

Annual Town Report 2014
Concord Public Schools
Concord-Carlisle Regional School District
Superintendent's Report

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The mission of the Concord Public Schools and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District is to educate all students to become lifelong learners, creative thinkers, caring citizens, and responsible contributors in our diverse global society. We are able to achieve our mission through the investment of educators, staff, parents, and community members who work tirelessly to improve our schools.

DISTRICT GOALS

Every school year, the administration develops district goals for the Concord Public Schools (CPS) and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District (CCRS) which are approved by the School Committees. We focus on efforts to improve student learning by implementing the Common Core standards, monitoring student progress through common assessments, identifying appropriate interventions, adjusting instructional practices, and closing the achievement gap. The goals also specify improvements in authentic learning experiences, instructional strategies, analyzing student data, integrating digital tools, and teacher collaboration and evaluation. In addition, we strive for prudent management of school budgets, resources, capital projects, the new high school building project, long-term solution for transportation, and resolution of fair collective bargaining contracts.

STUDENT LEARNING

All district efforts focus on improving student learning. Elementary (grades K-5) principals, curriculum specialists, and teachers worked together to monitor individual student progress in reading, writing, and math. Multiple literacy assessments for fluency, decoding, vocabulary development, and comprehension were administered to monitor progress for reading benchmarks. Pre and post assessments were given for the nine math units in grades 2-5 using the Investigations math program. Kathy Richardson assessments were used to evaluate K-1 students' math skill development. Teachers implemented district wide grade level writing rubrics to analyze student writing pieces with a greater emphasis on students' ability to work with informational texts and to write persuasive and informational pieces. Teachers worked with curriculum specialists to fully align the elementary curriculum with the Common Core Standards, and the Student Progress Report was revised to reflect the more rigorous Common Core Standards. At each school site, the assessment data was analyzed in monthly grade level progress meetings, and classroom instruction or Response to Intervention (RtI) groups were adjusted to provide targeted skill instruction for struggling students. More than 80% of the K5 students mastered end of the year grade level standards in English Language Arts.

At Concord Middle School (CMS), 80% of the students earned report grades B- or higher across academic subjects: English, math, foreign language, science, and social studies. Common assessments were identified and administered in every subject. English teachers worked collaboratively to refine curriculum to align with not only the Massachusetts Common Core

standards but also with rigorous performance based assessments as students will see on the PARCC. Examples from practice include explicit teaching of tier 2 vocabulary as well as revising questions posed to students focused on higher order thinking skills identified on Bloom's Taxonomy. Developmental Language Arts classes continued to provide additional academic support in English. Math teachers promoted increased achievement in leveled classes and through additional intervention with those students enrolled in the Math Strategies course. Math Strategies enrollment has increased due to the revision of the daily schedule to include a supplemental block, enabling students to participate in a full core curriculum program while enrolled in Math Strategies as needed.

October began the fourth year of *CMS Stands Together* bullying prevention and intervention curriculum for the entire CMS community. Students participated in five lessons from October through November. Curriculum revised last year and specifically relevant to the CMS community included an expanded focus on racial and cultural issues. The English department expanded the "One School, One Book" summer reading assignment with all staff and students reading critically acclaimed, *Freak the Mighty*, an anti-bullying book. CMS Students' baseline literacy assessment in grades 6-8 was based on this book, scored with the common assessment rubric developed by CMS English teachers.

At Concord-Carlisle High School (CCHS) 93% of the students earned more than 2.0 GPA, and 99% of the graduating class achieved competency determination. Every department worked on developing and implementing common assessments to monitor student progress in the core curriculum and the Common Core Standards. *AP Capstone Seminar*, a unique research program offered by the College Board, was implemented as a new course and *Rivers and Revolutions*, a unique interdisciplinary program, completed its second successful year with 100 enthusiastic students. At the beginning of the school year, all freshmen participated in a technology orientation course to become familiar with their Google Drive, First Class, X2, and Moodle accounts. More than three hundred students and teachers use the Moodle site on a daily basis. Students use a variety of digital tools to access online course work, check email conference folders for class and school information, contribute to wiki forum discussions, and work with a variety of web-based platforms. Information literacy classes taught by the library media specialist instructed all students in advanced web searches, source evaluation, citation, and web-based tools for collaborating, synthesizing, and sharing work. Twenty-five students participated in Virtual High School classes each semester. Thirty Biology students participated in the Environmental Field Studies project to protect Blandings' turtles. The Robotics team built an amazing robot to successfully compete at the regional competition at WPI. The CCHS Meteorology students and teacher presented at the American Meteorological Society conference. Forty student leaders completed "A World of Difference" program with Anti-Defamation League trainers, and they facilitated several sessions of the Sophomore Advisory Groups.

One hundred and sixty (160) students of color in grades K-12 who reside in Boston attend the Concord Public Schools and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District via METCO. Our METCO Program is the sixth largest in Massachusetts. CPS provides a comprehensive orientation process for families of students entering Kindergarten, concluding with a four-week summer readiness program at Alcott School to prepare students for the transition to Kindergarten. CPS also maintains a robust Family Friends Program and a strong relationship with Concord Recreation to provide enrichment opportunities for METCO students in grades K-8. In Kindergarten, CPS and The Umbrella Center for the Arts partner to provide a weekly arts enrichment course for our METCO students, with a focus on early literacy.

CMS instituted new programming this year to increase METCO student achievement. Led by an English and Math teacher and supported by tutors in each building, the program aims to provide each student with an individualized learning experience. All students set SMART goals for math, English and community involvement, and they are working with their teachers to monitor their progress. Prior to the beginning of school, CMS ran a summer workshop for rising 6th grade METCO students. The workshop focused on building students' organization, time management,

and self-advocacy skills while also developing a stronger connection to Concord through field experience the Old North Bridge, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, and the Robbins House Interpretive Center. Students completed a capstone project at the close of the workshop utilizing video technology.

The CCHS faculty continues to address the achievement gap with a combination of academic and social programming. All 9th and 10th grade METCO students are enrolled in Achievement Strategies, a course implemented to provide access to technology and direct instruction on executive functioning skills. A group of faculty also serves as mentors in POWER (Positive Opportunities with Engaging Relationships), a student leadership initiative in which each METCO freshman is matched with an upperclassmen and a teacher, forming a triad. CCHS has also strengthened its Family Friends Program so that each student is matched with a cooperating family. CCHS continued its implementation of the Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference Institute, an anti-bias program designed to prepare students for competence in a multicultural society, with 50 new students completing training to act as peer leaders in Advisory.

At the district level, district administrators, principals, department chairs, and K5 curriculum specialists attended training by *Teachers 21* in classroom observations for the new Educator Evaluation system. CPS teams of administrators and teachers from each school site completed *Teachers 21* training on the five step cycle in the new Educator Evaluation system and *Baseline Edge*, the technology platform for the system. CPS administrators and teachers also participated in monthly trainings in Dr. Donna Hick's Dignity model of conflict resolution to improve labor management relationships. CMS teachers refined the Summer Academy for METCO students and designed the new support system for the school year. CCHS teachers participated in departmental summer work to plan for 1:1 learning environment. District teachers participated in MA DESE Sheltered English Instruction courses to increase their teaching strategies for students with English as a Second Language.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

CCHS and CPS students continue to achieve at high levels, and more importantly there was improvement in almost all grade levels. The 2014 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results were strong with 90% of 5th grade students scoring advanced or proficient on the ELA MCAS, 91% scoring advanced or proficient on the Math MCAS, and 82% scoring advanced or proficient on the Science MCAS. In February 2014, Thoreau Elementary School was recognized by the MA DESE as a 2013 Commendation School for its high MCAS achievement. Ninety-four percent (94%) of 8th grade students scored proficient or advanced on the ELA MCAS, 78% scored proficient or advanced on the Math MCAS, and 76% scored proficient or advanced on Science MCAS. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of 10th grade students scored proficient or advanced on the ELA MCAS and 95% percent scored proficient or advanced on the Math MCAS. Ninety-three percent (93%) of 10th grade students passed one of the Science MCAS. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the CCHS class of 2014 received a Competency Determination as a result of passing both the ELA and Math MCAS.

The median SAT score for CCHS Class 2013 was 1840 (with 1528 as the State average). Six students in the Class of 2014 qualified as National Merit Scholar Finalists. 97% of Advanced Placement (AP) exams taken by CCHS students received a passing score, and overall 92% of AP exams were scored at a 4 or 5 (the highest score). The average number of CCHS graduates planning to continue their education in post-secondary placements exceeded 95%. In a survey of graduating seniors, 86% reported they were admitted to their 1st or 2nd college choice.

The CCHS Repertory and Concert Bands earned gold medals at the prestigious Massachusetts Instrumental and Choral Conductors Association (MICCA) State Concert Festival. A record number of student musicians (band, orchestra, jazz band, and chorus) were nominated and accepted into the MENC All-eastern Honors Ensembles and twenty-six (26) students received All-State recommendations. Student artists participated in the Boston Globe Scholastic Art awards regional exhibit and earned gold and silver keys. Student artists also participated locally in the

Lexington Arts and Crafts Society Show for art majors and the year-end awards and retrospective at the Concord Art Association. More than 50 students worked together to build sets, coordinate lighting and sound for the production, and performed in *Nation*. In the winter of 2014, more than 150 students performed as actors or musicians, created technical designs, built sets/props, implemented theatrical lighting and sound, and served as stage crew for the musical, *Pirates of Penzance*. In May 2014, more than 30 students performed on stage and were involved as technical crew for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The CCHS Student Senate sponsored a freshmen orientation program that brought all of the incoming ninth grade students together for an informative and fun-filled day before the beginning of school. The Senate worked on many projects focused on student life: managing student stress, enhancing communication among all members of the school community, and increasing sustainability initiatives.

CMS takes pride in stretching learning experiences beyond the breadth of the school day and across content areas to promote development of creative and critical thinking. Students competed in regional Rubik's Cube, Math Counts and Math Team contests, Lego Robotics and Science Olympiad, and the Model UN conference as well as National French and Spanish exams. Over 75 students participated as cast or crew in the musical, *Shrek*, and choral and instrumental music students competed and performed in Junior Districts, MICCA and Music in the Parks.

In the elementary schools, Grade 5 students participated in the national Mathematical Olympiad program, and all school teams were named to the National Math Olympiad Honor Roll for scoring in the 90th percentile or higher. The 5th grade Willard team was also named to the National Math Olympiad High Achievement list for scoring in the 80th-89th percentile nationally. Fourth grade students at all schools participated in a special yearlong science project nurturing the development of Blandings' Turtles in the classrooms. They worked with a local ecologist to collect and contribute data as part of an ecological research project. Elementary students in all the schools participated in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) projects such as the pollination project in Alcott's second grade, WeDo LEGO in Willard's third grade, and SAVE the SHARK project in Thoreau's fifth grade. Students presented their projects at the Acton Discovery Museum. A highlight in fourth grade is the annual Chinese poetry and calligraphy project with a poet in residence. Thoreau published *Thoreau Times* with students assuming the responsibilities of reporters, photographers, graphic designers, cartoonists, book critics, and advertisers. Elementary students also participated in many musical events with chorus, string, band, and theater performances throughout the year. The elementary school orchestra earned bronze and gold medals at 2014 MICCA festival.

Elementary students engaged in a variety of community building and outreach efforts through the year including Grade 5 Service Day, Grade 5 Holiday Craft Day, Trick or Treat for UNICEF, From the Pumpkin Patch, Honoring our Veterans, Coats for Kids, Open Table, hosting visitors from Nevada and Japan, and collaborating with CCHS student partners in the Rivers and Revolutions program.

CMS students developed cultural and community awareness and responsibility through involvement in a variety of leadership opportunities as members of Student Leaders, Animals and Planets, and *CMS Stands Together*. Awareness was raised for local organizations through the Coats for Kids drive, and the Animals and Planet club designed and coordinated the first annual CMS Pet Palooza, a pet show and fundraiser combined. Students demonstrated initiative and understanding of community participation by seeking and organizing new after school opportunities such as the creative writing and Anime clubs, and pursuing opportunities to institute 8th grade peer tutoring for 6th graders and sharing ideas to improve our recycling efforts at CMS.

At CCHS, students demonstrated their commitment to social responsibility through participation in numerous outreach activities, raising funds to aid relief efforts in numerous countries, and participating in the Ecuador, Denmark, Japan, and Turkmenistan exchanges. Locally, our students completed more than 25,000 hours of service in the surrounding communities during the 2013-14 school year.

These activities and achievements are only a sampling of the wide range of student programs and projects at Alcott, Thoreau, and Willard elementary schools, CMS, and CCHS. For more information, visit the district website (www.concordpublicschools.net) or individual school websites.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Special Education Department of Concord Public Schools and the Concord -Carlisle Regional School District is dedicated to providing quality services and programs for students with disabilities preschool through age 22. We strive to meet the increasingly diverse needs of students with learning, medical, cognitive and social disabilities within the local community. Transition to post secondary settings for special education students has been a top priority. The Concord Integrated Preschool (CIP) opened the 2014 school year at 80% special education student capacity. Since opening a fourth half- day class during the 2013 school year, we have continued to reach our special education student capacity by the end of each school year. We are in line with the national trend as our preschool special education student enrollment continues to increase. At the K-8 level, the special education staff has worked to align special education instruction with the Common Core Standards. Special education teachers worked with the Elementary Steering Committee to review and pilot new math curriculums. Additionally, in 2014 we participated in the DESE coordinated program review. Following the onsite DESE visit of the review, which included observations, interviews, and record reviews, Concord Public Schools received the DESE's final report in August 2014 which cited the need for an active special education parent's advisory council (PAC). In September 2014, the district organized an active PAC to work collaboratively with the director of special education and to support parents' of students with special needs. At CCHS, the special education department has continued to work collaboratively with all academic departments on accommodations and modifications for all students. The department has worked on improving transition services for students' ages 19-22 including increased vocational opportunities, multi-school collaboration for expanded social connections, and improved collaboration with post secondary agencies.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The district continued to invest considerable resources in professional development, providing educators with learning opportunities in curriculum development and technology integration. During the 2014 school year, K12 teachers participated in many courses for Google Apps for Educators including Google Drive. Elementary teachers participated in LEGO Robotics course, and K8 teachers learned how to integrate writing in science lessons. During the summer, K12 teachers participated in eighty (80) curriculum development projects ranging from using iPads to create books in primary classrooms, K5 common research process, K5 digital writing projects, to Mindfulness in Schools, and CCHS departmental projects for transitioning to 1:1 learning environments.

HUMAN RESOURCES

In 2014 twelve (12) administrators, faculty, and staff members retired after many years of dedicated service. Kathy Codianne, Director of Teaching and Learning retired after six (6) years of service. The following educators retired: Joseph Hehn, CCHS, 15 years; Andrew Sapp, CCHS, 14 years; Susan Kinniburgh, CMS, 16 years; Caroline Stevens, CMS, 16 years; Nicki Richards, Thoreau, 17 years; and Barbara Lehn, Willard, 26 years. The support staff that retired were: Susan Martin, Alcott tutor, 10 years; Cynthia Theriault, Thoreau Aide, 32 years; Karen Whitcomb, CCHS Administrative Assistant, 25 years; Ann Pike, CCHS and CPS bus driver, 44 years; and Liz Tencati, Ripley Administrative Assistant, 30 years. The districts hired fifteen teachers at CCHS, twelve teachers at CPS, and thirty-four staff members. The majority of the new faculty and staff members filled vacancies created by retirements, resignations, and leaves of absence. The retention rate for educators at CCHS was 96% and for CPS 97.6%. The districts have significant mentoring programs to ensure that new faculty members swiftly and substantively become part of the learning communities at each school site. The human resources

office continued supporting implementation of the new comprehensive supervision & evaluation system for educators. The Teachers Associations and administrative team continued to meet regularly to discuss ideas, issues, and concerns related to the new state requirements for the evaluation of educators. Other efforts and priorities included aligning professional development plans with educator plans and goals, school improvement goals, and district goals; utilizing data and feedback from an onboarding survey; implementing mindfulness training opportunities for staff; and utilizing the Minuteman-Nashoba Wellness Coordinator to implement district-wide wellness activities. Three year contracts were executed with the Concord-Carlisle Teachers Association, K-12 Secretaries Association, and the Bus Drivers Association.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The continued growth of technology within our classrooms and integrating 21st century tools are transforming how our students learn. Both teachers and students have daily access to digital tools and content that impact learning. We have moved to 1:1 computing using Apple MacBook Air laptops at the middle school and are planning for 1:1 at the new high school. To meet the demand for wireless coverage in our schools, we installed more Xirrus access points (APs) at both middle schools and all three elementary schools. Xirrus engineers created "heat maps" to ensure robust wireless coverage in the new high school. In addition, we increased our Internet bandwidth to 700 mbps. To govern these new machines on our network, we are moving to *Filewave*, a mobile device management platform (MDM). Filewave manages deployments of applications, documents, and updates down to the file level. This allows for granular control over devices such as laptops, desktop computers and tablets across our network. We will upgrade to Mac OSX 10.10 server in all schools and change to computer- based profiles. We are moving to wireless network security consisting of user authentication through Active Directory while providing an Internet -only guest wireless network. We have migrated our FirstClass communication services off-site to a secure hosted server. The new high school will include installation of cell phone repeaters (Verizon, ATT, Sprint) to ensure a strong signal within the building. Other technology updates in the new high school include Epson Brightlink Pro HDMI projectors with Apple TV. We will have a new Mac based foreign language lab and updated iMac installations for music, engineering and robotics, and chemistry labs. A new student- run video wall in the cafeteria is another exciting improvement.

FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

The districts continue to maintain excellent academic programs while meeting challenging funding goals. Our core budgeting principles remain focused on using resources to support student learning and growth. The district goals approved by the school committees provided direction to the budget process to support student learning opportunities. The district administration and school committees' work continue to reflect the new \$92.5M high school project's cost impact on taxpayers. We continue to work collaboratively with the finance committees and have developed responsible FY2016 budgets during 2014; we have successfully matched the FINCOM Regional guideline and the SC has reduced its CPS request to narrow the gap between the SC Adopted budget and FINCOM Guideline by \$100,000. The FY2015 CPS school budget at \$32,440,538 represented a 4.17% increase above the FY2014 appropriation, and the FY 2015 operating budget for CCHS, \$24,662,800, increased by 3.01%. Both the CPS and CCHS FY2015 budget requests were below levy limits and matched guidelines developed by the finance committees and for the eighth consecutive year did not require overrides. Both school districts managed successful FY2014 year-end closings, and it should be noted the CPS FY2014 closing process was extremely challenging. The Regional School District met its planned \$350,000 commitment towards its OPEB liability in the year-end closing process. CCRSD's Excess and Deficiency (E&D) fund balance for the past fiscal year has been maintained above the 4.9% level. The AAA bond rating has been maintained and the December 2012 \$32,500,000 Bond sale was assigned the highest possible rating by Moody's Investors Service on the borrowed funds at an effective interest rate of 3.0%. A second major bond sale of \$30,000,000 is planned in March 2015.

CAPITAL PROJECTS AND TRANSPORTATION

The major capital projects for CPS included installation of high efficiency boilers at the Peabody building and partial replacement of flooring at the Alcott school. For CCHS, the new high school project is nearing completion, and the project remains within budget, scope, and on schedule for April 2015 occupancy. Please refer to the additional report on the high school building project from CCHS Building Committee Chairperson, Stan Durlacher. The operational planning for future in house transportation parking and repairs is underway at the W.R. Grace site in Acton, with transportation administration housed at the recently acquired 37 Knox Trail building in Acton.

SUMMARY

The major highlights of 2014 continue to be outstanding student achievement and the exciting progress of the new high school building project. We are extremely proud of our students, faculties, and staff, and we are grateful for the Concord and Carlisle communities' support. The schools made significant progress in achieving the district goals by increasing student learning, improving special education services, integrating technology into the classrooms, supporting faculty and staff, implementing a new educator evaluation system, developing responsive and responsible budgets, and building a beautiful new high school. We are looking forward to the April 2015 opening of our new CCHS. For more information, please visit the districts' website, www.concordpublicschools.net, and review the CPS & CCRSD 2014 Performance Report.