

Engaged and Confident Learners

More students become engaged and confident learners.

Vision Statement

We envision all students, PK-12, engaged in their learning and with their school community. Classroom learning is meaningful and relevant for all students. Students are much more likely to succeed if they are excited by what they're learning. Engaged students look forward to learning, seek answers and solutions on their own, and achieve at higher levels.

Similarly, confident students are those who approach problems and challenges with open-minds and are willing to try new and different solutions. This confidence spills over into other parts of their lives, allowing and encouraging much more creative and positive personae to emerge.

Opportunity for Improvement

Many students today report feeling disconnected from their studies and report difficulty in connecting school learning with their lives. They often ask, "Why should I care?" and "What does this have to do with me?" Many students lack the confidence to take on new challenges or to approach problems with the confidence that hard work will pay off in terms of success or achievement. A major national study found that as students progress from grade 6 through grade 12 they report in increasing proportion that they do not find school relevant to their lives and futures.

Root Cause: Lack of a baseline

How engaged and confident are our students? We know, anecdotally, that many students are not highly engaged and confident learners. We also know the national statistics in this regard and these are disheartening. We do not know exactly how our students would report their connection to learning in school and therefore lack a baseline from which to measure progress toward our vision.

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
Develop or adopt a standard assessment technique for engagement and confidence.	Recommend an assessment for use in FY10 and budget appropriately.
Establish baseline by assessing students using adopted assessments.	Extract data from ASSETS Survey on <u>School Engagement</u> and on <u>Commitment to Learning</u> and chart it.

Root Cause: Difficult to discern relevance of classroom content

Students sometimes have difficulty seeing relevance of classroom content and experience. To quote a mother of past Newburyport High School students:

“This was a common complaint from my own kids, but I imagine it will be challenging to provide relevance that would be meaningful to all students, as their interests will vary widely. Still, an attempt at this may prove worthwhile to keep more students engaged in learning.”

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
<p>Encourage the use of instructional techniques that assist in making learning more relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active hands-on experiential learning • Self-directed learning • Inquiry-based learning • Project-based learning • Portfolio and presentation-based assignments where students showcase their work • Collaborative learning • Real world application, including field trips. “Direct Experiences,” especially low-cost walking trips in Newburyport – even for High School students – are valuable. Example subjects include history, judicial systems, etc. • Sense of place/community 	<p>Conduct regular administrative “walk-throughs,” grades PK-12. Support and encourage use of strategies to make learning more relevant to students’ lives.</p> <p>School Committee and teachers, in contract negotiations, work to increase use of “Collaborative Evaluation Process” that is option available for teachers in the contract.</p>
<p>Increase number and frequency of community service projects, with a careful balance to insure that students receive valuable experience.</p>	

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
Increase number and frequency of guest lecturers and connections to businesses, professions, and trades.	

Root Cause: Schools don't tap into students' passions

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
<p>Implement a “Passion Block” to provide time for students to enjoy their passions and to provide teachers new avenues to experiment with differentiating instruction and assessment.</p> <p>Use the “Adult for every Student” program (see strategies for Connecting Students with Schools) to determine and tap into each student's passions.</p>	Investigate Governor’s Expanded Learning Time Grant program to lengthen school day and provide more time for “passion” activities.

Root Cause: Expectations are not always clearly articulated

Expectations of students, parents and teachers are not clearly articulated

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
<p>Encourage early and honest setting of expectations among students, parents and teachers. Setting of expectations can include the following techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplars • Modeling of expectations • Rubrics • Common goals/expectations/standards • Greater opportunity for reflection • Students participate to help identify/choose a learning plan that relates to their interest • Convey to students what they are learning 	

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
<p>and why they are learning it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit discussions about learning as a privilege and responsibility • Expectations should incorporate and value the “journey as well as the destination.” Put another way, there can be too much emphasis on grades and learning for the sake of grades. • Expectations should not become a black and white checklist. They should set an expectation that students must come prepared to think creatively to solve problems. • Increase parent teacher communication about what is going on in class and what the expectations are for learning. 	

Root Cause: Insufficient time to develop engaging units of study

Teachers lack time and resources to learn, develop and implement creative and engaging units of study

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
Support sustained professional development.	School Committee and teachers, in contract negotiations, work to include process through which teachers’ Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDP) better support sustained professional development and better connection to District’s strategic goals.
Provide time and support for teachers to practice newly acquired knowledge and skills.	
Encourage and support innovation and experimentation in the classroom. Find ways to give and encourage flexibility for teachers in how they orchestrate class time, to enable more student engagement.	School Committee and teachers, in contract negotiations, work to increase use of “Collaborative Evaluation Process” that is option available for teachers in the contract.

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
Increase opportunities for teacher learning through connections with colleges, businesses, and government.	Determine and report reasons that few teachers participate in NEBC Externship Program.
Consider changes in the school day schedule to improve student engagement. Consider starting day later for older students, and earlier for younger students.	

Root Cause: Standards limit ability to respond to student passions

State standards dictate curriculum to too great a degree limiting teachers availability to be responsive to student passions

Long Term Strategies	FY09 Specific Actions
Break down myth that the state frameworks entirely dictate the curriculum. Communicate that our curriculum is a carefully designed and constructed educational plan aligned with and using selected portions of the state frameworks.	See FY09 specific actions in goal for Balanced, Standards-based Curriculum.