plan for FY08 until the next iteration of the Strategic Plan is developed.

### *Human Resources, Finance and Business Operations including Transportation, Facilities Maintenance and Food Services*

4. The District should employ an external evaluator to review the human resources tasks that must be completed to support a District that wants to move student achievement and supporting structures to the next level and evaluate the current staffing, roles, and workflows. The evaluator should look across both human resources and business operations roles as they presently overlap in staff assignments and roles.
5. The District should invest in the change process and additional staffing, if required, to achieve greater human resources management capacity and effectiveness.
6. Excellent progress in improving finance and budget processes and reporting should be continued with an extension of the 2003-2008 Strategic Plan, new actions to include bringing systems to higher standards of practice and developing infrastructure that will ensure transparency, accuracy, and user-friendly reporting for internal and external purposes.
7. Staffing that supports the Assistant Superintendent across multiple areas of responsibility should be reviewed in the human resources evaluation noted above.
8. Purchasing systems should be reviewed for efficiency and effectiveness and trainings conducted for new administration and selected staff.
9. The District should continue to make efforts to improve maintenance of facilities as recent improvements have positively impacted safety, appearance, and staff morale. Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between the quality and appearance of facilities and learning.

10. The District should contract with a food services expert consultant once every three years to evaluate the program and compare food service options, i.e., in-house or contracted services.
11. The District's new Wellness Policy should be implemented in the spring of 2007. It's implementation should be closely tied to food service policies and guidelines and clearly address food allergies.

*Budget, Finance and School Funding*

12. Adequate funding should be provided to the school system in order to maintain a status quo with the opportunity for incremental improvement.
13. In a five year time frame, increases in school funding should substantially restore budget reductions and cuts of the last four years and be sufficient to provide opportunities for dramatic improvement in student achievement by financially allowing the implementation of the recommendations of this report that require additional budgetary support.

*Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment*

14. The 2003 Strategic Plan wisely focused energy on student achievement and the vision for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in 2008 was progressive, aggressive, and remains an essential vision. This focus should be updated and extended into the future.
15. The District should remain fully committed to achieving a guaranteed and viable curriculum in all disciplines as soon as possible through the curriculum mapping process.
16. The District should provide significantly more contractual time for teachers to do the work necessary to achieve a standards-based guaranteed curriculum by building as many early-release days as practicable into each annual school calendar and by providing additional funding for substitute teachers that would support the school day release of teacher work groups for the completion of critical tasks.
17. The school system should consider the strategic placement of additional standardized achievement tests to supplement MCAS. For example, a standardized and diagnostic reading test at the end of grade one and at the end of grade two would help to identify students who have not acquired basic literacy skills critical at these ages and help to target interventions that would help to ensure that all students are reading in grade three.
18. As with curriculum mapping, the development of common assessments at all grade levels and in all disciplines is essential to the achievement of a guaranteed and viable curriculum. The school system needs to support the development of common assessment by providing more time as recommended above with curriculum mapping.

19. The District should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the time devoted to instruction in each subject area at each grade level and set minimum standards appropriate to each grade level that support the learning expectations for students and the achievement of standards included in curriculum frameworks. This alignment activity may require significant adjustments in school schedules and activities.
20. The K-6 elementary reading program needs to be replaced with either a research-based program published after 2006 or the current program should be replaced by a comprehensive literacy initiative and supported with the purchase of leveled texts.
21. Teams of K-6 teachers should be organized to evaluate potential literacy program options and to redefine the learning expectations for literacy in each grade. This process should be completed by the spring of 2008 and potential programs piloted at that time.
22. A new K-6 literacy program should be in place as soon as possible after a selection is made, but no later than the fall of 2009. If the District cannot afford a K-6 implementation, and only in that case, a phased approach of implementation should begin no later than fall 2009. Grades ahead of the phase-in will need additional professional development and materials in order to receive the benefits that are provided by a phased-in approach to implementation.
23. Literacy instruction in grades six through eight should be advanced through focused professional development in "reading and writing in the content areas" for all teachers in the grade span.
24. Mathematics curriculum and course sequence in grades 7-10 should be evaluated by the math teachers, secondary Principals, and the Curriculum Director. Curriculum and course sequences should be aligned with the goal of maximizing opportunities for students to progress to advanced levels of mathematics in high school and aligned with the mathematics framework. The secondary Principals must have the authority and responsibility for the leadership and completion of this critical task.
25. The Connected Math Program should be updated with revised units and at the same time the units of instruction must be better aligned with the framework and MCAS assessments. Teachers must be supported with time and resources to accomplish this goal and the Principal, supported by the Curriculum Director, must ensure that this task is completed. The unit updating must be supported in the next budget.
26. The system should find the means to provide coordination of foreign language curriculum and instruction from grades five through twelve. The means should be supported by the budget if necessary.
27. Appropriate instructional program materials need to be purchased for high school Spanish and French instruction and each curriculum must play catch-up in curriculum mapping.
28. The Middle School faculty and administration should discuss the perception that more rigor is needed in Middle School curriculum and instruction and do a self study of this if warranted.

29. Transition of students between elementary and middle levels and between middle and high school levels must continue to improve with continued focus on transition planning and activities. I recommend that transition to Middle School begin with programming for grade three parents.
30. Critical to good transition from Middle School to High School is closer collaboration between Middle School and High School teachers in regard to student learning expectations and how these should differ between eighth and ninth grades, agreement about work and study strategies that can be taught in Middle School and continue to be reinforced by High School teachers, eighth grade preparation for High School workload and homework demands, and, most importantly, grade seven and eight content alignment with the grade 9-11 six semester sequence in the run-up to the eleventh grade History MCAS.
31. The lack of vertical planning time and intra-level teacher curriculum alignment time fails to support good academic transitions. The curriculum mapping process will remedy this but; again, progress is limited by opportunity. Again, I recommend a significant increase in time as can only be provided by additional teacher release time. This must be a system priority.
32. I wish the School Committee the wisdom of Solomon in attempting to maintain reasonable class sizes without cutting programs, course offerings, or critical infrastructure if there is no school funding crisis relief. I will make recommendations, as it is to my role to do so, but ultimately they are budget choices at the discretion of the School Committee. I recommend that these difficult decisions, if they are necessary, be made with a maximum of staff and public input and that recent improvements in transparency over the past several budgets be continued and even strengthened.
33. The school system should move away from Central Office driven professional development and shift to site-based strategies. Schools will move toward developing methodologies for school staff to use data to identify needed interventions likely to raise student achievement or improve other important school functions. Most interventions will require staff development to further the goals of the intervention. Schools will need to have direct control over resources (time and money) in order to implement this research supported model of school improvement. Schools will have more direct control in aligning resources with School Improvement Plans (SIPs). I recommend a five year phased implementation of this model beginning in SY 2007-2008.
34. There is a need for a better professional development program for educational support personnel, as well as other groups (e.g., custodians, clerical personnel) within the system.
35. I recommend that we continue to be very grateful to the NEF, NEBC, Swasey, Arakelian, the PTOs and other benefactors whose generosity provides for so much staff development that would not be supported by the LEA budget. We need to constantly remind these organizations about how great a difference they make for our teachers and students.

### *Student Academic Performance*

36. Recommendations for improving curriculum and instruction are one and the same with those for improving student academic performance.
37. The school system should have measures of student achievement, other than MCAS, in place at different strategic points.
38. The District should provide information and workshops to better support parent understanding about MCAS and the school system's role in preparing students to take MCAS tests. All parents need to understand that MCAS is here to stay and that the District cannot opt out of its provisions or do anything but prepare students to perform their best.
39. Newburyport should seek to rank in the top third of school districts in the Commonwealth in all MCAS performance assessments.
40. The District should develop internal academic benchmarks to measure improvement. These should include benchmarks for graduation rate, percentage of students meeting MCAS competency, number of students taking AP courses, AP exam scores, SAT participation and performance, college acceptance ratios, currency of programs and instructional materials, Middle School math opportunities for advanced study, percentage of applicants to Whittier accepted, number of students competing in inter-district academic competitions, etc.
41. The District should establish external benchmark communities to measure improvement and to collaborate with benchmarked communities on best instructional practices and resource procurement strategies.

### *Special Education*

42. The District should sustain the progress being made in addressing the corrective action plan developed in the 2006 Coordinated Program Review.
43. The District should continue to support special education initiatives to develop in-district programs for low-incidence populations.
44. The District needs to move to full inclusion and should provide the necessary professional development and resources to support this transition. This is an ethical mandate.
45. The District should budget the technology required to deliver special education services in the most effective manner.

### *Regular Education Programs Serving Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties*

46. The District needs to reengineer its 504 program to bring it into compliance with law and consistent with good practice. This should be done immediately.

47. The system should review and revise its pre-referral practices to establish consistencies among the schools, to share and incorporate best practices and to ensure compliance with law and regulation.
48. The system should add remedial mathematics support for elementary students failing to acquire fundamental math skills in regular classroom instruction.

### *Technology*

49. The school system should restore technology integration positions to 2003-2004 levels or risk backsliding in technology use to levels from which it will be difficult to recover.
50. The District must find a way to fund the technology replacement plan or risk falling to levels from which it is impossible to recover.
51. The school system should improve its District and school web pages to better serve students, parents and the public.
52. The District must provide better levels of access to computers that access the internet at reasonable speed for elementary educators and students.
53. The District should identify and acquire through licensing a professionally developed and commercially published software solution to data management and scheduling needs to ensure systems integration, operational effectiveness, efficiency, and compliance with state and federal reporting requirements.

### *Safety and Security*

54. The school system should review and revise District emergency response guidelines in partnership with public safety and public health officials and first responders.
55. The District should convene and support a City-wide School Safety Council comprised of public safety officers, other city officials, health officials, and school personnel that is advisory to the Superintendent on all student and staff health and safety matters, and that will assist the District in preparing for and responding to school emergencies.
56. The District should establish independent crisis response teams at each school with differentiated roles for team members.
57. The system should initiate school level planning and practicing of emergency scenarios progressing to School Safety Council led unannounced drills.
58. Schools should conduct annual site-based school safety assessments and document priorities to better secure building perimeters and lockdown readiness as well as identifying other safety issues.
59. The District should develop comprehensive site surveys of each school's critical emergency data, personnel, and special needs for distribution to public safety departments for the purpose of having this information in every police and fire emergency vehicle.

60. The school system should continue to conduct tabletop drills with the involvement of police, fire, health and hospital personnel.
61. The District should annually evaluate and report progress in emergency planning at the individual building level and at the District/City level.

*Leadership, Management, and Supervision of Staff*

62. The District needs to increase the number of curriculum support personnel, especially at the elementary and middle levels to provide adequate support of curriculum initiatives and the development of a guaranteed and viable curriculum at all levels and in all disciplines.
63. The system should restore an administrative position to the Brown/Kelley district in the form of a ten month Assistant Principal.
64. The system should initiate an external review of Central Office tasks, staffing, and workflow (also see Human Resources, Business Operations and Transportation recommendations). This should include the non-curriculum tasks assigned to the Curriculum Director.
65. The District should invest in the change process and additional staffing, if required, to achieve greater capacity and effectiveness in Central Office operations in order to better support the primary mission of the school system, student achievement.
66. Adequate clerical support should be provided to Special Education Coordinators.

*Education Program Partners*

67. The District should continue to collaborate with, support, and pursue higher mutual goals with our education partners.

*Communication, Customer Service, and Parent-Community Relations*

68. Each school should regularly gather data from parents through formal surveys to learn parent perceptions of school strengths and weaknesses, to establish baselines for school performance on issues important to parents, and baselines on which to evaluate improvement.
69. Each school administration should lead the staff in addressing parent concerns and making changes in communication and customer service that will lead to increased parent satisfaction. There are great things happening with teachers and kids in each school, we need to put that face forward to the public.
70. Parents need to be guided in how to solve problems and how to get needed information in an efficient manner that is likely to get the desired response from the school system. To this end, the school system should design and develop a Parent Communication Guide in partnership with parent representatives from each level. This guide should be a

“problem solving guide”, explain the “chain of command” for communication and provide a “Frequently Asked Questions” section. The Guide should be widely distributed in print and electronic form and be evaluated for effectiveness on an annual basis.

71. “Trust” and trust in “honesty” are two values that can only be earned by being trustable and honest. There seems, to this newcomer, to be a certain level of cynicism about public entities in general, in the City. Whether this has been earned over the last two-hundred years or not, I’m not certain, but that’s what I’m told. I believe I can speak for the School Committee, the school administration, and the school system staff that honesty and trust are as important to us as to the public, and necessary if we are to grow as an effective team and reach for the next level. I recommend that I end this short editorial and get back to recommendations.
72. District and school web pages need to be significantly upgraded and made content rich in order to serve students, parents, the public, and the staff well.
73. The District should regularly survey parents and the public in an effort of continuous improvement in communication and responsiveness to customers.
74. The District and the School Committee should ensure “smart” communication by utilizing survey data to better target different types of communication through preferred parent communication modes.
75. The District should ensure that District and school offices are accessible and parent-friendly places by evaluating greeting expectations and staff performance expectations and achieving consistently excellent customer service.
76. **The District needs to invest in an internal phone system that serves the current needs of the district.**
77. Each school should develop a communication plan to ensure that communication is effective and efficient and to ensure that all staff is clear about norms and expectations for communications with parents. The system should increase both computer access and technology assistance to support growth in the number of teacher web pages.

### Conclusion

When I first read the District's *Vision Statement for the Year 2008* last February, I was impressed with the values that it expressed. I thought that I would like to be a part of a community that believes in those values and has that vision. Today I can say that not only do I find these values to be widely held and respected, but I see decision processes referring back to the District's Core Values, Mission and Vision.

I believe that since this vision was articulated in 2003, much of the vision is being realized. While this report has focused on findings related to improvement needs, this report was not intended to trumpet the successes, the areas of excellence in teaching and leadership, and the numerous and frequent outstanding student achievements and performances. The report has not focused on the incredible community support, the tremendous and unique commitment of staff to the organization. I did not attempt to demonstrate the overall quality of education in the Newburyport Public Schools in the findings and recommendations. However, I note here that the District needs to do a better job of that on a regular basis. There are great stories to be told.

Much has been achieved in recent years to make the vision real. The District is poised for advancement; our human resources have the capacity, knowledge, and skills to propel that advancement. What has not been fully achieved is, unarguably, attributed in great part to a reduction of human and material resources. The greatest limiting factor going forward is four years of school budgets in the immediate past that have weakened needed infrastructure and curtailed or eliminated programs, services, and maintenance. I cannot end this report on a high note that it is my nature to do, without calling attention to the stark reality of the impact of budget reductions to date and the threat of more reductions. The cumulative effects of reductions are just that, cumulative. Each round cuts deeper into muscle and bone.

We have our challenges, chief among them inadequate funding for schools and overcrowding at the elementary level. As a community, we need to find a way to overcome these problems, the schools alone cannot provide the solutions.

Many of the recommendations here can be implemented without great cost and they will bring significant improvement. Other recommendations require substantial investment of money and cannot be implemented if not funded. In order for the Newburyport Public Schools to go from good to great, I believe that many, or most of the recommendations, need to be implemented in the next five years. To not go forward is to fall further behind. Here lies one of the most important challenges of the decade not only for the schools, but for the Newburyport community.

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## **Vision Statement for the Year 2008** (from the 2003-2008 Education Strategic plan)

*The Vision Statement provided below describes the desired state of the Newburyport Public Schools in the next five to eight years. The Vision is an expression of possibility, yet based enough in reality to be plausible. Its purpose is to inspire those involved and interested individuals to help the Vision become a reality. The Vision provides the basis from which the organization determines priorities and establishes targets for performance.*

Newburyport Public Schools is part of a collaborative, interdependent community that includes students, teachers, administrators, parents, citizens of the city, community organizations and businesses. The public schools are the focal point for education in the community with a primary focus on educating the community's children.

The Newburyport community is guided by leaders who have a shared vision and shared values about the significance of education to the overall community. The shared vision and values are founded in the free flow of information among and between all stakeholders. They work collaboratively to advocate for and seek out the resources to provide for staffing, training, facilities, materials, and equipment that support excellence in instruction and enable students to achieve high standards and expectations.

High standards and expectations are consistently established for every aspect of students' learning. A well-qualified and highly effective teaching force provides instructional experiences that are personalized and challenging for students. All students are respected as individuals, with individual learning styles, who are continuously challenged and supported towards achieving their potential and maximizing their personal growth. Inquiring and reflective teachers share in the leadership of the schools. The school system regularly assesses, questions, and changes its functions and programs to ensure that desirable student learning outcomes are achieved.

All members of the school system are committed to continuous improvement, questioning the status quo, and seeking ongoing renewal of the organization. The school system embraces open dialogue and regularly seeks feedback regarding the effectiveness of its work and is responsive to all stakeholders. The school system is welcoming, respectful, and inclusive, making reasonable and appropriate accommodations for individual strengths and differences.

Students completing their education in Newburyport Public Schools have acquired and demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understandings that exemplify those needed to become productive, responsible, involved citizens of their community and the world. They have a practical understanding of themselves and the world around them. From that understanding they are able to identify their talents and cultivate an appreciation of the opportunities for personal achievement in their lives.