

**Regional School District No. 7  
Northwestern High School  
Northwestern Middle School**

**Five-Year Plan**



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## Introduction

During the 2013-14 school year, the Board of Education requested that administration develop a 5-year plan. This request was in response to the influx of state mandate requirements and the many staffing, facility and other needs of the district. The Board of Education will utilize this comprehensive report containing the identified needs and requirements to make well-planned decisions on how to implement and fund any possible changes. As a result, the recommendations listed below address not only items mandated by the state, but other priorities that will enhance the academic and social foundations provided to our students.

## Teaching and Learning

### *Scheduling*

A challenge exists to create a schedule that will carry the 25 credits necessary for High School Reform. Our current 7-period day schedule cannot accommodate the increase from 23 credits to 25 credits for all students. A district-wide conflict exists, due to the fact that the middle school has an 8 period day, and it would be difficult to fill 9 periods. The sharing of staff between the middle school and high school is a significant issue.

*Administrative Action:* Rather than hiring a consultant to do this work, administration is working to create a schedule in-house. Progress has already been made toward creating a schedule that will meet the needs of both the high school and middle school.

**Recommendation:** Create a high school schedule that can accommodate the 25 credits for all students, as mandated under the High School Reform Act, while minimally impacting the middle school. The schedule should be in place for the 2016 freshmen class.

### *Capstone Project*

The Capstone Project is designed to allow seniors to apply the knowledge they have gained throughout their program of studies to a real world experience in their area of interest. The Capstone Project has three phases; 1) a research paper on their chosen topic; 2) field work or volunteer internship with a mentor relative to their topic; 3) a formal presentation before a panel of professionals where the student will reflect and communicate on their project as a whole.

*Administrative Action:* A careful review of staffing levels and projected class enrollments revealed that an additional English teacher will be needed to institute a Capstone Project. All students are required to take 4 credits of English, the Capstone Project is an additional credit and it will run through the English Department. Research and planning for the Capstone, including an assessment rubric, will take place over the summer of 2015.

**Recommendation:** Implement the Capstone Project for seniors graduating in 2018. One additional language arts teacher is required to accomplish this goal.

### ***High School Reform***

The Secondary School Reform Act was incorporated into law through Public Act 10-111 of Connecticut State Statutes. HS Reform was enacted with the understanding that the requirements that would require funding would not be implemented unless Connecticut received federal Race to the Top funds or it was funded through the CSDE. To date, the state government has not provided funding for the implementation of new graduation requirements. Given all of this, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents and other organizations have taken the position that all new graduation requirements that require funding for implementation be postponed until non-local funding is identified for this purpose. Under current legislation, high school reform requires 25 credits for every graduating senior in the year 2020. These credits must fall within a prescribed subject area clusters. Northwestern currently requires 23 credits to graduate, effective with the Class of 2016. Therefore, we must begin to offer additional credits within the appropriate subject areas.

**Administrative Action:** Rather than hiring a consultant, administration is working with school guidance personal to develop a schedule that will provide enough sections for high school students to carry the 25 credit load.

**Recommendation:** In addition to the mandated Capstone Project and changing to an 8-period schedule, new staff will be required. However, a consolidation of high school classes and/or reassignment of teachers from the middle school may be possible in some areas, due to an expected decrease in enrollment, beginning in 2016-17. Further, Board policy #6146 will need to be revised to reflect this change in credits. The Superintendent should continue to be a strong advocate to revise this mandate to align with current educational practices, such as personalized learning and to advocate for the revisions of requirements where implementation would have a substantial budgetary impact.

### ***Personalized Learning***

Right now, every student must follow an inflexible prescribed course of study to graduate from Northwestern. Research suggests that students would be better served by a more flexible course of study that allows for multiple avenues to achieve credit. This inflexible course of study, where the schedule is dictating courses available, does not allow students to learn based on their unique learning styles and area of interest. A move to more personalized learning experience would better suit students with varying learning styles and provide better career readiness opportunities.

**Administrative Action:** Administration has identified local businesses where students can participate in voluntary internships. Currently, 8 students are participating.

**Recommendation:** Create and interest inventory that pairs student interest with community opportunities to develop a personalized learning structure. An updated program of studies and student success plans will be necessary to reflect these new pathways to graduation.

### ***Additional Vocational Opportunities / Internships***

Currently, Northwestern provides limited vocational opportunities for students. Over the years, the Career Arts Department has been diminished. As a result, students have fewer opportunities to pursue educational pathways that would lead them or prepare them for vocational professions.

**Recommendation:** Reinstate electives in the Career Arts area that would prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs. Implementation of a robust internship program would require a reinstatement of the School to Career Coordinator position to place students, become a liaison between the school and community businesses, to track student hours, and monitor progress.

#### ***Enhance Agricultural Education Program***

The Agricultural Education program is a unique and prideful aspect of the education offered here at Northwestern. The Agricultural Education program offers opportunities to students in the following areas; plant science, animal science, natural resources, forestry, mechanics, food science, biotechnology, career exploration, business management and leadership. The Agricultural Education Consulting Committee has helped to create a replacement plan for their full sized bus, mechanical equipment, and other items needed to provide their program.

***Administrative Action:*** Administration has applied for an Agricultural Education matching grant to replace identified items. The grant has been approved, with the CSDE reimbursing the district 80% of associated costs. However, to be eligible for this grant funding, the district needs to commit to 20% of the costs associated with these purchases.

**Recommendation:** Create a stronger connection between what students are learning in the Ag-Ed program and campus projects. This would include beautification and maintenance of the grounds, growing produce for use in the cafeteria, labeling trees and shrubs/flowers on the grounds, student maintenance of tractors and other equipment, expansion of animal science program, expanding nursery and a turf management program. Continue to advocate for students outside of Ag-Ed to take classes they are interested in, for a STEM credit.

Explore opportunities to integrate Ag Ed programs into the district's communities. Develop relationship between the Ag Ed program and state agencies such as the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

## **Students**

### ***Mental Health***

A growing trend in the number of students in need of emotional support and mental health services has been identified. This includes increases in the number of students with significant anxiety, depression, substance/alcohol abuse, self-harm, suicidal ideation and other behavioral issues. This trend is having a negative impact on the students themselves, their families and our limited support staff. The concern over students with serious mental health issues is a statewide concern. Recently, Joette Katz, Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families released a report titled, "Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan". This report was completed pursuant to Public Act 13-178 which required DCF to develop a plan that identifies steps toward preventing or reducing the long-term negative impact of mental, emotional and behavioral health issues on children.

***Administrative Action:*** Administration has worked to create the Northwest Connecticut Youth and Adolescent Mental Health Coalition in an effort to break down existing barriers facing students and families from accessing support services. Through administrative efforts, Charlotte Hungerford Hospital is now holding counseling groups at school for students in need of services. This service comes initially at no cost, but over time very low costs may be



associated with this program. Administration is also pursuing legislative changes that will provide funding to hire additional school counselors.

**Recommendation:** Develop and continue the Northwest Connecticut Youth and Adolescent Mental Health Coalition to: 1) support our students by connecting them with regional support services; 2) work with legislators to improve laws surrounding adolescent and mental health issues and 3) provide greater communications to families about mental health services that exist in the region.

Strengthen our partnership with Charlotte Hungerford Hospital to design additional support groups specific to student needs in the school setting. Investigate the possibility of Charlotte Hungerford Hospital providing a Behavioral Health Specialist and an additional Psychologist to be available on campus.

### ***Student Achievement***

Currently, Northwestern has a low number of AP offerings compared to other Berkshire League schools. There is also an increase in the number of students who need greater support in math. Students would also benefit from a writing lab for the English/Language Arts Departments with a dedicated staff member.

**Recommendation:** Continue to track student achievement and offer high level support services based on data. Hire an additional math teacher for the high school to enable all students to complete four years of mathematics, as required under High School Reform. Offer English/Language Arts support labs and Math labs for students in grades 7-12. Increase AP offerings and electives in areas of interest to the student body.

### ***Enrollment***

Enrollment projections completed by Peter Prowda in December 2013 suggest that Regional School District No. 7 will experience an enrollment decrease, beginning in the 2016-17 school year.

**Recommendation:** If this decline becomes a reality, the district will examine potential staff and programmatic efficiencies to correspond to a decreasing enrollment. This could include, but would not be limited to, consolidation of high school courses, an examination of the team structure in the middle school and a re-assignment of staff based on certifications and program needs.

### ***Program of Studies***

We are currently mandated to meet the requirements of the High School Reform Act. The 25 credit requirements are grouped as follows:

**Cluster 1:** Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) 8 credits.

**Science:** 3 credits; Biology/Life Science, Chemistry/Physical Science, and one elective.

**Math:** 4 credits; Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II or Statistics and Probability, and one elective. **(add credit)**

**STEM:** 1 credit; Electives available in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. **(add credit)**

**Cluster 2: Humanities 11 credits**

**English:** 4 credits: English I, English II, Literature and Composition, American, World or British Literature and one elective.

**Social Studies:** 3 credits; U.S History, International/World Studies, ½ credit Civics, ½ credit elective.

**World Language:** 2 credits (add credit)

**Fine Arts:** 1 credit; Art, Music (add credit)

**Humanities Elective:** 1 credit; English, Social Studies, Fine Arts, other Humanities elective.

**Cluster 3: Career and Life Skills 3.5 credits**

**Comprehensive Health Education:** ½ credit

**Physical Education:** 1 credit

**Career and Life Skills Elective:** 2 credits

- Career/Technical Education, Business Education, World Languages, Culinary, Personal Finance, Public Speaking.

**Open Elective:** 1.5 credits for all students

**Capstone Experience:** 1 credit (add credit)

**Administrative Action:** Administration reviewed student enrollment data to determine that most students were already earning three science credits in their high school careers. Greater flexibility was developed that enabled students to take identified Ag-Ed science classes and to use that class toward a science credit instead of an Ag-Ed credit. Administration has also looked carefully at the Program of Studies and aligned classes already offered with a specific cluster under the HS Reform requirements, with minimal adjustments.

**Recommendation:** Expand the program of studies in a way that has the least budgetary impact over the next two academic years. Northwestern High School's Program of Studies will be augmented to include courses that explore the current geopolitical reality. For example, courses with a greater focus on international relations, and international trade and economy. Also, courses that focus on the role of technology in modern life and network security should be included. Every attempt should be made to designate current electives to meet the requirements of HS Reform, or to restructure the electives in order to do so.

***Expand High School Partnership with Northwestern Connecticut Community College***

Currently, the district works with NWCC through the High School Partnership Program. In the 2014-15 school year, 25 students have participated in the partnership. This program opens up classes at the college where students can earn both high school and college credit at the same time. There exists a need to develop higher level education opportunities for students to earn a two-year associate's degree or certification or college credit that feeds directly into a four-year degree in a given field.

**Administrative Action:** School administrators have developed a strong relationship with NWCC. This year, more seats have been opened up for our students to attend classes and receive



college credit while still in high school. Currently, Administration and the Board of Education Chair are working together to explore opportunities that would bring NWCC classes to the Northwestern campus. This is an ongoing effort and will continue to be augmented over the next five years.

**Recommendation:** High School administration should continue to expand the relationship with NWCC to include classes that lead to an Associate's degree in the areas of manufacturing, medical assistant, etc. Individual student schedules should accommodate the time necessary to take classes off campus.

## **Staffing Levels**

### ***Certified Staff***

**Recommendation:** Hire up to three additional Social Workers over the next five years. The district would also benefit from a part-time Curriculum Director who is charged with overseeing curriculum development and student assessments that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards and related standardized tests. Finally, the district's educational program will require additional teaching staff in English, Math and the Career Arts in order to successfully meet the mandates of High School Reform. It is possible that a projected enrollment decline will allow at least some of these necessary positions to be filled by current staff members who will be reassigned. There are other staffing needs that are addressed through the recommendations below.

### ***Non-Certified Staff***

**Recommendation:** It is critical that the district hire a School to Career Coordinator to support the additional credits needed for the STEP program. If the STEP program ceases to be recognized by the state as a viable program, the district will incur significant additional cost associated with outplacing students. Second, the district should consider hiring a part-time Communications Director / Grant Writer. This person would be responsible for building community relations, providing support for budget related communications and bringing revenue to the district through the writing and submission of grants. Finally, one repeated need identified through the surveys of staff, students and parents, was the importance of maintaining a robust and functioning technology infrastructure. Few things are of more importance to the daily instructional and operational functions of the schools than the ability to connect to the internet and the network. As a result, additional funding should be considered to hire a Network Engineer and a Technology Assistant.

## **Facilities**

### ***Roof***

Currently, the roof at the school leaks in a number of areas during periods of heavy rain. These areas include spots over House II and some areas in the middle school. A majority of the roof was replaced during the last renovation in 1999-2000. The exceptions are areas over House II and the cafeteria which were replaced in 2002. Currently, when leaks occur, the vendor who holds the warranty comes out and performs repairs as needed. However, our warranty will be up in a few years. These repairs are reactive and do not address larger concerns with the roof.





Again, this work can be done over a period of time with only certain sections of the building being done every year.

## **Technology**

### ***Hardware***

The district currently has a computer replacement plan that calls for all of the computers and smartboards to be replaced on a rotating 7-year cycle. The ability of the district's computers to accommodate updated software is critical to the educational program as well as the district's ability to administer online standardized testing as required by the state.

**Administrative Action:** Administration has written, and received, several technology grants help to fund many of the initiatives we have taken over the past three years. These grants have significantly off-set district costs.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the Board of Education fund this replacement plan in its operating budget every year. Align the Technology Plan with the STEM Cluster of the High School Reform Act to ensure that we are purchasing computers that are capable of performing to the level necessary for the technology and engineering courses.

### ***Infrastructure***

In 2013-14, the district purchased new switches to improve internet connectivity and aero hives throughout the middle school to improve the wireless system. In general, the technology infrastructure in the district is sound and up to date. However, more aero hives should be added to strengthen the wireless system in the high school.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the Board of Education fund infrastructure improvements as needed. While infrastructure components tend to have a longer lifespan than smartboards or desktop computers, there will likely be a need to upgrade the infrastructure to keep pace with changing technology.

### ***Efficiency Programs***

While a number of initiatives have been implemented in the past couple of years that have significantly improved the operational efficiency of the district, there are still a number of areas where the district could better utilize technology to operate more efficiently. Since 2012, the district has implemented School Messenger (parent communication system), Applitrack (employment application process), SchoolDude (facilities work orders) and MySchoolBucks (online cafeteria payment system). Each of these programs has reduced the amount of time staff needs to complete certain tasks and helps to better organize workflow.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the district implement a number of programs to help further streamline the workflow process. In particular, the district should examine automating its Human Resources function as they relate to tracking current employees. Such a software program would be able to electronically track sick/vacation time as well as salary and other employee information. Second, the district should consider automating its substitute teacher process. There are programs such as Aesop which allow for the district to post substitute openings online and allows pre-screened candidates the opportunity to indicate their interest in filling these openings.





monthly lockdown and evacuation drills. Finally, separate lines should be created in the budget for security related items and those lines should be funded every year to the degree possible.

## **Budget/Business Office**

### ***Uniform Chart of Accounts***

A new mandate that will have a significant impact on the administration of the Business Office requires municipalities and local school districts to have a Uniform Chart of Accounts. This mandate was originally scheduled to take effect by July 1, 2015. However, delays in getting a workable account system in place have made the actual implementation deadline uncertain. Blum Shapiro has been hired by the state to create the Uniform Chart of Accounts and has not yet finalized the process.

A chart of accounts is the string of numbers that organizations use to identify various budgetary objects, functions or expenditure locations. Currently, all school districts in the state have a similar chart of accounts, although not completely identical. Also, the state mandate will also require municipalities and school districts to have expanded account identifiers that will allow the state to gather expenditure information in more ways than is currently provided through the ED001 (the end of year financial report that districts supply to the state).

The main issues associated with changing our chart of accounts are; 1) the financial data provided will no longer be comparable to our historical data; 2) the data that is gathered may be easily misunderstood; and 3) there will be a cost associated with changing the reports in our financial system to adhere to the new codes.

**Administrative Action:** The Director of Finance has worked, through CASBO, to create a consortium to help reduce the costs associated with creating and implementing the Uniform Chart of Accounts.

**Recommendation:** Implement the Uniform Chart of Accounts as required. However, funds must be put in the operating budget to cover potential costs associated with changing the reports within our system.

### ***Affordable Health Care Act***

While the implementation of the federal Affordable Health Care Act is currently underway, the item in the legislation that will have the biggest impact on the district is set to go into effect in 2018. At this time, all employers will have potential liability in regards to "the Cadillac Tax". Figures provided by our health insurance agents project a potential liability to the district that could be in excess of \$3,200 for each employee on a family plan and over \$1,000 for each employee on a single plan.

**Recommendation:** First, the potential liability for the district should be communicated often and publicly to all stakeholders including parents and town leaders. If we are required to budget for this extraordinary cost, it should come as no surprise to anyone involved in the budget process. Second, the Superintendent, Business Manager and Board of Education members should convey the negative impact of this legislation to state and federal legislators in the hopes of getting this piece of the legislation delayed or the limits subject to the tax increased. Finally, a concerted effort should be made in the negotiation process to develop health benefit plans that would place the district under the threshold for tax liability purposes.









The 5-Year Plan outlines many recommendations to implement educational improvements to ensure student success. While there will certainly be costs associated with some of these recommendations, the ultimate goal is to provide a safe, challenging learning environment that empowers students to become independent life-long learners and contributors to a changing society.



