



## Support Standard School Culture and Leadership

### Narrative

The Sample High School community has consciously and continuously built a safe, positive, respectful and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility for learning and results in shared ownership, pride and high expectations for all over the years. SHS prepares and distributes electronically updated school handbooks that students and parents use throughout the school year. Discipline and attendance policies are thoroughly outlined in these documents. The community has access to the assistant principal's annual compilation of data on disciplinary actions and interventions. He has shared these results in faculty meetings for the purpose of elucidation and discussion.

SHS has many active programs in place that serve to improve the school climate. An example is the 32-member student representative body (SRB). This group of students, elected and appointed by peers, is active in creating and facilitating most student activities, the most popular of which is Winter Carnival, a school-wide, week-long event that actively engages a large percentage of students every February. SRB also serves to provide feedback to administration on a wide range of student issues. The Civil Rights Team Project (CRTP) is a school-based program to combat violence, prejudice, harassment and bias in the school. The Gay-Straight Alliance has a similar program to educate the student body on issues of harassment and tolerance. The Student Judiciary Board provides selected students the opportunity of a fair hearing prior to suspension, expulsion or other penalty as well as a way for students to have a voice and representation. Our State of the School day provides a forum during the school day for students to work directly with faculty members on key cultural issues. The Fall of 2012 forum was entitled, "How do we define and recognize Character, Community and Citizenship at SHS?". Other programs that serve to promote a positive school climate and sense of pride in ownership include: a Peer Tutoring Program, a Student Ambassador program, a student attendance committee that examines chronic attendance problems, and a variety of student leadership teams attached to co-curricular

activities (including the Athletic Leadership Academy and Advisory, an outdoor education program) and the Student Leadership Team.

SHS fosters student responsibility for learning in a variety of ways. Teachers actively encourage students to contact them when class time is missed and are routinely available before school, during school prep blocks and after school. Teachers write narratives once a semester and distribute grade reports multiple times each semester which allow students to create plans for success. Students also engage in student-led conferences and digital portfolios through our advisory program. Lastly, SHS provides different avenues for students to engage in their own learning through independent studies, early college courses, online course work, internships and attendance at Local Regional Technical Center (LRTC). All students have access to electronic retrieval systems such as Edmodo, class websites, and email.

SHS promotes high expectations for all students. Most classes offer an Honors Challenge which is more complex work that is offered to any student. Students must complete rigorous graduation requirements that include 24 academic credits, a sophomore exhibition project, a senior celebration project, 4 co-curricular activities, 15 hours of community service, and completion of at least 1 college application. Students are actively encouraged to take AP courses, which are open to all students willing to accept the challenge and work load. Students can complete an acceleration process in Math and Humanities for a faster track in those disciplines. College courses and online courses are also available for students to earn academic credit. The school has achieved high marks in surveys connected to school climate. According to the Endicott survey, 74% of students, 84% of staff and 86% of parents feel SHS is a safe and supportive place. Additionally, 91% of parents feel the school encourages students to take responsibility for their learning. The school's Civil Rights team conducted its own student survey in January 2012 to inform development of in-house civil rights awareness programs.

The school is equitable, inclusive, and fosters heterogeneity where every student, over the course of the high school experience is enrolled in a significant number of heterogeneously grouped core courses. SHS values highly the principles of heterogeneity and inclusion in all core courses. For starters, students are expected to commonly take integrated math (4 years), integrated Humanities (3 years), integrated science (2 years) and world language (2 years) all of which are

grouped heterogeneously. Special education help is available in many of these classes to foster inclusive teaching. Students who want to explore course content in more depth can expect their teachers to offer Honors Challenge assessments that will be reflected on their transcripts. Opportunities exist for students to be placed in core courses earlier than the expected high school progression. For example, incoming freshmen can "test out" of Math 1 and proceed directly into Math 2/3. This accelerated experience still includes a heterogeneous experience at the Math 2/3 level. All AP classes at SHS are open enrollment for all students who have met introductory course requirements. Students with significant disabilities, including those in Functional Life Skills, School to Work, and Applied Academics, are also enrolled in heterogeneous classes such as Advisory, Wellness and Visual and Performing Arts.

There is a formal, on-going program through which each student has an adult in the school, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Expectations. Sample High School's advisory program has been at the core of its culture since the school opened in the fall of 1999. For 13 years, Advisory has been an essential component of the school's identity. Advisory fosters our connections to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Expectations through social and academic development, community service requirements and academic curriculum. One of the fundamental concepts of Advisory is that every student should have at least one adult with whom he or she can make a formal and personal connection. Most faculty members are assigned to an Advisory consisting of 12 to 14 students, spending 28 minutes each day advising them on school and social issues. Advisors follow their group from the beginning of freshman year through high school graduation. Grouped heterogeneously, Advisory offers time for students to get to know peers who may not be in their academic classes, their social circles or in their co-curricular activities. The Endicott survey reported that 75 percent of students and 85 percent of parents say the school is a safe place.

The pillars of Advisory are two culminating assessments involving research, reflection and public speaking - the Sophomore Exhibition and Senior Celebration.

Since passing Advisory is a graduation requirement, it is imperative that the student completes these assessments. In 9th grade Advisory, freshmen participate in activities and reflection centered around essential questions. This process begins with a day-long orientation the day before school. This orientation introduces the students to their Advisories and provides opportunities to learn about the school's Core Values and academic expectations. Students develop a sense of community through the day's activities that the school continues to foster throughout their career at Sample High School. Eleventh grade Advisory students delve into community service projects and job-shadowing in professional fields where they have shown interest for future careers.

Advisors are considered conduits and resources in the school community. They are involved in multiple meetings involving students on academic and social issues. Parents meet with their child's advisor twice per year at student-led conferences. At these meetings the advisors reiterate their role as the "go-to" person for any questions on school work, social, or co-curricular issues. Advisors are expected to be available for daily consultations regarding a child's progress in meetings, on the telephone, or through e-mail. Advisors meet at least once per month with other advisors in their grade level to share ideas and strategies and revise RT curriculum. Many veteran faculty members have been working with the same advisory "teams" for years, and thus have had the chance to review, evaluate, discuss and amend the curriculum for each grade level several times.

As a result of this continuous reflection, SHS has added a new dimension to the advisory program that is designed to communicate our performance with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Expectations with the community. Beginning with the Class of 2016 and continuing with subsequent graduation classes, students will present to their parents and their advisor a Digital Portfolio that displays their work, growth and accomplishments in the classroom, in co-curricular activities, throughout the school community and in the community at large.

The principal and professional staff regularly engages in a variety of professional efforts designed to improve student learning including professional discourse, resources outside of the school, formal time to implement professional development, and opportunities to apply the skills, practices and ideas gained to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Three years ago the principal initiated a book club for interested faculty members to read, reflect and share ideas about pedagogical and professional development issues through text-based discussions. The program, although voluntary, has enlisted more than 40 faculty

members during the past three years, including teachers who have signed up for the book groups more than once.

SHS learning areas have held 90-minute meetings once per month for the past 14 years. Teachers exchange best practice ideas in the areas of common assessments, common core standards and curriculum sequence. Learning Area coordinators establish formal protocols for evaluating and modifying common assessments. LA coordinators also lead group analysis of teacher grade books to ensure consistency with application of standards. In addition, 9th and 10th grade core subject teams meet twice per month to improve student learning through better instructional and planning strategies. SHS continues to engage teachers in Professional Learning Communities. PLCs meet once per month to transfer common school goals into individual professional development goals. This year's PLC focus is student engagement. In previous years the PLCs have focused on technology integration and literacy. SHS makes time for each teacher's professional development through full faculty meetings, Learning Area meetings, PLCs and advisor meetings that meet one afternoon a week on a rotating basis (Wednesdays this year). After-school meetings are embedded into the faculty culture. In addition, the school's leadership team schedules and plans professional development meetings that take place during full-day workshops when students are out of the building.

The school has a tradition of budgeting time and money for teachers to attend professional development meetings outside of the building. Each year teachers sign up for 10 to 12 courses and multiple conferences, some of which are out of state. These include MLTI, ACTEM, ASCD and NEASC, as well as a world language conference, statewide policy and leadership panels and college courses focused on subject content. Nearly \$15,000 was spent last year in teacher tuition reimbursement. Leadership has incorporated the sharing of ideas from workshops into faculty meetings, where teachers help each other implement the strategies in their classrooms. For example, last year a team of teachers who attended Google workshops returned with classroom ideas much of the faculty has since embraced. Also, the recently-adopted RT Digital Portfolio was developed from conference training. The school's performance-based salary system makes professional development a priority through Performance Archive Folders in which teachers demonstrate reflection and instructional strategies based on Danielson's Rubric.

School leaders regularly use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning. Since its inception in 1999, SHS has used a performance-based pay salary system that requires participating faculty and staff to be evaluated according to the research-based Danielson Rubric. Faculty that opt to strive for salary increases on the pay scale have been required to produce Performance Archive Folders that are assessed by peer committees. Administrators serve on PAF committees to assess the teachers' professional development and their commitment to student learning. All teachers and administrators who serve on PAF committees have been trained in the application of the Danielson Rubric. The PAF process, however, is not a formal administrative review. In 2012, the central office initiated directives for SHS and other district schools to establish more standardized evaluation and supervision for professional staff. Many components of SHS's developing administrative review system, including teacher observations, can be found in the Danielson Rubric and the PAF form.

Between 2009 and 2012 members of the administrative team have attended the following professional development conferences that address teacher and staff evaluation: Advanced Staff Evaluation in 2010 and 2012 (Maine Principals Association); The Art and Science of Teaching, 2010 (NEASCD); Advancing the PLC Journey by Closing the Knowing-Doing Gap, 2009 (MPA); When Students Fail to Learn/RTI, 2011 (MPA); Data-Driven Dialogue, 2011 (MPA); Simplifying Response to Intervention Spring and Fall, 2012 (MPA); Assistant Principal's MPA conference, 2011-2012 (MPA); MPA Fall and Spring Conferences 2009 through 2012 (MPA); Introduction to Restorative Practices, 2012. New hires at SHS, including certified teachers and other education professionals, are required to attend a two-day introductory workshop shortly before the beginning of the school year for the purposes of professional development and acclimation to the school's culture. Administrators are actively involved in planning and facilitating these workshops.

The organization of time supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration and the learning needs of all students. Ninth and tenth grade students at SHS attend academic support classes where teachers implement strategies designed at their bi-monthly team meetings with core subject instructors. All students who fall short of standards in any class are required to attend guided academic support classes, where teachers have data from all of the student's classes. The school day is organized around block scheduling with four 78-minute

classes, a concept derived from the Coalition of Essential Schools. All students attend a 28 minute advisory class called Advisory, in the middle of the day, either before lunch or immediately after lunch. Advisory features academic advising, projects designed to help students meet the school's learning expectations, outside speakers addressing social issues, and school-wide culture issues such as texting, dress code and class activities. SHS schedules work days so that faculty members have common planning periods with members of their team. In addition, faculty conduct their planning and organization in teacher pods that are designed for teams collaboration. A number of scheduling initiatives have developed to foster student learning, including the implementation of Spanish class every day for ninth graders, and "Lunch Bunch" sessions in the Learning Center where struggling students meet with mentors during lunch. In addition, the school's Learning Lab and Learning Center offer one-on-one assistance throughout the day for students to seek academic help, which they coordinate with their teachers, advisors and schedules.

Student load and class size enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students. Sample High School strives for teacher loads and class size that allow for effective instruction and individualized learning. With reductions in the number of electives and faculty in recent years, class size and teacher loads have increased. The majority of classes, however, average 20 students per teacher. A small number of courses range in size from 25 (including visual/performing arts and some math courses) to 48 (band).

The school values the interests of students who seek learning in specialized areas outside of mainstream courses; these classes are available even if roster sizes are low. Examples include Advanced Placement Government with 11 students; Math/Physics with 9; Wellness II with 9; Studio Art with 5; Writing workshop with 4; and Spanish 3/4 with 2 students. The Leadership team alternative education program, with a small group setting designed for individualized learning, features an average of 10 students per teacher. Between 25 and 30 students enroll in this program each year.

Advisory class, designed to make the overall education experience for every student more personalized, meets every day, with teachers serving as academic advisor for 9 to 15 students. The school's optimum number for a RT class is 12; we are consistently close to that target. Considering the economic pressures and budget constraints, SHS still endeavors to meet the needs of student learning through reasonable class sizes and teacher loads.

*The principal, working with other building leaders, provides a great amount of instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations.* The principal and assistant principal have been part of a leadership team that has created policy grounded in the school's mission, core values and instructional goals for 14 years. The leadership team consists of 6 teachers, 2 students and a community member, as well as the principal and assistant principal. The Leadership team's official role is to "serve as the leadership and policy making team for the school. Its primary responsibilities are to maintain the mission and vision of SHS and to give the school community voice in school governance." Towards that end, the Leadership team meets every summer to create its own goals for the school year that are tied to the school's core values and beliefs. In the past four years the group has led, guided and assisted faculty with individual and school-wide goals connected to classroom instruction. These goals include technology integration in the classroom, common assessments, student engagement, school-wide rubrics and digital portfolios to measure student progress in the context of our learning expectations. The principal and assistant principal are also leaders of the Response to Intervention (RtI) team that creates individual student plans for attendance, credit recovery and instruction with students who have social, behavioral and learning challenges. RtI also includes an academic coach, a literacy coach and the coordinator of the Leadership team, an in-school alternative education program. RtI monitors students who are struggling with core curriculum, using assessment data to inform interventions. Its philosophy and strategies are linked to the SHS mission to teach all students to use their minds well and to cultivate their particular talents. Three years ago the principal initiated a book club for interested faculty members to read, reflect and share ideas about pedagogical and professional development issues through text-based discussions. The program, although voluntary, has consistently engaged more than two dozen faculty members during the past three years. The books chosen have consistently explored SHS's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Expectations. The principal and assistant principal meet individually with faculty members at the beginning of each school year to establish the teachers' annual goals. They also hold one-on-one meetings with teachers during the school year to assess progress towards these goals. The principal provides professional development opportunities for teachers; the principal also encourages and supports teachers who seek professional development opportunities.

As a core value, the concept of parents as partners in the education of the children along with the concept of students as active participants in their education requires that teachers, students and parents are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision making that promote responsibility and ownership. Parents, students and educators interact and collaborate as partners in the education of students at Sample High School. On a macro level, the school's leadership and policy making board consists of 6 teachers, an adult community representative, two students, and two administrators, with each member holding voting authority on policy decisions. On a micro level, student-led conferences, an extension of daily advisory group meetings, involve discussions, assessments and decisions on the student's education plan; student-led conferences are facilitated by a student with parents and an advisory faculty member in attendance. These meetings take place twice each year. The school encourages parents to request additional meetings - beyond the bi-annual student-led conferences - with teachers, social workers and administrators to address student progress and adjustments in educational plans. In addition parents serve on hiring committees when SHS adds faculty members and coaching staff. Parents are also involved in fundraising efforts in booster groups.

Students at SHS are actively involved in decision-making, stewardship and ownership of policy at SHS through a variety of forums, all of which are accessible to parents. Student Representative Body is an elected 32-member student governing board that has recently changed the school's guidelines for valedictorian and salutatorian; established new guidelines for class fundraising; and set clear responsibilities for each class covering major school events from school spirit weeks to commencement ceremonies. The student Judiciary Board is an elected student committee that reviews conduct issues and recommends disciplinary action to administration. State of the School Day is a comprehensive, school-wide period of reflection and deliberation of action steps to ensure that SHS culture adheres to the school's mission, vision and core values. In addition, a SHS student now serves on the School Committee.

Because of the school's focus on a culture of collaboration, teachers are expected to exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school. These efforts are primarily designed to increase student engagement in learning. Since the school's inception in 1999, SHS has cultivated and executed a democratic model for decision-making to improve the learning environment for

students. Important policy decisions are made through a fist-to-five voting system, with fours and fives representing strong endorsement for a proposal and a fist serving as a single-person veto. Teachers who exercise their veto power are required to be actively involved in producing an alternative proposal with other faculty members. This voting process extends to learning area meetings and advisor meetings, as well as the Student Representative Body.

Leadership is an expectation for each faculty member at SHS. Those who do not serve as chairs or facilitators of committees are encouraged to pursue these roles in subsequent years. The school has developed a culture of innovation and improvement through teacher initiatives designed to increase student engagement in learning. Several elective courses (including Film Studies and AP courses) have been created by individual teachers who put their proposals through Learning Areas. Faculty members have introduced significant changes to existing courses by bringing their ideas and evidence to Learning Areas. These changes include Spanish classes transitioning from a block schedule to a daily schedule, and reconfiguring the math curriculum sequence from Math 1-2-3-4 to combinations that fit more needs for more students.

Other teacher initiatives that introduced changes for students and more engagement opportunities include the Leadership team program, a student portfolio designed to demonstrate Learning Expectations, Credit/Standards Recovery for students who need more time to meet academic standards for a particular course, a "Lunch Bunch" assistance program for struggling students, the girls' and boys' Bates Club mentoring program, and a pilot mentoring program where two senior advisory groups discuss school-wide topics with two freshmen advisory groups.

The school board, superintendent, and principal are collaborative, reflective and constructive in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The district superintendent and the Sample High School principal actively participate in school board meetings by reporting on developments within their jurisdiction including policies that impact 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Expectations. The principal's contributions recently included reports on school fundraising and community

service, the athletic budget, and an update from the SHS accreditation steering committee. The superintendent and high school principal also collaborate at bi-weekly administrative team meetings attended by leaders from each school in the district, including principals, assistant principals, special education directors, the superintendent and assistant superintendent. In addition to reporting on issues of mutual concern, the A-Team devotes one meeting per month for professional growth through book discussions. The book group reviews assigned readings from the superintendent before engaging in reflection and discussion. The recent superintendent search team included school committee members, community stakeholders, administrators, and a faculty member. The Endicott Survey revealed that 51 percent of faculty agreed with the statement " The school board, superintendent and principal collaborate in the process of achieving learning expectations." At the time of this survey, the district had hired its fourth superintendent in 10 years. The recent search process was inclusive and designed to ensure stability and collaboration.

The school board and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision making authority to lead the school. The SHS leadership committee makes policy and planning decisions with input from the principal, assistant principal, six teachers, two students and the chairman of the school board. The school board has consistently supported the SHS leadership model, which gives the principal decision making authority as well as the freedom to include other stakeholders in policy making. Through this leadership model, the principal builds the school budget with input from faculty and learning area coordinators, the building and grounds managers, co-curricular director and other interested parties. Also through this model, the principal and the Leadership team create the professional development calendar and agendas for the high school faculty and staff. The school board and superintendent have supported this decision making process while allowing the principal to make both collaborative and unilateral decisions. Among other responsibilities, the school committee and superintendent have granted the principal authority to set school-wide goals; manage the school's governance process; plan State of the School Day in consultation with the school leadership team; lead curriculum revision for each learning area; approve new courses; assist with course development; oversee the writing and revision of the Student Handbook and Disciplinary Code; conduct teacher evaluation; and manage the evaluation, hiring and dismissal process for

faculty and staff. The Endicott Survey revealed that 81 percent of the SHS faculty and staff were in total agreement with the statement, "The principal and other school-based administrators provide instructional leadership that is consistent with the school's core values, beliefs and learning expectations."



## Support Standard School Culture and Leadership

### Executive Summary

Students, faculty, professional staff, and administrators collaborate daily at Sample High School (SHS) to maintain and further develop a school culture that is safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, with high expectations for all and a tradition of putting students first. Students are empowered to create an educational experience that fits their unique needs and interests, while meeting high academic standards in core classes, electives, independent studies and alternative education programs. Incoming ninth grade students spend their first day in Advisory groups, team-building, learning about the school culture, and engaging in activities intended to familiarize them with academic, social, and community expectations. Throughout their high school career, opportunities abound for students to challenge themselves and develop their skills through co-curricular activities that include the student government; the leadership team where students make policy with teachers and administrators; the Civil Rights team, the Gay-Straight Alliance; sports, music, theater, the school newspaper, and many other in-school organizations.

Since its inception in 1999, the school has nurtured a feeling of community through the advisory program, which meets daily for 25 minutes. Students move through their four years at SHS with the same Advisory group, led by an advisor who knows each advisee well while helping them achieve 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Expectations.

Because all core classes at SHS are heterogeneously grouped, students expect their educational experience to feature diversity, collaboration, tolerance, and respect. The principal and assistant principal lead by example as they encourage faculty to push their thinking, improve their practice, and find new ways to reach students of all skill levels. Weekly 90-minute meetings with full faculty, learning area peers, or advisory group peers allow teachers to share ideas and work through problems. The leadership team creates an in-house professional development schedule to guide teachers in their efforts to improve student learning. The school board has consistently supported the SHS leadership model. Parents

give the school high marks for creating a safe environment. Parents help create a positive culture through their involvement at student-led conferences, on hiring committees, with fundraisers, on the booster club, and attendance at sporting and performing arts events.

Based on the Rating Guide for the Standard, Sample High School judges their adherence to the Standard as ACCEPTABLE.

**Strengths:**

- The Advisory program provides a "community within the community" dynamic for students who spend 25 minutes every day of their four years at SHS with an advisor who knows them well, and with Advisory peers who come from different backgrounds
- The school community is committed to heterogeneous grouping throughout the curriculum and in co-curricular activities.
- In order to graduate, every student is required to participate in four co-curricular activities during high school
- The school's decentralized governance system ensures collaborative decisions and policy-making, with administrators, teachers and parents and students working together
- The school's performance-based salary system requires teachers and professional staff to assemble Performance Archive Folders to be assessed by trained peers in order to qualify for salary increases
- The administration provides for numerous professional development opportunities, many of which allow faculty and administrators to work together at conferences
- Faculty and administrators attend book club discussions to reflect on their practice and learn new strategies and methods from experts and peers
- The student-led judiciary board reviews student infractions before recommending consequences to ensure the maintenance of a safe and equitable school environment
- Students have opportunities to customize their learning through independent study, college courses, online classes, alternative education programs and Honors Challenge
- The Advisory program serves at-risk students through outdoor education and provides them with the opportunity to develop leadership skills and responsibility

- The community can access school-related information through Infinite Campus, a district newsletter and the expectation that advisors and classroom teachers maintain contact with parents
- The culture of collaboration is a norm for all teachers and professional staff
- Teachers are encouraged to serve on several different leadership committees throughout their careers
- The school encourages all teachers to serve as advisors on at least one co-curricular activity
- The school maintains a student-first vision and culture of collaboration despite changes in superintendents, school district restructuring and budget cuts

**Needs:**

- Develop and implement a comprehensive administrative evaluation process for teachers
- Expand the recently established senior-freshmen mentoring program
- Create better awareness within the student body of the roles and functions of the Leadership team and Student Representative Body
- Increase flexibility in the creation of student schedules for those who want to take advantage of the wide variety of education choices
- Extend professional development opportunities so that faculty can benefit from conferences attended by their peers, as well as the sharing of expertise among teachers
- Hold forums for faculty gatherings with less formal professional development agendas
- Establish strong, consistent connections with families, parents, businesses, and community organizations