

CURRICULUM

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

A new vision statement for Holyoke High School was developed in the spring of 2006 by a faculty committee and approved unanimously by the faculty at large. The school-wide academic expectations of Holyoke High School and a set of school-wide rubrics are integral parts of that vision statement. Because the academic expectations put forth in the vision statement are the same across the entire curriculum, every department, to a greater or lesser extent, assumes responsibility for those expectations.

The English Department and the English Language Learners (ELL) Department have accepted primary responsibility for reading, writing, and speaking effectively, and secondary responsibility for the use of critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning techniques. The Science Department has assumed primary responsibility for reading effectively and for the use of critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning techniques, and secondary responsibility for effective writing and speaking. The Mathematics, Art, and Business and Technology Departments have assumed the use of critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning techniques as their primary responsibility, with effective reading, writing, and speaking as secondary responsibilities. The World Language Department sees speaking and reading effectively as their primary responsibility, with effective writing and the use of critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning techniques as secondary. The Social Studies Department has assumed primary responsibility for effective reading and writing and the use of critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning techniques, and secondary responsibility for effective speaking. The Music and Health Departments have assumed primary responsibility for effective speaking and reading as well as critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning techniques, and a

secondary responsibility for effective writing. The Physical Education Department has assumed secondary responsibility for all of the academic expectations. The Special Education Department follows students' Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) and has assumed the primary responsibility for effective reading and writing and the use of critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning techniques, and secondary responsibility for effective speaking.

Holyoke High School's academic expectations are clearly identified in the course selection guide distributed by guidance counselors to students and parents. In addition, the academic expectations are published in the Holyoke High School Student Handbook and posted conspicuously in each classroom and other public spaces in the building. *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006)* showed that 79.1% of the faculty felt that the curriculum reflected school-wide learning goals.

Every course offering in each department has been recently revised to align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks as well as the academic expectations put forth in the vision statement. Course levels have been revised for the 2006-07 academic year. The Principles (basic) level was dropped, and Holyoke High School now offers three academic levels- Advanced Placement, Honors, and Standard. Using the Understanding By Design template, the written curriculum prescribes content, integrates relevant school-wide learning expectations, includes course-specific learning goals, suggests instructional strategies, and suggests assessment techniques including the use of school wide rubrics.

The Holyoke High School written curriculum permits an in-depth concentration within a single discipline or a unique combination of courses. In order to graduate from Holyoke High School, a student must earn a minimum of 120 credits. Course credits range from 1.25 to 7.5. All students are required to pass four courses in English, three courses in mathematics, three courses in science (increased from two, starting with the graduating class of 2010) and two

courses in history (including one course in United States history). Starting in 2007, the history requirement will increase to three years. In addition, each student is required to take four years of physical education. A 20 hour community service graduation requirement has been proposed starting with the class of 2010. These minimum requirements, combined with course offerings at up to three academic levels (Advanced Placement, Honors, and Standard), are intended to allow students flexibility to pursue an individual academic plan that both challenges them and prepares them to succeed in the workplace and/or higher education without remediation, as put forth in the vision statement. Additionally, Holyoke High School offers a comprehensive English Language Learner program to ensure the success of a large ELL population.

The Holyoke High School curriculum offers a wide variety of opportunities for all students in the school to practice and achieve each component of the school's academic expectations for student learning. Because the academic expectations are the same across all levels of the curriculum, all students, regardless of the course of study chosen, have adequate opportunity to practice and achieve those expectations. The entire School Committee and 77.2% of parents surveyed agreed that the curriculum provides students with multiple opportunities to meet school-wide academic expectations according to *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006.)* Eighty-eight percent of the faculty agrees that students are regularly given an opportunity to practice and achieve school-wide academic expectations in their classes.

In September 2005, all departments began the creation of curriculum units, using the Understanding By Design (UBD) template. Each UBD unit prescribes the content and learning goals of the lessons in that unit through the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks content standards, understandings, and essential questions. Assessment evidence (including performance tasks, key criteria, and other evidence) and the learning plan (including specific classroom and non-classroom activities) are also integral parts of the UBD format. The use of the

Understanding By Design template ensures consistency across the curriculum with regard to content, school-wide learning expectations, and course-specific learning goals. It also allows a maximum degree of instructional and assessment flexibility to the various individuals who may teach the same course. Results of *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006)* (taken before the completion of the aforementioned curriculum revisions) showed that written curriculum documents are clear and comprehensive to 74.2% of the faculty, and a majority of both parents (74%) and students (72.9%) know the learning that is expected in classes. The results of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), along with results of other standards-based assessments such as Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA), and Massachusetts English Language Assessment – Oral (MELA-O), are used to guide curriculum review in order to enhance student learning.

The Holyoke High School curriculum, now aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, offers a variety of rigorous and intellectually challenging courses. With opportunities to select courses at three academic levels (Advanced Placement, Honors, and Standard) in most departments, students are presented with many opportunities for inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking. *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006)* indicates that a significant percentage of both faculty and parents feel that the curriculum develops critical thinking and problem solving skills (91.6% and 78.8% respectively) and encourages inquiry (87.8% and 71.4% respectively). Student response to the survey shows that only 65.2% feel that their courses develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006)* show a significant difference of opinion regarding authentic application of skills, with 80% of teachers responding positively versus a 41.9% positive response from students. Only 53.9% of parents felt that their children were often

asked to apply what they have learned to real life situations, but 84.1% felt that what their children were learning will be useful later on in life.

Classes require authentic application of knowledge and skills through research papers and projects in which students select and explore a topic in depth. Internal applications of knowledge and skills include *The Herald* (the school newspaper), and *The Annual* (the school yearbook). Other opportunities for authentic application of knowledge and skills include speech and debate competitions, participation in Model Congress, and drama and musical performances.

Curriculum development and revision in all public schools in Massachusetts is driven by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. There is currently no formal program of true curricular integration at Holyoke High School, but since the curriculum has been recently realigned to the Frameworks, any curricular integration allowed by them is reflected in that curriculum. Although the school board shows a 100% positive response to *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006)* concerning the inclusion of multi-disciplinary experiences and activities in the curriculum, neither the students (65.4%) nor the parents surveyed (35.1%) feel that there is a high degree of interdisciplinary learning. When asked if their teachers include topics from other subject areas, only 49.4% of students responded affirmatively.

A pilot program involving coordinated curriculum for a group of 100 freshman students has been implemented to maximize integration across multiple subject areas.

A significant number of teachers (61.7%) and parents (63.4%) surveyed feel that the curriculum does not allow for depth of coverage, a reflection perhaps of the conflict between the curricular content demanded by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the time constraints of the school year. Efforts are being made to resolve this inherent conflict. Among them are the Science Department's shift from the traditional one year biology, chemistry, and

physics courses to two year courses which allow sufficient depth of coverage and still satisfy the requirements of the Massachusetts Frameworks. In a similar fashion, the Social Studies Department has changed its United States History offering to a two year course. In the study of literature, the English Department has moved away from abridged novels, with a deeper focus on fewer, more complete works.

The inclusion and expansion of Advanced Placement courses in the Holyoke High School curriculum is another opportunity for a focus on depth over breadth. To address the problems of staffing or low student interest in some areas, the possibilities offered by on-line distance learning through the Virtual High School are being considered.

Holyoke High School provides a number of opportunities to extend student learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus. However, *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006)* showed that only 42.2% of students and 41.9% of parents were aware that these opportunities exist.

Currently in its third year at Holyoke High School, the CONNECTIONS after school program, funded through the Massachusetts Department of Education's 21st Century Learning Center Grant Program, serves an average of 60 students a day, with an estimated 200 students attending the program during the school year. CONNECTIONS, staffed by certified teachers, runs four afternoons a week and provides an hour of homework help or academic support followed by 90 minutes of an enrichment activity. One of the goals of the program is to provide creative and innovative interdisciplinary, hands-on, student-centered programming that supports and contributes to the academic achievement and youth development of all students. Students can choose to attend workshops such as Community Service Learning, Culinary Arts, Fitness, Salsa, Hip-Hop CD Production, and Fashion Design. Students are also provided with a snack and bus transportation home.

During the 2004-05 school year, Holyoke High School had 107 new students participating in the Tech Prep program, a federally funded initiative under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Educational Act of 1998. The benefits of participating in the Tech Prep program include the creation of an academic career plan, the opportunities to meet potential future employers and earn free college credits while still in high school, the development of leadership and communication skills, and no cost registration at Holyoke, Greenfield, and Springfield Technical Community Colleges. Results of Tech Prep's placement testing are given to students and their guidance counselors, with additional participation in summer courses, offered without charge, at Holyoke Community College. Many of the Tech Prep students have attended the Career Construction Day Career Fair, Holyoke Community College Career Day, and the Leadership Ambassador Presentation and Engineering Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

With the Valley Opportunity Council as a project partner, Holyoke High School participates in Gear-Up, a federally funded program of the Department of Education. Services provided to students and their parents include college trips, information and guidance on financial aid, academic support programs, and both SAT and MCAS preparation. A select number of Gear-Up students participated in courses offered through Virtual High School, a non-profit organization that provides NetCourses to participating schools.

A proposal for broader participation in Virtual High School is currently before the Holyoke School Committee. VHS NetCourses offer students opportunities to gain proficiency in online collaboration and accessing and processing data in an online environment.

Holyoke High School has participated for many years in two Upward Bound programs, one in partnership with Holyoke Community College and another with the Northfield-Mt. Hermon School. Mentoring, peer tutoring, leadership exercises, and college and financial aid

application support are provided to students and their families through these grant-based programs. Summer institutes given at both HCC and NMH preview course work in subjects to be taken in the next academic year.

Holyoke High School allows its students to pursue college credit, on their own initiative and at their own expense, through dual enrollment programs with local colleges. Students are currently enrolled in courses at Holyoke Community College and Westfield State College.

For those students who fall behind in their class work due to absence or tardiness, or for those who simply wish to supplement their regular attendance, the Holyoke School District has instituted a Saturday School which is in session from October until June.

Many of the students participate in one or more of the many enrichment programs, clubs, sports, or community activities offered by the school. Through these organizations, students are given the opportunity to travel to local and regional competitions and performances; perform public service at libraries, museums, nursing homes, and food kitchens; and hone citizenship and leadership skills by interacting with the community at large.

The school wide system of academic departments is the basic level at which the curriculum is generated. Each department meets monthly to discuss all aspects of the curriculum, including expectations, class activities, and assessment measures. These department meetings are opportunities for personnel to interact with one another, address the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, assess their plans and goals respective to those of their colleagues, and make known any concerns that need to be discussed. The department head guides the meetings and assigns intradepartmental projects and special initiatives to the staff. To improve and increase the flow of information between the high school and the sending schools within the district, teachers from grades 6 through 8 are now required to attend department meetings three times a year.

The Leadership Team (comprised of the department heads, key school administrators, the academic coordinator, and three at large faculty representatives) serves as the vehicle for interdepartmental communication and coordination. Led by the Principal, the Leadership Team addresses broad issues that affect students and teachers, including special events and initiatives and interdepartmental collaborations. In preparation for Leadership Team meetings, department heads survey the members of their department as to ideas and/or concerns about school and curricular matters. Additionally, students too are encouraged to bring their concerns and suggestions to the Leadership Team through their student government representatives.

All teachers at Holyoke High School, regardless of subject, are expected to promote the students' reading and writing ability through the system-wide *25 Books Campaign*, school-wide reading times, open response questions, "MCAS Mondays," and tests/exams written in MCAS standardized styles.

Overall, Holyoke High School has sufficient amounts of instructional materials and equipment to both implement the curriculum and meet the needs of the students. Both the students (80.7%) and the parents (88.3%) surveyed in 2006 (*The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS*) agreed that the books and print materials provided were adequate, although only 69.8% of the parents thought the books used by their children were current and up to date. Parent opinions of the school's computer resources were slightly lower, with only 65.3% agreeing that they are adequate, in contrast with the school committee's 80% positive response. Teachers gave consistent responses to questions about the adequacy of technological resources (58.5%), material resources (58.1%), and library resources (59.8%).

Only 25.2% of the students reported that they use the library often as a part of class assignments. A 2006 analysis of the school library reveals holdings of 24,821 items, with the largest distributions in the social sciences and fiction (14% each), literature/rhetoric (13%), and

geography/history (12%). Many of the library's holdings are older than what is generally considered acceptable, with publication dates ranging from 1972 to 1992. Slightly more than 15% of the library's holdings have publication dates of 2000 or later. In addition to its collection of print holdings, the library has 10 computer stations (with a printer) available for student use, and subscribes to a number of on-line databases including EBSCO Magazine Database, Grolier Encyclopedia, Infotrac, Netlibrary, and Newsbank. The on-line databases are accessible from any computer station in the school.

A significant number of improvements to instructional materials has been made within the last ten years. A number of faculty concerns about instructional equipment expressed in a June 2006 survey have been addressed through the addition of another computer lab, the upgrade of most computer hardware in existing computer labs, upgrades in the language labs, and the purchase of several Smartboards, portable multi-media carts, and a large number of good quality microscopes. However, as the aforementioned survey data indicates, approximately 40% of teachers find their technological, material, and library resources to be insufficient to allow for implementation of the curriculum.

In general, the school facilities are adequate for the implementation of the curriculum. For a building of its age (40+ years), the physical plant is in good condition, with the notable exception of the science wing. Antiquated and inadequate laboratory facilities hinder the full implementation of the science curriculum. Problems with air quality and ventilation throughout the building are also of concern.

In a June 2006 survey of Holyoke High School faculty, 78% indicated a belief that their class loads were "acceptable," while 83% felt that their class sizes still allowed them to implement all parts of their curriculum. The greatest concern of the faculty regarding class size is the unequal distribution of students among classes of varying levels. It is widely held,

especially among ELA teachers, that five classes of twenty or more students significantly inhibits a teacher's ability to effectively teach and grade writing. Several teachers expressed the belief that large class sizes, combined with short instructional periods, prevent them from working effectively with each student. Only 13% of teachers surveyed in June 2006 report having a paraprofessional aide in their classroom.

Based on *The Self-Study Survey Results for Holyoke High Schools (February 24, 2006)*, there is a significant gap between the perception of the professional staff and the school committee concerning ongoing development of the curriculum and how decisions about the curriculum are made. The school committee unanimously felt that the staff is involved in curriculum development, evaluation, and revision and that curriculum decisions are based on student performance data. The staff, however, gave only 75.0% and 67.8% positive responses to those same statements.

The Management Information Systems Supervisor gives teachers individualized results of their students' performances on standardized tests (MCAS, MAP, MEPA, and MELA-O) to guide course specific learning goals. Additionally, departments use this information to determine necessary new courses such as READ 180 and Ramp Up English and Math.

The most recent school-wide curriculum review cycle was initiated by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act and the implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. As of 2005, all courses taught at Holyoke High School are aligned with these curriculum frameworks. That review cycle will be completed with the full implementation of the academic expectations (as stated in the school's vision statement) and school-wide rubrics. Since the Curriculum Frameworks, in the words of the Massachusetts Department of Education, are "living documents," revisions and changes in the frameworks can be expected. Any such changes would trigger a new cycle of curriculum revision at Holyoke High School.

Over the past ten years, there has been a concerted effort by the professional staff to bring the curriculum of Holyoke High School into alignment with the evolving Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The last three years have seen the faculty involved in the development and revision of unit plans (following the UBD format) aligned with both the curriculum frameworks and the school's academic expectations. Time and resources have certainly been committed to this effort; however, *The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006)* showed that only 35.7% of the faculty believed that the time and resources committed have been sufficient for the development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum. In response to this perceived deficiency, and to address the needs of the diverse student population, a number of changes have been implemented. The function of the academic coordinator will be refocused on curriculum development, evaluation, and revision. Additionally, one assistant principal has been assigned to support curriculum and another to support instruction.

Holyoke High School is also working with district officials to promote the development, evaluation and revision of curriculum. In 2006, a curriculum team was convened to review mathematics and English language arts curriculum to ensure vertical alignment from grades K-12. Teachers received a summer stipend to develop curriculum maps that detail student work and academic expectations. The next phase of this project calls for the development and alignment of social studies and science curricular maps.

The Self-Study Survey Results for HHS (February 24, 2006) indicate that the school committee unanimously agrees that the school provides professional development activities in the area of curriculum. In the same survey, the teachers gave only a 40.7% positive response to the same question. Only 75.3% of the staff takes advantage of professional development opportunities related to curriculum development. Although there are a number of professional

development activities offered by the district, few of them are related to, or supportive of, curriculum development, and fewer still are focused on the high school curriculum.

When the school's practices are compared to the Curriculum Standard Rating Guide, Holyoke High School performs in the **ACCEPTABLE** category.

Adopted unanimously by HHS staff on December 15, 2006

CURRICULUM STANDARD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The last two years have seen Holyoke High School face its greatest challenge in the area of curriculum evaluation and revision. The development of a new vision statement and the need to align the entire curriculum with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks have driven the most significant changes in the curriculum in recent years.

A new Vision Statement with academic expectations and school-wide rubrics was developed in the spring of 2006 by a faculty committee and approved unanimously by the faculty at large. Each department in the school has identified the school-wide academic expectations for which it has assumed either primary or secondary responsibility.

Starting with the elimination of principle (basic) level courses, the bar has been systematically raised for all students in all courses. The Holyoke High School curriculum, now aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, offers students a variety of rigorous and intellectually challenging courses at each of three levels (Standard, Honors, and Advanced Placement) with the goal of preparing students for success in the workplace or higher education without remediation. The curriculum allows a degree of flexibility that makes it possible for a student to select an in-depth concentration within a single discipline or a unique combination of courses. The use of school-wide rubrics and the development of unit plans using the Understanding By Design template ensures consistency in each area of the curriculum as to prescribed standards-based content, course specific and school-wide learning goals, and assessment

strategies. In each department, students are presented with many opportunities for inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking. Whether through performance opportunities, student publications, or an emphasis on writing across the curriculum, every student is provided opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.

The inherent conflicts between a state mandated curriculum that emphasizes breadth of knowledge and Holyoke High School's desire to provide depth of understanding pose a significant challenge to educators. Faced with the reality of an evolving set of Curriculum Frameworks, the professional staff of Holyoke High School is committed to integrating the curriculum wherever appropriate and providing a course of study that emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.

Holyoke High School has made determined efforts to expand learning opportunities beyond the confines of the school's walls and the normal school day. A number of school and community based programs designed to both complement and supplement the curriculum are available to all students. Among the most exciting of these are cooperative programs such as Tech Prep, Upward Bound, dual enrollment at area colleges and, potentially, on-line distance learning.

The Leadership Team, composed of department heads, key administrators, the academic coordinator and three faculty members, is the vehicle for school-wide curricular coordination. To improve and increase the flow of information between the high school and the sending schools within the district, each department has expanded three of its department meetings to include teachers from grades 6 through 8. In addition, the school

district employs a full time curriculum coordinator to insure articulation and coordination of the curriculum from grades K to 12.

Approximately 60% of both teachers and parents believe that the instructional materials and equipment are adequate to allow for implementation of the curriculum (*The Self-Study Survey Results for Holyoke High School*). A significant number of improvements to instructional materials has been made in the last decade, with a major emphasis on technology. Computer labs have been added, and both hardware and software have been upgraded. Several on-line database resources have been added to supplement the library's aging print collection.

Over the last ten years, there has been a concerted effort by the professional staff to bring the curriculum of Holyoke High School into alignment with the evolving Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Professional staff have also received training on how to use standardized test results to inform course specific learning goals. One assistant principal has been assigned to curriculum support, with another to instructional support. The function of the school's academic coordinator has been refocused on curriculum development, evaluation, and revision. As the analysis of state-wide standardized testing data drives changes in the Curriculum Frameworks, those changes will be reflected in changes to the Holyoke High School curriculum.

When the school's practices are compared to the Curriculum Standard Rating Guide, Holyoke High School performs in the **ACCEPTABLE** category.

CURRICULUM STANDARD
STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

Strengths

- Course offerings which provide the appropriate level of challenge to prepare students for higher education and/or a rewarding career
- Utilization of curriculum units using the Understanding By Design template which ensures consistency with regards to content, school-wide learning expectations, and course-specific learning goals
- Extended learning opportunities beyond the school day
- Increased use of school-wide and departmental rubrics for assessment
- Increased writing opportunities across the curriculum
- On-going development of the vision statement, curriculum guides, school-wide rubrics and alignment to Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks
- Availability of additional courses to ensure that students can meet their individual academic plans
- Comprehensive ELL (English Language Learner) program to address the needs of limited English proficient students.

Needs

- Improve consistency and adequacy of funding for curriculum development, staffing, evaluation, and materials

- Create a curriculum committee that is responsible for the on-going coordination and evaluation of the curriculum
- Improve coordination between sender schools and Holyoke High School to ensure that students' previous coursework ensures adequate preparation for high school expectations
- Re-evaluate professional development offerings in curricular areas to enhance their relevancy
- Train all professional staff on how to use data on student and school performance to inform curricular development

Increase ability for staff to use network capabilities without being hindered by system-wide controls