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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.  
COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

**Director**

PAMELA GRAY-BENNETT, Ed.D. (EXT. 325)  
pgraybennett@neasc.org

**Deputy Director**

JANET D. ALLISON (EXT. 318)  
jallison@neasc.org

**Associate Director**

CHARLES J. MC CARTHY, JR. (EXT. 317)  
cmccarthy@neasc.org

**Associate Director**

ANN L. ASHWORTH (EXT. 341)  
aashworth@neasc.org

**Assistant to the Director**

ROBERTA E. KNIGHT (EXT. 319)  
rknight@neasc.org

April 6, 2006

Keith Parent  
Principal  
Gorham Middle/High School  
120 Main Street  
Gorham, NH 03581

Dear Mr. Parent:

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools at its March 26-27, 2006 meeting, reviewed the deferred Special Progress Report and the findings of the report of a Commission Directed Visit to Gorham Middle/High School and voted unanimously to place the school on probation based on significant deficiencies in its adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation on Curriculum and Community Resources for Learning.

School officials have the opportunity to show cause why the school should not be placed on probation. If Gorham Middle/High School elects to show cause, it should file a written submission of its case by May 15, 2006 providing information, beyond that contained in the school's evaluation report, which demonstrates that the problems cited either do not exist or have been resolved. Review of such a response would take place at the next Commission meeting on June 25 -26, 2006. If the school chooses not to show cause, it should so inform the Commission in writing by May 15, 2006. The lack of a show cause response is an indication to the Commission that the concerns cited are accurate. Correspondence from the school should be sent to the Commission office by certified mail, return receipt requested.

Since a request for a show-cause response is a serious matter, the Commission has asked that I review the communications between the school and the Commission office since the last evaluation visit in March 2002 related to the concerns that are prompting the decision to place the school on probation. Since that time, the Commission has reviewed four reports from the school, the decennial evaluation report, the required Two-Year Progress Report, and two Special Progress Reports, one of which was combined with the findings of a Commission Directed Visit.

When the Commission reviewed Gorham Middle/High School's evaluation report in September 2002, the school was commended for the teachers' enthusiastic support for the mission and expectations for student learning, the collaborative and professional culture, the positive school climate, the principal's visibility throughout the school and at school events, and the variety of assessment strategies employed among many other strengths. However, the school was placed on warning for the Standards for Accreditation on Curriculum and Community Resources for Learning. The Commission expressed a number of serious

concerns, including, but not limited to, the following: the lack of written curriculum guides in all subject areas, the lack of substantive interdisciplinary instruction, the lack of emphasis on depth of knowledge, the lack of rigor in the curriculum other than with the accelerated and advanced placement courses, the lack of funding for curricular materials, the lack of a curriculum cycle to review and revise the curriculum, and the lack of alignment of the curriculum with school-wide expectations for student learning.

Further, the Commission expressed concern regarding the failure of the school site, plant, and equipment to adequately support and enhance the educational program. Concerns included, but were not limited to, the following: roof inadequacy, the lack of sufficient sprinklers throughout the building, the presence of asbestos in the ceiling and floors, the lack of smoke and heat detectors in all areas of the building, the limited handicapped accessibility in the building, the overcrowded parking lot, inadequate windows, inadequate space in some classrooms, cramped hallways, the lack of adherence to code regarding electrical wiring, the poor air quality, the unsafe conditions in the nurse's room, the overcrowded cafeteria at lunch time and the unsafe entrances/egress from the cafeteria, the inadequate storage space, the lack of an area for school presentations, the need for conference rooms for confidentiality and educational significance, the need to replace equipment, the poor condition of the school's playing fields, the lack of a process to address technology repairs in a timely manner, and fire, health, and safety issues.

The Commission requested a Special Progress Report for July 2003 providing a plan and timeline to address short and long-term facility issues, including those affecting the health and safety of building occupants. Further, school officials were asked to provide information related to these curriculum concerns: increase the level of rigor of the curriculum, ensuring that all students are challenged by critical thinking, problem solving, and higher order thinking skills; increase the level of funding for curricular and instructional materials and supplies; provide further training to teachers in the use of technology for classroom instruction; and delegate among curricular areas the academic expectations in the mission for which each is responsible.

Additional highlighted recommendations were identified for the Two-Year Progress Report which was due October 2004. Among those recommendations were: report the completion of all curriculum documents, ensuring alignment with the academic expectations; discuss steps taken to emphasize depth of understanding rather than breadth of coverage; provide an update on the adequacy of funding for curricular and instructional materials; and provide training for teaching in the block schedule.

The Commission reviewed the first Special Progress Report at its September 2003 meeting and continued the school on warning for the Standards on Curriculum and Community Resources for Learning. It commended the school for the installation of a fire alarm system, the removal of all asbestos tiles as part of a grant, the acquisition of grant monies to support curriculum work by the faculty, the addition of a part-time guidance counselor, and increased training for faculty in the use of technology for instructional activities. School officials were asked to respond to the following additional recommendations for the Two-Year Progress Report: report the status of the discussion and timeline to address long-term facilities needs by building off-site, forming a cooperative school district with the sending towns of Randolph and Shelburne, and/or sending high school students to Berlin High School; describe the process used to review the mission and expectations for student learning; and submit the revised mission and expectations and the definitions for the academic, social, and civic expectations for student learning articulated in the mission.

The school's Two-Year Progress Report was reviewed and accepted by the Commission at its January 2005 meeting. The Commission voted to continue the school on warning for the Standards on Curriculum and Community Resources for Learning. A number of commendations were identified including: the financial support for curricular and instructional materials; the integration of technology across all facets of the school; the documented efforts to integrate the mission and expectations into the school culture; the

development of a formal curriculum review and revision cycle; the training for teachers in writing and using rubrics; the establishment of freshmen advisories; and the addition of courses for non-college bound students. Further, the Commission acknowledged the ongoing work to address some facilities issues including the upgrading of the structure of the roof, repairs to the electrical system, and the replacement of some windows.

A second Special Progress Report due November 1, 2005 was requested by the Commission in which school officials were asked to again submit a plan and a timeline to fully address/resolve all identified long-term facilities concerns and report the results of the March 2005 town meeting regarding facilities concerns. Further, the Commission sought an update on the re-established building committee's findings regarding the facilities and the school's ability to deliver the revised curriculum. Finally, the Commission identified six highlighted recommendations in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the Five-Year Progress Report due in March 2007.

Upon reviewing the school's second Special Progress Report in January 2006, the Commission deferred action and requested a Commission Directed Visit following receipt of a description by department/curriculum area of any negative impact of the facility on the delivery of curriculum and instruction, any negative impact of the facility on the delivery of appropriate services, and any infrastructure needs and/or health and safety concerns.

As stated above, in March 2006 the Commission reviewed the school's deferred Special Progress Report and the report of a Commission Directed Visit which confirmed the longstanding facilities, space, and health and safety concerns and their negative impact on teaching and learning and the health and safety of all building occupants. These concerns include, but are not limited to, the following: the aging and inappropriate classroom space in the 1924 section of the facility that houses the middle school, including a number of classrooms that have only one entrance/exit; the absence of any science lab for the middle school program which limits the application of scientific concepts; the lack of space in the middle school for student lockers; the enclosed middle school computer lab that poses ventilation and lighting concerns; the deplorable condition of the physics and chemistry labs that are barely functional and have no operational gas lines; the non-working sinks in science labs; the presence of exposed radiators; the presence of radiators suspended from the ceiling in areas where students work; the inconsistent heat and ventilation; the poor condition of many sections of the roof due to ongoing leaks which have also damaged window frames; the insufficient number of electrical outlets, many of which are outdated and do not support the number of computers throughout the facility; the poor and aging condition of the gym floor which is pulling away from the sub-floor; and the lack of confidential small group meetings/conference space any place in the facility.

Of equal concern are: the limited storage space throughout the facility; the undersized kitchen preparation area in which all food is prepared and served; the availability of only one major entrance/exit in the cafeteria, although students can exit through the kitchen in an emergency; the serious dust issues in the wood shop; the presence of a number of old, green chalkboards; the lack of screens on some windows in the 1924 building; the poor condition of several windows in various areas of the facility that do not close properly, some of which are nailed shut; the lack of any playing fields on-site; the safety concerns in the bus loading area and parking lot; the poor condition of the bleachers; the lack of handicapped accessibility to the girls locker room and the front entrance of the building; the poor condition of the locker rooms; the structural crack in the chimney located in the 1924 building; the poor exhaust system for the kiln; the presence of some non-friable asbestos floor tiles; the obsolete clock system which can no longer be repaired; the small, dark, and poorly ventilated faculty workroom; and the design of the facility itself which has a variety of stairways and alcoves and presents concerns during a building lockdown.

Given the unacceptable condition of the current facility which is in dire need of additional repairs, renovations, and refurbishments if it is to provide an appropriate, safe, and healthful environment that supports teaching and learning for the students and adults who work in the school and the severity of the issues detailed, the Commission voted to place the school on probation. Regrettably, the present school plant will continue to be operational for at least the next two school years with no agreed upon plan or secured funding, and, in the Commission's view, will continue to negatively impact teaching and learning and the school's programs and services.

Although the Commission does have considerable concerns about the school facility it did wish to convey its pleasure in learning of the following: the establishment by the newly formed cooperative school board of a building committee that presented detailed information related to the current condition of the facilities at the recent school meeting; the subsequent allocation of \$350,000 at the March 2006 school meeting to hire both an architectural and engineering firm to work with the current building committee to develop a proposal to be presented to the voters in March 2007 designed to resolve the facilities, space, and health and safety issues; the steps taken immediately following the allocation of those monies by the committee in seeking information related to state funding requirements and the issuing of bids and contracts. As well, the Commission noted the increased availability of parking spaces through the purchase of two house lots adjacent to the school, the provision of new individual student lockers, sufficient in number for all students, the upgrades to the main server and the electrical panel, the installation of outside lighting, and the purchase of a mobile computer lab. Further, the Commission wished to recognize that school personnel are making concerted efforts to work within the constraints imposed by these issues in order to meet the needs of the students they serve. Finally, the Commission noted the school's completion of rubrics for the academic expectations in the mission along with the ongoing curriculum work by the professional staff.

We have enclosed a copy of the Association's Policies and Procedures for Appeal of Adverse Action and Policy on Release of Information for your review as well as the Commission's show cause procedures. Should you have any questions about the Commission action or information that has been requested, please contact the Commission office.

Sincerely,



Pamela Gray-Bennett

PGB/rt(ms)  
Enclosures

cc: Patrick C. Low, Superintendent, SAU #20  
Leona Guay, Chair, Gorham School Board  
Martin Gray, Chair, Commission on Public Secondary Schools