# BIG STEP FORWARD (BSF) PROPOSAL

*A proposal to more effectively structure the secondary school system in Rochester – moving from one large comprehensive high school enrolling all district students (and achieving mixed results) to three separate high schools better serving all of our students (at the same level of per pupil operating expenditure)… (1) a smaller and better Spaulding High School (of approximately 1000 students) that is one of the best comprehensive public high schools in the state, (2) a small separate alternative school (of 75-100 students) better serving our most at-risk teenagers, and (3) a new "break the mold" 400 to 450-student high school for the future -- powerfully serving our students and also serving as a model for a significantly improved and more engaging secondary education system.*

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**Rochester School Board - special meeting/presentation (public)**
**Rochester Community Center**
**7:00 pm, January 28, 2010**

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Assisting with presentation:
- Skip Hansen *(NH Liaison, New England Consortium of Secondary School Redesign)*
- Fred Bramante *(NH State Board of Education)*
- Robert Lister *(retired superintendent, Portsmouth School Department)*

**Outline of proposal**

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## I. THE CASE FOR CHANGE

A. Historic/current performance – we are not doing well enough.
B. Traditional model is not sound.
C. Size is an issue at Spaulding.
D. Need for a small alternative program (BCA) is clear.

### A. Historic/current performance (of Spaulding High School) on five key indicators:

(1) Average daily attendance at Spaulding High School

* Regularly/historically at or under 90% prior to past two years.
* Solidly over 90% last two years (and this year to-date).
* Target (high performing high schools): 95%-plus.

| School yr. | Attend. rate |
|---|---|
| 2009-10 | 92% (to date) |
| 2008-09 | 93% |
| 2007-08 | 93% |
| 2006-07 | 90% |
| 2005-06 | 90% |
| 2004-05 | 89% |
| 2003-04 | 89% |
| 2002-03 | 89% |
| 2001-02 | 88% |
| 2000-01 | 89% |

(2) School culture/discipline

* Approximately 1200 to 1500 suspensions each school year (over last five years). Approximately 75 to 100 ten-day (or longer) suspensions each year.
* Fighting/bullying problem (100-150 altercations each year) – but fighting problem has been reduced drastically over past two years.
* Student health, wellness, behavior, and general well-being issues are significant. *(Current Spaulding-specific YRSB survey data being released by NH in Jan. or Feb. 2010.)*
* Culture of high expectations is not currently the prevailing norm.
* School pride/spirit and student engagement (in extracurricular activities, etc.) -- we have many strong programs and good examples of engagement, spirit, and pride -- but engagement is not widespread/prevalent across full student body.

**January 2010 student survey of extracurricular participation**:

* Approximately 550 students (37% or our student body) are currently not participating in any extracurricular programs.
* Approximately 400 students (26% of our student body) are participating in only one extracurricular program.
* Approximately 550 students (37% of our student body) are participating in two or more extracurricular programs.

(3) Drop-out rate

* Historically over 20% (cumulative) - one of the worst in the state.
* Significantly improved last year (cumulative rate of approximately 12%).

| School yr. | Cum. drop-out rate |
|---|---|
| 2009-10 | expected to be under 10% |
| 2008-09 | 12% |
| 2007-08 | 23% |
| 2006-07 | 22% |
| 2005-06 | 20% |
| 2004-05 | 21% |
| 2003-04 | 23% |
| 2002-03 | 24% |
| 2001-02 | 27% |
| 2000-01 | 28% |

(4) Post-secondary matriculation/success

* Only 30-35% of graduates going on to 4-year colleges. Historically not exceeding 40%.
* Only 60-70% of graduates going on to any post-secondary education.
* Success/ongoing enrollment (one and two years later) -- not being tracked, but state/federal system is in the works.

(5) Standardized test scores

* NECAP scores were significantly improved in 2008-09 (in both math and reading) - but they are still well below targets. We are entering our fifth year as a "school in need of improvement" (or SINI). We are now labeled as in "corrective action" and are participating in a state-mandated "focused monitoring" program this year.
* SAT scores are below state and US averages - and too many students don't take the test.

| SHS graduating class | Verbal | Math |
|---|---|---|
| 2009 | 497 | 470 |
| 2008 | 488 | 484 |
| 2007 | 496 | 481 |
| 2006 | 502 | 495 |
| 2005 | 518 | 501 |
| 2004 | 499 | 492 |
| 2003 | 504 | 501 |
| 2002 | 508 | 492 |
| 2001 | 501 | 497 |

**Percentage of SHS class taking the test:** typical range of 50% to 60%-plus.

STATE PARTICIPATION RATE – approx. 80%-plus.

STATE SAT SCORING AVERAGES – approx 515-520 (V) and 520-525 (M)

United States SAT AVERAGES – approx 500-505 (V) and 510-520 (M)

* AP (Advanced Placement) testing – only 50 students enrolled in AP courses last year (2008-09). And exam scores were (and have been) mixed.

**B. The traditional high school model is not designed to support (or maximize) effective teaching and powerful learning.**

* Organization of curriculum - not designed for learning.
* Isolation from community/"real world."
* Credit/assessment system - not focused on learning or accountability.
* Four-year model/assumption is grossly flawed.
* Organizational structure - not designed for flexibility/adaptability, entrepreneurship, responsiveness to student needs.

***A developing consensus around and growing understanding of this point:***

From a *A Nation at Risk* (April 1983):

*"Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur--others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.*

*If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.*

*This report, the result of 18 months of study, seeks to generate reform of our educational system in fundamental ways and to renew the Nation's commitment to schools and colleges of high quality throughout the length and breadth of our land.*

*On the occasion of the Commission's first meeting, President Reagan noted the central importance of education in American life when he said: "Certainly there are few areas of American life as important to our society, to our people, and to our families as our schools and colleges." This report, therefore, is as much an open letter to the American people as it is a report to the Secretary of Education. We are confident that the American people, properly informed, will do what is right for their children and for the generations to come."*

Bill Gates (February 2005): Gates “appalled” by high schools *(The Seattle Times)*

*Bill Gates blasted the state of U.S. high schools yesterday in a speech before the National Governors Association education summit in the nation's capital. Using words such as "ashamed" and "appalled" to describe his reaction to the failure rates for students, Microsoft's co-founder called America's high schools broken, flawed and underfunded, and said the system itself is obsolete.*

*Though Gates' philanthropic funds have had an impact on education issues for several years, his personal appearance at such a venue suggests an even stronger move by Gates to fix public education by working directly with key political leaders.*

*"The key problem is political will," he said, discussing resistance to change. Only one-third of our students graduate from high school ready for college, work and citizenship," he said.*

*The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has committed more than $2.3 billion to education since 1999. It has designated $733 million to a campaign for "smaller learning communities" to replace mass-enrollment high schools.*

*The governors, led by Virginia's Warner, welcomed Gates' candid assessment. Warner, who comes from the high-tech industry, has championed the Gates Foundation's efforts nationally, and has begun a governors' initiative to redesign high schools.*

*Gates acknowledged that there is some political resistance to the smaller-high-school campaign. "It's very complex," he said. "But in many schools you need radical institutional change," he went on. "Any radical change is going to upset people. If you look, most of the pushback is not really against small," he said. He suggested it comes from those who run big sports programs, who are "asking why you're trying to change the status quo."*

From *Considering an education system overhaul* (Jan. 2009) – *Foster's Daily Democrat Editorial*

*The Rochester School Board recently okayed a study looking into the feasibility of creating another high school. But is it a good time to start looking at another school when the economy is in the dumps? It could be the best time. Spaulding Principal John Shea, who (will spearhead) the study, notes that a new school would be several years away. Hopefully by then, the economic downturn will have righted itself at least somewhat.*

*The idea of re-examining the fundamentals of how schools operate seems good as well. Consider reports released by the National Center for Education Statistics.*

*A lot of the trouble with educating our kids is the society in which we live. Scientists aren't really idolized to the extent they should be. Instead, kids want to be athletes or pop singers. Both noble aspirations, but not so helpful when trying to show the young ones the importance of a good education. But as John Shea so aptly points out, we have to play the cards we're dealt.*

*What all of this says is that maybe we could at least look at new ways of educating our children. We've been using basically the same system for over 100 years. And things have changed. Our schools aren't performing like they should. And as the old saying goes, there's no such thing as a bad student. Perhaps it's time to re-evaluate our whole system, from the ground up.*

*Of course, the crux is the same as every other problem out there. What about the money? Shea believes he can find the (start up) funding, which is estimated at between $5 and $10 million. And he has succeeded at similar ventures in California, where he and a partner raised $8 million for a new high school. But even federal funding comes out of our collective pockets. To which some would reply that money spent now means a more educated workforce later, which in turn, brings the money back in. It gets the head in a spin, doesn't it?*

*Shea is not alone in his drive to bring change to the aging education system. New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont recently created a partnership through a*

*million dollar grant. The New England Secondary School Consortium aims to redefine the traditional concept of the American high school.*

*David Connerty-Marin, director of communications for the Maine Department of Education, says, "At the transformed high schools of the near future, students will not be limited by building design, geography or educational convention."*

Ronald Wolk (April 2009): *"We will make real progress only when we realize that our problem in education is not one of performance but one of design." From Education Week*

*After nearly 25 years of intensive effort, we have failed to fix our ailing public schools and stem the "rising tide of mediocrity" chronicled in 1983 in A Nation at Risk.*

*President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan should open two fronts in this war on mediocrity and failure. We need to continue making every effort to improve the existing public schools. They will enroll most of our young people for many years to come. Simultaneously, we should pursue a parallel strategy of creating new, innovative schools and giving them the autonomy and resources to explore new ideas. These new schools can be a much-needed research-and-development sector for the conventional system.*

From *Christian Science Monitor* (Jan. 2010): Why US high school reform efforts aren't working

*Good news at the high school level is unusual. Despite vigorous calls for change and a host of major reform efforts, encouraging results have been scarce. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores – considered the "Nation's Report Card" – tend to be stagnant for high-schoolers, even when they rise for elementary school students. Only about half of low-income and minority students in US high schools graduate, and many of those who do are unprepared for college. The isolated examples of success often fail when administrators or education reformers try to reproduce them on a large scale.*

*In short, US high schools don't seem to be working. "High schools are really large, and it's harder to coordinate work in them," says Elaine Allensworth, interim coexecutive director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research. "There's a different kind of culture in high schools, where teachers think they're teachers of subjects rather than teachers of students.... And the expectations of high schools have changed dramatically without their general structure changing."*

*A new book from the Urban Institute, "Saving America's High Schools," examines the results of six major reform efforts and finds little widespread improvement – despite innovative changes and large infusions of money and manpower.*

*In some ways, the attempt to focus on high school is relatively recent. When the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – a major player in high school reform – began focusing on the issue a decade ago, it was "trying to fill a vacuum," says Vicki Phillips, the college-ready director of education for the foundation. Since then, she says, more players have gotten involved, and the discussion has become more sophisticated. The Gates Foundation has invested more than $1 billion in improving US high schools, with both noteworthy successes and a number of false starts. In the process, Ms. Phillips says, the foundation has learned a lot about what works and what doesn't. She still believes as much as ever in the importance of smaller schools, for instance, but the foundation now looks at that as simply one important aspect of a reform effort.*

*Becky Smerdon, coeditor of the new Urban Institute book, and others concur on many of the challenges: The large and uncoordinated nature of many high schools results in teachers focusing on their subjects and often having no contact with a student's other teachers. At the same time, numerous at-risk students enter ninth grade well behind grade level. And the stakes are high: Unlike in the past, when perhaps 30 percent of graduates planned to attend college, today the expectation is that almost all students should go on to some form of postsecondary education.*

*A typical US high school operates well if only about 15 percent of the students need extra attention, says Robert Balfanz, codirector of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins and of the Talent Development Middle and High School Project. But in high-poverty neighborhoods, it may be 70, 80, or 90 percent of students who need that help.*

*Still, there are reasons for some optimism. "I've been studying high schools for about 15 years, and for two-thirds of my career, I've had to argue why high schools matter," says Smerdon. "So I'm incredibly optimistic because we're focused on it, we seem to care about it, and I think there is a commitment to try to change high schools."*

**C. There are significant disadvantages to a single mass-enrollment high school (Spaulding High School) of 1500 to 1700 students.**

* School culture, discipline, sense of community, relationships, personalization, engagement. *Research supports down-sizing to smaller schools – particularly in communities with a socioeconomic make-up such as ours. (See Appendix D - page 53.)*
* Facilities issues at Spaulding (outlined later in proposal).
* Lack of meaningful options/choices for students (and parents) – outside of those offered *within* the high school.

**D. There is a clear need, in this community, for a separate small "alternative" school designed to serve our most at-risk (or least engaged) students.**

* Small/strong community -- focused on relationships, all students known well, intensive support.
* Curriculum focused on relevance and application.
* Flexible schedules (days, hours, calendar).

*There should not be more than 75-100 students in a district the size of ours in need of such an option – if the "non-alternative" programs are of high enough quality (for all students).*

## II. THE VISION (and GOALS)

The crux of the vision or proposal is for the secondary education system in Rochester to transition from one large comprehensive high school of approximately 1700 students (in 2007-08) to three separate high schools (starting in 2012-13 and fully implemented in 2014-15 or 2015-16):

(1) A Spaulding High School (& Creteau Regional CTE Center) of approximately 1000 students or less… that is one of the best comprehensive public high schools in the state – serving all students effectively.

(2) A Bud Carlson Academy of approximately 75-100 students – that is one of the best small alternative school programs in New England.

(3) A new/third high school of approximately 400-450 students – that is one of the best and most effective models in the nation for what high school ought to be… a so-called "school of the 21st Century."

*NOTE: Demographic projections currently show secondary school enrollment down approximately 150 students five years from now. Hence, the numbers above add up to approximately 1500 to 1550 (rather than 1700).*

***Overview of the three schools:***

(1) Spaulding High School (& Creteau Regional Career & Technical Education Center) of approximately 1000 students – fundamentally the Spaulding that we know today (or the very best of the school we know today) but smaller, significantly improved, and better serving ALL students...

*Comprehensive program, relatively traditional high school model with rigorous academic programs (including CTE programs), high quality special education services, a breadth of extracurricular offerings, a much greater focus on community service and leadership development than currently exists, competitive interscholastic athletics, a quality performing arts programs, and a strong sense of community and a culture of high expectations.... with an information/technology infrastructure that fully supports teaching and learning and that provides better data for more-informed decision making (at the administrative level and in the classroom).*

***Eight keys to success (improved student achievement) moving forward:***

**1.** Strong "school-within-a-school" ninth-grade program serving 250-300 students in a discrete space with its own core faculty and principal/director (leaving a sophomore-junior-senior program/high school of about 700 students). Focused on the critical transition years from middle school to high school (8th to 9th to 10th grade).

**2.** More tightly focused and strengthened school curriculum/course offerings aimed at getting all students to targeted competencies (essential learning outcomes) – via clear and high expectations, constant instructional improvement, well-aligned and more effective

assessment strategies, and a scoring/grading system that is more helpful and useful to students and others.

**3.** Ideal/better school day schedule (and school year calendar) in place to maximize effectiveness of teaching and learning – via best mix of shorter and longer periods and frequency of class meetings, appropriate mix of semester/year-long classes, built-in time for remediation, student support, and teacher planning/collaboration (and professional development), appropriate time for homeroom/advisory program and other support services, greater flexibility for alternative/non-traditional pathways, etc.

**4.** Significantly increased number of high quality/rigorous options (or alternative pathways) for earning high school credits (i.e., demonstrating competencies or essential learning outcomes) – for at-risk students, highly-engaged (or "gifted") students, *and* all of the students in-between.

**5.** Campus fully "settled down." Clear, reasonable, and consistently enforced/reinforced expectations for all students – with fully-staffed school safety team at the center (along with powerful school culture set by principal, administrative team, teachers and staff) – producing far fewer disruptions to the learning environment and a stronger sense of community and support.

**6.** Homeroom/advisory program providing all students (and their families) with a single adult advisor (for all four years), a comfortable regular check-in opportunity, a homeroom/ advisory peer group of approximately 16-18 other students, and an effective vehicle for school communication, course selection/registration, a home base for the development of the student's digital portfolio and a personalized learning plan, etc. *(Greater personalization of the learning environment and the full school experience.)*

**7.** No classes (or very few) with more than 24 students. Ideal class size of 16-22 (with some exceptions). And with teachers working with fewer students (with more depth and focus) each marking period -- and/or over the course of the year.

**8.** Better facilities and more effective use of space. No overcrowding or need for expansion (but renovated and reorganized in many areas). Technological resources (computer labs, Smartboards, etc.) updated/expanded as needed. Possibility of a range of "wrap-around"/ support services provided by outside organizations at the high school – particularly before and after the school day.

(2) Bud Carlson Academy - approximately 75-100 students (grades 9-12) at separate school (located at community/recreation center). Innovative program aimed at better serving students who are least likely to find success at Spaulding.

*THIS HAS ALREADY BEEN APPROVED AND ESTABLISHED. Currently in its second year of operation.*

(3) New/third high school -- a tuition-free public school of 400-450 students (charter, pilot, district-run, or another organizational structure) with a focus or organizing theme such as entrepreneurship (including both private/business and public/social entrepreneurship) or some other appropriate and powerful unifying theme. The school will have an innovative academic program tied closely to the surrounding community. It will be one of the best and most effective models in the country of the high school of the future.

***Five key design elements – that cut at the current/traditional model:***
*(See Appendix A, page 30, for elaboration on the five design elements.)*

1. Integrated curriculum organized around solving problem and answering questions – focus on relevance, application, and depth of learning (rather than coverage of material).

2. Community/adult world collaboration -- both in & out of school -- built into the program/ schedule.

3. Competency or outcome-driven curriculum, instruction, and assessment system -- clearly defined learning goals directly assessed (multiple times in varied ways) with course credit determined by demonstrations of learning rather than seat time or traditional averaging. Much greater accountability for student learning.

4. Graduation when ready (goals met) – not sooner nor later. No more four-year assumption.

5. Organizational/management structure designed for flexibility, creativity, continuous improvement, and responsiveness to student needs. A degree of autonomy – with full accountability for results/performance.

*Operational budget:* same per pupil operating expenditures as – or less than – Spaulding High School. No impact on total Rochester School Department annual operating budget.

*Start-up budget:* originally estimated at $5 to $10 million – with the goal being to fund it predominantly (if not fully) from outside sources. *(Our original estimate has since been proven to be a good one.)*

## Goals/projected results on the five key indicators (five-plus years out) if we pursues this proposed vision:

(1) Average daily attendance - 95%-plus across all three schools.

(2) School culture/discipline
* Fewer than 100 suspensions per year (across all three schools).
* Fighting/bullying minimized, almost eliminated.
* Culture of high expectations (and strong support) at all three schools.
* Strong school pride/spirit (at all three schools) -- as well as strong faculty morale.
* At least 90% of students engaged in at least one meaningful extracurricular activity.

(3) Drop-out rate -- under 3% (cumulative rate) across the district (if not zero).
Annual rate of less than 1% (if not zero).

(4) Post-secondary matriculation/success (at all three schools)

* 50-60% of graduates (or more) going on to 4-yr colleges.
* 90%-plus of graduates going on to some type of post-secondary education/training.
* 90%-plus of graduates successful/enrolled one or two years later. (Development of tracking system is in the works.)

(5) Standardized test scores

* NECAP scores that meet AYP at all three schools. No SINIs.
* SAT scores above the state average – and more students (80%-plus) taking them.
* Double the number of students enrolled in AP courses. And more students scoring fours and fives on the exams (on the one to five scale).

And all three schools will earn stellar accreditation reports/approval from NEASC. And all three schools will, of course, meet the New Hampshire minimum state standards.

Bottom line: *More students – all students – learning more (reaching targeted competencies), better prepared for (and more eager to pursue) post-secondary options, better prepared to find and pursue meaningful and fulfilling work, and better prepared for (and more motivated to engage in) civic/citizenship responsibilities. And, due in part to the success of a significantly improved secondary education system, a better Rochester for all community members and businesses.*

## III. EXPLORATION/STUDY PROCESS

The proposal for an "exploration/study" process was brought to the school board (Oct/Nov 2008). The School Board approved moving forward, unanimously, in December 2008.

The timeline set was January 2009 through spring 2010 (approx. 16-18 months).
*Proposal is coming to the school board now (January 2010) – 4 to 5 months early.*

Budget for exploration/study process was set to not exceed $25,000.
*Expenditures to-date: approximately $12,000 (less than half of what was budgeted).*

*Expenditures:*

* Salary increase to assistant principal Rob Seaward (now serving as deputy principal) to assume much of the principal's day-to-day/operational responsibilities – to allow principal (Shea) to dedicate time to exploration/study process.
* Preliminary architectural/design consultation fees to Frank Marinace – developing estimate for renovation/preparation at prospective site/building.
* Consultation fee to retired Seacoast superintendent (Dr. Robert Lister) assisting with identifying and cultivating prospective grant makers.

**Major areas of work over past 12 months of exploration/study process:**

(1) Extensive public outreach focused on sharing the idea (the proposed vision), answering questions, and securing input from all members of the community:

* Three public forums (targeted to full community).
* Parent/public forums at all Rochester schools (and the Paul School in Wakefield).
* Presentations/forums as invited (Rotary, RCTA, Tri-City CTEs, et al.).
* Updates/Q&A with (and input from) Spaulding faculty.
* Spaulding students - discussions as interested.
* Interviews/articles run by Foster's/Rochester Times.
* Foster's commentaries (front page over seven consecutive Mondays, spring 2009).
* Interview/Q&A on Rochester community channel.
* Meetings with elected representatives, civic leaders, business representatives.
* Superintendent's blog - and development of BSF link (with taped overview interview).

(2) Identification and preliminary cultivation of prospective start-up funding sources:

* State & federal prospects.
* Grant makers & foundations.
* Businesses/corporations.
* Individuals (high net worth).

(3) Research and identification of prospective buildings/sites (in Rochester):

* Researched/reviewed approximately 25 possibilities (Spaulding campus included).
* Visited/analyzed several prospective buildings/sites.
* Determined ideal building/site (and secondary options).

(4) Research/determination of start-up mechanics:

* Regular public school.
* District public charter school.
* No recommendation at this time - both are viable options with advantages.

(5) Cultivation, meetings, discussions with prospective partners/collaborators:

* NH Department of Education
* University of New Hampshire
* New England Consortium of Secondary School Redesign
* Others (charter school networks, state higher education system, national school reform networks, etc.)

(6) Further research & development of model/design of the proposed new/third high school:

* Development, fine-tuning, and clear articulation of the five key design elements.
* Research and exploration on curriculum, instruction, and assessment matters.
* Visits to other schools (very limited to-date).

## IV. PROPOSED/DRAFT TIMELINE (& PROCESS) FOR MOVING FORWARD

* Formal presentation (and written proposal) to School Board – Thursday, January 28, 7 pm, Rochester Community Center. Will be taped (in its entirety) and broadcast (repeatedly) on Rochester Community television.

* Public hearing hosted by school board – Monday, February 8, 7 pm, Community Center. All are welcome to attend – and to comment. Will be taped and broadcast on Rochester Community television.

* School board vote to move forward (or not) – March 2010 regular school board meeting (?). Vote would be to approve proposed vision – and start new/third high school – but there would be no commitment of school department or city funding at this time. An additional/ final approval would be necessary (at a later date) via Joint Building Committee, City Council, and School Board.

Importance of timeliness: *property availability, commercial real estate market, fund raising efforts and the pursuit of grant opportunities, and critical importance of direction/leadership of Spaulding High School moving forward.*

**If school board votes to move forward:**

* Appointment/hiring this spring of full-time project director (to start July 2010). *Funded entirely by outside planning grants. Target budget for the project for 2010-11 fiscal year would be $100,000 to $150,000. With at least $25,000 to $50,000 secured by spring 2010.*

* First priority becomes fund raising and partnership building... led by project director and newly developed advisory team/board. Securing a building/site (and formation and preliminary work of Joint Building Committee) are also critical next steps.

* Search, interview, hiring process for new SHS principal (if not Shea). If necessary -- ideally initiated, conducted, and completed in March-May 2010 timeframe (aiming for July 1 – or earlier – start date).

* Final/critical vote of approval *(JBC, Council, School Board)* to be sought at appropriate point during the 2010-11 school/fiscal year (likely sometime late fall or in the winter) based on:
  - Final site selection, more detailed school design, and precise start-up budget.
  - A more detailed plan for the school, staffing, programs, and operating budget.
  - More detailed plans – transitional and longer term – for Spaulding.
  - Dollar amount of start-up funding secured to-date.
  - Precise dollar commitment (if any) needed from the city/school department.
  - *Note:* if the new/third school is to be a district public charter school, a warrant article granting the charter is part of this City Council approval process.

**If this additional/final approval is secured:**

- Planning and preparation work continues through remainder of 2010-11 and into 2011-12 .
- Site/building is secured, renovation/construction begins, and FFE (furniture, fixtures, equipment) plans are initiated/executed.
- All elements of school design, curriculum, program, school day schedule, school year calendar, others plans are finalized.
- Extensive outreach and information provided to all eighth grade families, to RMS staff, to Paul School staff, etc. during fall of 2011. *Open houses, informational meetings, etc.*
- Rolling "application/admissions" process (December 2011 through spring 2012). If first "ninth grade" class is oversubscribed, enrollment would be by lottery.
- Staff/faculty goes from one person to core team of five-plus (spring or early part of 2012). All faculty and staff (for opening year) on board June/July 2012 -- most of whom will have been offered positions and signed contracts several months earlier.

*AND a detailed transition/downsizing plan (enrollment, staffing, facilities) is created for Spaulding High School.*

New/third high school would open August/September 2012 (at approximately one-fourth of capacity). Enrollment would be half of capacity for 2013-14. Three fourths of capacity in 2014-15. And full capacity in 2015-16.

Spaulding High School enrollment would decrease by approximately 100-120 students in 2012-13 (to approx. 1400 students)…

* Then decrease by about 200-230 students in 2013-14 (to 1250-1300 students).
* Then decrease by about 300-340 students in 2014-15 (to 1100-1200 students).
* And finally by about 400-450 students in 2015-16 – bringing it to its new enrollment level of approximately 1000 students.

*NOTE that the lower enrollment ripples through the school from the ninth grade through the twelfth grade year by year. Very helpful to organizational issues through the transition.*

## V. SPAULDING HIGH SCHOOL (OF THE FUTURE)

Spaulding High School & Creteau Regional Career and Technical Education Center – enrollment of approximately 1000 students – fundamentally the Spaulding that we know today (or the very best of the school we know today) but smaller, significantly improved, and better serving ALL students. Athletic programs, band/chorus, CTE programs, and the broad range of extracurricular offerings remain as essential elements of the high school.

Smaller student body – but essentially the same make-up as the current student body. *Faculty will be downsized proportionally to student enrollment (over four-year period). Administrative team will be downsized more than proportionally.*

Students wishing to attend Spaulding would never be denied a spot at Spaulding. The prospective new/third high school would be a *school of choice*.

Significantly improved high school (producing significantly better results) – but fundamentally still in line with the traditional high school model… with the focus being on the eight keys to success (i.e., improved student achievement) noted earlier….

Second (of the eight) – more tightly focused and strengthened school curriculum/course offerings aimed at getting all students to targeted competencies or essential learning outcomes… *SEE APPENDIX B (page 47).*

Third (of the eight) – ideal/better school day schedule (and school year calendar) in place to maximize effectiveness of teaching and learning… *SEE APPENDIX C (page 50).*

Eighth (of the eight) – better facilities and better use of facilities.

*Issues/opportunities:*

* All teachers based out of a “home” classroom.
* Special education, make-shift computer lab, and everything else out of the basement.
* Cafeteria no longer over-crowded, fewer lunch periods, more time available for lunch.
* Adequate/appropriate space for nurses, counseling, student services.
* Lecture hall (seating approx 125).
* Two or more new tech/computer labs.
* Ninth grade “main office” space of sorts (administrator, counselor, para-educator, part-time office aide, copier, supplies, and meeting space).
* Departmental work space (math/science, English/social studies, etc).
* Student common/community space.
* Parent drop-in/support center.
* Partnerships -- space at high school for community organizations (counseling services, wrap-around services, parent services/education), post-secondary options, GED programs, etc. POSSIBILITY OF REVENUE STREAM (via leasing).

*Two important notes:*

There are no costs/projects related to possible facilities changes at Spaulding that would by necessity have to be incurred simply due to the downsizing. They would be options/ opportunities to be decided upon as we move forward.

These prospective costs/projects must be weighed against the costs of facilities work that should or must be undertaken at Spaulding in the years ahead if we don't move forward and downsize.

We are presently working aggressively on the eight key SHS strategies. All eight are relevant/ core regardless of whether or not we downsize Spaulding in the years ahead. The current school year goals and priorities are reflective of the focus on theses key/core strategies:

SPAULDING SCHOOL-WIDE PRIORITIES/GOALS (2009-10)

*(1) Ongoing improvement of CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENT – with a focus on four key areas:*

(a) Rollout out of effective competency-based assessment system. *(This is huge.)*

(b) Reading/writing (across the curriculum) – and meeting AYP on NECAP test (all populations).

(c) Ongoing improvement of math curriculum/instruction (rigorous, relevant, and engaging all students) – and meeting AYP on NECAP test (all populations).

(d) Ongoing development and rollout of digital portfolio program/system – with seniors and now starting with freshmen, too.

** With assistance from Focused Monitoring initiative on special education, math and reading NECAP scores, and school-wide improvements (both special and regular education).*

*(2) Faculty-wide decision on our school day SCHEDULE moving forward.*

*(3) Beefed up, more effective/meaningful HOMEROOM/ADVISORY program.*

*FUNDAMENTAL TO MAKING PROGRESS ON THESE PRIORITIES/GOALS:* Effective collaboration, productive communication, and a strong sense of community/collegiality – across the entire faculty, staff, and administrative team. *(Unfortunately, time for meeting, collaborating, planning, and professional development is limited in the current system.)*

*In addition to the school-wide priorities/goals above, it is worth noting that among the additional or secondary priorities/goals are the following:*

* The ongoing rollout and implementation of additional aspects of Infinite Campus and the student/parent portal.
* Fair, clear, and consistent expectations of all students – with fair, clear, and consistent disciplinary consequences whenever appropriate (with aim toward minimizing out-of-school suspensions)… with a supportive & caring community at the foundation.
* More alternative programming/pathways within the high school, various ways to earn credits, and other opportunities for more students to find greater success – particularly those students who are at greatest risk of failing to earn a diploma/dropping out.

* Maximizing the effectiveness of the ninth grade program, the 8th-9th transition, and the 9th-10th transition – within the constraints that currently exist – and with an eye toward what might be possible in the future in light of school-wide changes that are in the works.

***Prospective impact of lower enrollment on Spaulding offerings:***

The following courses, departments, and/or programs might be at risk if Spaulding moves from its current size to a lower enrollment of approximately 1000 students – due to the already small numbers participating in these offerings.

*Academic offerings:*

* AP science offerings – already a problem that might become worse with smaller enrollment. However, overall school improvement strategies moving forward and the science curriculum overhaul currently underway should more than compensate for the risks related to lower total enrollment.
* AP foreign language offerings – already a problem that might become worse with smaller enrollment. However, overall school improvement strategies moving forward would likely compensate for the risks related to lower total enrollment. We should also be working to have more students studying foreign language.
* Latin (small program) – but should be okay.

*CTE programs:*

* Plumbing – is generally one of the smallest CTE programs – but the assumption is that all (or most) of the students headed in this direction are likely to choose SHS over the prospective new school.

*Extracurricular offerings:*

* No significant impact expected.

*Athletic program:*

Though the assumption is that most athletes (particularly at the higher levels of competitiveness) would choose SHS over the prospective new school, among the smaller programs that might be at risk should they lose some athletes are the following:

* Wrestling – variable numbers – could be problematic.
* Cross country (varsity only) – girls and boys – but should be okay (numbers have been up).
* Alpine skiing (varsity only) – girls/boys – but should be okay.
* Swimming/diving (varsity only) – girls and boys.
* Boys tennis (smaller numbers than girls tennis).

The NHIAA class system is based on student enrollment:

* Class L: 1201+ (being changed to Division I)
* Class I: 627-1200 (being changed to Division II)
* Class M: 351-675 (being changed to Division III)
* Class S: 1-350 (being changed to Division IV)

And schools can petition up or down for particular sports.

If we move forward with the new/third school, it would be in 2014-15 that Spaulding's enrollment would put us in Class I/Division II. (Should the new/third high school offer a few interscholastic athletic offerings, it would be in Class M/Division III.)

## VI. BUD CARLSON ACADEMY

Already approved and established. Currently in its second year of operation – enrolling approximately 125 students (grades 9 through 12) – on separate campus located in the Rochester Community Center. Last year, in its first year, approximately 125 students were enrolled, more than sixty graduated, and only one dropped out.

*Three keys to success:*

(1) Small, close, strong community. Emphasis on relationships, support services, counseling, knowing students well.

(2) Innovative curriculum putting an emphasis on relevance and application.

(3) Flexible schedule (school day schedule) and school calendar – to meet student's other needs.

Success of the Academy thus far has been due heavily to #1. Moving forward, more planning and emphasis must be placed on #2 and #3.

*With significant improvements in how well the rest of the district serves our most at-risk students (at the elementary schools, middle schools, Spaulding, and the prospective new/ third high school), enrollment at BCA should not need to be more than 75 to 100 students.*

## VII. NEW/THIRD HIGH SCHOOL (AND START-UP BUDGET)

A 400 to 450 student high school "of the future." Open to all students.

Five key "new model" design elements:

1. Curricular integration (and depth over coverage).
2. Adult/real world immersion.
3. Assessment system (directly connected to learning goals, more useful to students, and producing greater accountability).
4. Elimination of four-year assumption/model (graduation at end of each term/period).
5. Autonomy/organizational structure (principal as CEO & fully accountable for results).

*All five are described in APPENDIX A (pages 30-46).*

***National (and regional) organizations that are committed to one or more of the five key design elements and/or are generally aligned with our proposed model/direction**:*

New England Consortium of Secondary School Redesign

Center for Secondary School Redesign

National Association of Second School Principals

NAASP Breaking Ranks

National Center for Education and the Economy (Move on When Ready Initiative)

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – High School Initiatives

Coalition of Essential Schools

CES Small Schools Project

Big Picture Learning

New Urban High Schools Project

New Schools Venture Fund

Envision Schools

SREB High Schools that Work

Edutopia

School-to-Work Initiative

Learn & Serve America

National Service Learning Partnership

Outward Bound Expeditionary Learning

Center for Education Reform

Coalition for Community Schools

New Hampshire Public Charter School Association

New Hampshire Charter School Resource Center

New Hampshire Department of Education

US Department of Education Race to the Top Initiative

***Schools that are committed to one or more of the five key design elements:***

High Tech High (San Diego, CA)

Casco Bay High School (Portland, ME)

Souhegan High School (Amherst, NH)

Dayton Early College Academy (Dayton, OH)

Tech Boston Academy (Boston, MA)

Parker Charter School (Devens, MA)

Metropolitan Arts and Tech High School (San Francisco, CA)

The Met (Providence, RI)

Foxcroft Academy (Dover-Foxcroft, ME)

Mt. Hope High School (Bristol, RI)

Eagle Rock School (Estes Park, CO)

Impact Academy of Arts and Technology (Hayward, CA)

Mt. Abram Regional High School (Salem Township, ME)

Metro Early College High School (Columbus, OH)

School of the Future (Philadelphia, PA)

Additional notes on the prospective new/third high school:

Different/non-traditional school day (e.g., 8:00 or 8:30 until 4:00 or 4:30).

Longer/non-traditional school calendar (more days, shorter summer, etc.).

Curriculum program organized around a theme or common strand – such as entrepreneurship (private & public)... moving us from the rich context of questions and problems... to the equally rich (if not richer) context of inventing and creating. "Studio culture."

Two major contexts for learning (both of them authentic) – the world of work & and civic life (citizenship).

Student presentations/demonstrations of learning – central to the educational/school experience. All students will speak before all or most of the full student body before graduating.

Culminating thesis project, presentation, and defense as part of graduation rite of passage.

All students graduate having earned at least 2 or 3 college credits (at no cost). All students complete common application essays and take the PSAT and SAT as part of the regular school

program.

Teacher collaboration & professional development – built into the schedule, the day, each week, the school year.

Environmental sound facilities and environmental stewardship built into all of the school community's practices.

Advisory program (and personalized learning plan) – central to the student's high school career/pathway.

Extracurricular programs, athletics, health and fitness – core quality offerings. We might make it an expectation that all students learn and play chess and participate in at least on one intramural sport (likely soccer).

All students graduate having gained a comfort level in the wilderness (use of compass, maps, gear, orienteering, hiking), in the city (safety, public transportation), and in the water (swimming, safety). All students (except those with certain disabilities) must also be able run a mile in under a certain time. All students also learn basic self-defense practices.

Annual operating budget – at or below that of Spaulding High School. District operating expenditures at the secondary education level stay the same.

Contract/collective bargaining agreement – if applicable – will need to be different than the regular Spaulding contract/bargaining agreements.

*POSSIBILITY (only discussed preliminarily at this point):* Teacher/professional development center (alternative certification path) in collaboration with UNH or another college/university based out of (or in the same facility) as the new/third high school.

*ADDITIONAL POSSIBILITY (only discussed preliminarily at this point):* State/regional/national secondary education reform center – based out of same building as new/third high school.

Prospective key partnerships:

* NH Department of Education
* UNH, Granite State College, or another post-secondary school (or two to three)
* New England Consortium of Secondary School Redesign
* One or more charter school networks or centers (if applicable)

**Estimated start-up budget (for targeted site/building):**

Building/site acquisition:

* Estimated market value of approx. 40,000 sq. ft.: approx. $2.5 million.
  *(appropriate/minimum square footage for the school)*
* Estimated market value of approx. 65,000 sq. ft.: approx. $3.5 million.
  *(larger space for the school and/or other district needs, leasing opportunities, etc.)*
* Estimated market value of approx. 80,000 sq. ft.: approx. $6 to $7 million.
  *(larger space for the school and/or other district needs, expanded leasing opportunities, etc.)*

Renovation, construction, equipment, furnishings, and project administrative costs:

* Basic 40,000 sq. ft. project: $3 million
* Expanded 65,000 sq. ft. project: $5 million
* Complete building (80,000 sq. ft.) project: $5 million
  *(same as 65,000 sq. ft. project – assuming separate tenant project in remaining space)*

Personnel (payroll, benefits, professional development) and other expenses during the start-up phase:

* 2010-11: $100,000 to $150,000
* 2011-12: $300,000 to $500,000

TOTAL START-UP BUDGET:

Total projected start-up budget for 40,000 sq. ft. project: approx. $6 million.

Total projected start-up budget for 65,000 sq. ft. project: approx. $9 million.

Total projected start-up budget for 80,000 sq. ft. project: approx. $12 million.
*(with significant leasing/revenue stream to be considered)*

**Prospective start up funding sources:**

New Hampshire Race to the Top application (federal government funds) -- in the works.

State/federal charter grant application -- in the works.

State building aid – if available (60% of acquisition & renovation costs).

Foundations/grant makers - *target list below.*

Corporations/businesses (local, regional, and national).

High net-worth individuals, other individuals

Possible revenue-generating strategies (lease agreements, etc.).

*Targeted foundations/grant makers for start-up/planning grants:*

Carnegie Foundation - New York, NY

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - Seattle, WA

Pew Charitable Trusts - Philadelphia, PA & Washington, DC

Wallace Foundation - New York, NY

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation - Kansas City, MO

The Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation - Los Angeles, CA

Joyce Foundation - Chicago, IL

Spencer Foundation - Chicago, IL

Charles Stuart Mott Foundation - Flint, MI

The MetLife Foundation - New York, NY

Wal-Mart Foundation - Bentonville, AK
The Goodrich Foundation – Indianapolis, IN
Eli Lilly Foundation – Indianapolis, IN
The Wendling Foundation - Alexandria, VA
The Ford Foundation - New York, NY
Nellie Mae Education Foundation – Quincy, MA
New Hampshire Charitable Foundation/Piscataqua Foundation

## VIII. OPERATING BUDGET/FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

*The school department will not increase the annual operating budget (per pupil expenditure levels) to accommodate the move from one large high school to three separate high schools. Rather, current per pupil expenditure levels will serve as the constraint that dictates budgets at all three schools.*

2007-08: *One high school (serving all students) – SHS*
* Per pupil expenditures: $9,399
* Approximate total: $15.5 million.

2008-09: *Two high schools (serving all students) – SHS & BCA*
* Per pupil expenditures: $9,507
* Approximate total: $15.7 million.
* Increase of just 1.1% from 2007-08 despite the move to two schools.
* At the elementary schools, the per pupil increase was 3.2%. And at the middle school, the increase was 5.6%.

2015-16: *If just one high school – SHS (with enrollment of approximately 1500-1600)*
* Projected per pupil expenditures (assuming, for the purposes of this exercise, an annual growth rate for inflation, etc. of 2.5%): $11,000
* Approximate total: $17 million

2015-16: *If two high schools – SHS & BCA (with total enrollment of approximately 1500-1600)*
* Projected per pupil expenditures (assuming, for the purposes of this exercise, an annual growth rate for inflation, etc. of 2.5%): $11,000
* Approximate total: $17 million

2015-16: *If three high schools – SHS, BCA, and new/third school (with total enrollment of approximately 1500-1600)*
* Projected per pupil expenditures (assuming, for the purposes of this exercise, an annual growth rate for inflation, etc. of 2.5%): $11,000
* Approximate total: $17 million

## IX. FAQs and MISCELLENEOUS TOPICS

Hypothetical student profiles (and student/parent decision making processes):

*Engaged parents who follow educational issues regularly and are excited about the design elements of the new school will likely give serious consideration (with their children) to the new school.*

*Students who are not finding success K-8, who are not engaged in their academic work, and are not engaged in school or extracurricular activities will likely give serious consideration (with their parents) to the new school.*

*Strong K-8 students may be less likely to consider the new school until it has a proven track record. They (and their parents) are likely to see SHS as the "safe" choice and the new school as involving some degree of risk. But some are also likely to see it as an ideal option.*

*Most students who are competitive athletes (in sports offered at SHS) will likely choose SHS – but a small number may opt for the new school. There will be physical activities, fitness programming, and sports (smaller scale, intramural, etc.) at the new school.*

*Most students who consider the CTE programs available at SHS to be a personal priority are likely to choose SHS – but some may opt for the new school.*

*Most students who consider the SHS band, chorus, or drama program to be personal priorities are likely to choose SHS – but some may opt for the new school. There will be music and performing arts (on a smaller scale) at the new school.*

*Though the small number of special education students in the LITE and Skills programs are likely to best be served by SHS, the majority of special education students (taking regular education classes with accommodations, modifications, and/or support) and their parents are likely to give careful consideration to both SHS and the new school.*

*At-risk students who are contemplating or being counseled to consider the Bud Carlson Academy as an alternative to Spaulding should also consider the new school as a viable third option.*

Students wanting to go to the new school but also wanting to participate in band, athletics, or a CTE program at Spaulding High School:
Recommendation to the School Board is: No, you can't do both. You have to make a choice. But this is likely to be a point of much deliberation. And NHIAA rules will also be a factor.

Wakefield agreement/students:
Wakefield students are simply considered "district students" (just like Rochester residents) – as they are now – for all intents and purposes related to the prospective new/third school.

Prospective tuition agreements (revenue generation):
Barrington, Nottingham, Milton, Dover, Somersworth students, et al. – to be considered/evaluated if we move forward.

Where might all of this lead us ten or twenty years from now:

* The Rochester community might settle into a three school secondary system – seeing all three options as effective and high quality choices.
* Or the design elements of the new/third school might come to be understood as the direction of the future (the new norm).

The Rochester community will decide.

*And an important note: It should be understood that the design elements of the proposed new/third high school are not "cutting edge" ideas based on the latest direction or trend or movement. Rather, they are common sense principles. They are not new. They are as true today as they were a hundred years ago – and as they will be a hundred years from now.*

## X. APPENDICES (A through H)

**APPENDIX A – FOSTER'S COMMENTARIES**

First piece – introductory/need for change.

Second – Design principle #1 – integrated curriculum designed around questions/problems.

Third – Design principle #2 – adult/real world immersion.

Fourth – Design principle #3 – direct, simpler, more useful assessment (competency-based).

Fifth – Design principle #4 – elimination of the four-year assumption/model.

Sixth – Design principle #5 – flexible, adaptive, entrepreneurial organizational structure.

Seventh – conclusion/wrap-up.

Article published May 4, 2009
FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT

**John Shea: The American High School: A call for change**

*Editor's note: Spaulding High School Principal John Shea begins a series of columns about the state of the American high school and the need for change. This is the first in a series that will appear each week for several weeks.*

If we were to able to bring together a community of thoughtful and caring parents, teenagers, educators, citizens, taxpayers, business representatives and civic leaders and if we were somehow able to let go of absolutely all our preconceptions about the American high school and we were then asked to envision what high school really ought to be (or, put another way, to sort out the things young people should experience, know, and be able to do before earning a diploma), I am fairly certain that what we'd come up with would look absolutely nothing like what we currently have.

It is, quite frankly, the weight of 100-plus years of tradition, unquestioned assumptions, and our own inabilities to break loose of all this baggage that are holding us back and robbing so many of our young people of a powerful and inspiring high school education.

There isn't anyone paying attention today who doesn't understand we have problems.

The dropout rate in many high schools is 10, 20, 30 percent or higher. Poor attendance, truancy, and disciplinary troubles are widespread. Student disengagement is all too often the norm. Many high school graduates end up needing remedial course work in their first year of college. Some eventually drop out. A significant number of others never make it to any form of post-secondary education. And employers are regularly dissatisfied with the basic skills or lack thereof that young people bring to the workplace. Our nation's competitiveness in the new global economy is in question.

Granted, the good news is that some students (about a third or so by my rough estimate) are finding a degree of success in our high schools. "Some," however, is by no means good enough neither morally nor practically. What's more, I'm convinced that our highest-achieving students are generally finding success despite the current system not because of it.

It's simply a credit to their own will and determination and, more often than not, to engaged and supportive parents who have set high expectations for their kids. Credit is also often due to the inspiring teachers who similarly find themselves doing their best to educate our young people despite the system not because of it.

I can only begin to imagine what our best students and teachers might be truly capable of if given the opportunity to work in an environment actually designed to maximize personal growth and learning.

There has been an increasing focus over the past decade or so — throughout New England and the country on improving our secondary education system and the current high school model. Unfortunately, "improving" the current system/model is not what we need to be doing. What it is that we need to be doing is replacing the current system/model. It's been suggested that the definition of insane is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results.

There comes a time when you need to walk away from something that isn't working, let go of the history, the assumptions and the baggage and start fresh. That time is now. And, honestly, it has been for quite some time.

The basic design of the American high school today is, for the most part, more than 100 years old. It is a model that was originally designed to educate a fraction of our teenagers at a time when neither a high school diploma nor post-secondary education were necessarily critical to a young person's future or, for that matter, to the health of the U.S. economy. A secondary education system that delivered some general information and basic skills in a relatively efficient manner to a small percentage of our teenagers was considered sufficient for the time.

Needless to say, quite a bit has changed over the past century. Today we are seeking to educate all young people not just a fraction of them and rightly so. Earning a high school diploma is absolutely essential. And post-secondary education is now also much more critical both to a young person's future and to our overall economy.

A hundred years ago, teenagers were generally rich in experience and responsibilities but lacked access to information. Today our teenagers are drowning in information but are often starved of real experience and responsibilities.

The world we live and work in today is vastly different from the world we lived and worked in 100 years ago.

Oddly enough, one of the things that has not changed much, however, is the basic design of the American high school. A model that may have actually never been much more than sufficient is now just plain failing. Frankly, it's obsolete.

If we are indeed committed to the education of all of our children and providing them with the knowledge, the skills, and the passion to pursue meaningful and fulfilling work and to contribute to their communities and our nation as engaged citizens, voters and volunteers we must come together and act boldly. We must aim high and think creatively.

It is, for me, nothing short of a moral imperative to do better for our kids. Much better.

High school should be a place of high expectations and hard work grounded in a powerful and supportive sense of community. It should be nothing less than inspiring. Excellence must be our aim not "sufficient" (nor, for that matter, "adequate").

And it is not just for our children's sake that we need to aim high. We need to do so for ourselves. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the longer-term health and competitiveness of our economy — as well as the vibrancy and effectiveness of our participatory democracy are what's at stake here. The connection is actually quite direct.

This is not the time for tinkering or tweaking. Nor is this the time for more new initiatives focused on improving the current system. This is the time for a complete overhaul. Now is the time for real change.

And I will do my best, in this forum over the next several weeks, to offer my perspectives clearly and precisely on what this change should look like. Beginning next week with a look at how the curriculum and courses are organized, I will seek to challenge your assumptions about high school, about teaching and about learning. I hope to inspire you to think differently and creatively about secondary education. And I hope you'll see that most of this is really just common sense.

I also hope to engage you in the dialogue. Whether you're a parent of a high school student, a parent with younger kids, a grandparent, a high school student yourself, an employer, an educator, or simply a citizen vested in the greater good we need your help. If you haven't already, please join in.

I have great faith in what we might accomplish together. As a high school principal, I have to.

*Second piece – DESIGN ELEMENT #1*
Article published May 11, 2009
FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT
**John Shea: More depth, less breadth in curriculum**

*Editor's note: This is the second in a series of weekly columns by Spaulding High School Principal John Shea about the state of American education and need for change. The columns will appear each Monday for several weeks.*

The most powerful learning occurs when we are genuinely curious, have a real stake in solving a problem or answering an intriguing question, have someone there to help us (but who lets us figure things out for ourselves), and are engaged in an endeavor that has relevance, meaning, and application to the world around us. Is this not just common sense? I believe it is. It also happens to be backed by sound research.

The American high school curriculum still based largely on a model more than a hundred years old is not designed to produce powerful learning of this sort. It was designed to deliver a broad range of information via a departmentalized approach that has virtually nothing to do with student interest, relevance, or application to the world around us. The best things happening in secondary education today are accomplished *despite* the current system not *because* of it. Change is overdue. There are enough obstacles in the world today to educating teenagers; the very design of our high schools should not be one of them.

The root of the problem is at the heart of how we've organized the high school curriculum. Quite simply, it's overly departmentalized. We teach physics, chemistry, and biology separately from one another. We teach the sciences separately from math. We teach math separately from almost everything else. Same goes for writing taught separately from almost everything else. We teach literature separately from history. Business, art, foreign languages separately, separately, separately. Day after day, high school kids make their way from one disconnected class to another four, five, six, or seven periods in a school day with several minutes of passing time in-between and a 23-minute lunch squeezed in at some odd time or another. And then they go home and do homework in four or five different areas 30 minutes of this, 45 minutes of that, and so on. It may indeed be a pretty good way to test their stamina, but it's certainly not a good way for anyone to learn.

The better approach is to eliminate the departments and move toward an integrated curriculum. Rather than an array of classes narrowly defined by traditional disciplines, high school studies should be framed around good questions and real problems questions and problems that require students

to develop and use knowledge and skills from a range of different areas. It is in the integration (and application) of mathematics, the sciences, communication skills, social studies, technology, literature, critical analysis, and the creative arts that the most powerful learning occurs. Rather than struggling to stay awake at the end of the day doing what they can to get through their homework, students should be engaged, enthusiastic, and even passionate about their studies. Exhausted, yes, but from meaningful work not from boredom.

An integrated curriculum is precisely what we find in elementary schools. First-graders develop basic skills and learn about the world around them by way of topics or themes (the elementary school equivalent of questions and problems). And our children's innate curiosities, creative instincts, and interests are central to the learning process. This also happens to be the way we approach things at the other end of the educational spectrum. Doctoral programs culminating with a thesis or dissertation organized around a particular question or problem are the epitome of curricular integration. Lastly, and most importantly, is the obvious the real world and the workplace are, by nature, integrated. Adults routinely deploy a variety of different skills and use information from a range of different disciplines to answer questions, solve problems, and get things done.

A high school curriculum framed around intriguing questions and authentic problems would not only better prepare students for the real world, the workplace, and civic participation it's also a more powerful way to learn. It's a win-win proposition. And there are thousands of good questions and problems to choose from some historical, some contemporary, some with correct answers and proven solutions, others that have yet to be answered or solved. Just one example of the prospective richness of this approach can be found in a set of questions such as this: Is our planet warming? If so, is human activity contributing to this warming trend? What, regardless of cause, can we do about it? What are the implications if any of doing nothing? The process of tackling this set of questions would take students into the earth sciences, biology, chemistry, meteorology, world history, the beginnings of agriculture and civilization, American history, the Industrial Revolution, technology, economics, politics, mathematics, probability and statistics, and into a vast array of both contemporary and classic literature. The questions bring everything to life. They make it real. They bring purpose and rigor to our studies.

There are, unfortunately, several reasons we're not moving in this direction. But none of them are very good. For starters, we have the rather troubling but not uncommon arguments that "we've always done it this way" and that "the current system is good enough." Neither position merits much of a response. The former is simply ludicrous. The latter can only be the result of not paying attention, not caring, or some combination of the two.

A somewhat more legitimate concern is that the high school model we have today is fairly well aligned with the current system of training and certifying secondary school teachers. Needless to say, however, the teacher training system should be designed to meet the needs of our high schools not vice versa. What we need is not a convenient way of organizing the curriculum but a powerful way. Similarly, moving toward a more integrated system could very well make a mess out of our current thinking (or lack thereof) on the school day schedule and the course credit system. But, indeed, some rethinking is long overdue here. And is it not the case that the schedule and the credit system should be designed to meet the needs of the curriculum rather than the other way around? The number of things we have backward today is utterly disturbing. The college admissions process is another example. Should high schools be designed to meet the needs of college admissions committees? Or should colleges design their admissions systems to support the best interests of our high school students? At the moment,

the accepted answer to the first question is "absolutely!" As for the second question, well, it's not even being asked. Is this not ridiculous?

Quite possibly the most compelling argument against an integrated curriculum is that it lacks efficiency. The best way to cover lots of material in a semester or a school year or over a high school career is via the current departmentalized model. Organizing the curriculum around in-depth study and analysis of questions and problems slows you down. You simply can't cover all 32 chapters of a biology textbook or 400-plus years of American history when you're spending weeks or months at a time tackling questions and problems via a deeper integrated approach. No doubt about it, this is true. But here's the catch it's a good thing. Attempting to "cover" everything and to equate it with learning is really just a lie. Coverage is not the goal. Learning is the goal. And coverage and learning are two very different things. Do you know how much biology the typical American high school student actually knows just a few months after completing a traditional course covering all 32 chapters of a textbook? Do we understand how little the typical American high school student can actually tell us about our nation's Constitution just a few months after completing a traditional US history course that has covered everything from early European exploration and settlement through September 11, 2001 and beyond? Who are we kidding?

Attempting to do less with much greater depth is the more powerful way for high school students to learn. It also forces us to hone in on what is most important and truly essential. Much like law schools where students do not learn the law (there is far too much of it) but rather they learn to think like a lawyer, high schools must be focused on preparing young people to think like citizens, like entrepreneurs, like scientists, like artists, like leaders. We must provide them with the skills and the passion to pursue meaningful and fulfilling work and to contribute to their communities and our nation as thoughtful participants in our democracy.

We need to let go of the overly-departmentalized system that has been the norm for more than a century and move to a more powerful and effective integrated approach organized around questions and problems. And we need to stop trying to cover too much at the expense of real learning. We must build meaning and relevance and real-world application into the curriculum. We must cultivate genuine curiosity and exploit the enthusiasm that comes with it. Let's please aim high. Real change is overdue.

*Third piece – DESIGN ELEMENT #2*
Article published May 18, 2009
FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT
**John Shea: Going from isolation to immersion - tear down the walls**

*Editor's note: This is the third in a series of weekly columns by Spaulding High School Principal John Shea. He writes about his opinions of the state of American education and the need for change. The column is appearing each Monday over several weeks.*

Most of us have probably heard at least a few teenagers compare their high school to a prison. Teenagers, like adults, are sometimes prone to exaggerate. Unfortunately, however, there's a bit of truth to this comparison. From the time the typical high school day starts at 7:30 or 8 in the morning until it ends at 2:30 or so in the afternoon, not too many people get in, and not too many people get out. In prisons, it's basically the guards and the inmates together all day, and in high schools, it's basically the teachers and the students together all day.

Though it goes without saying that a prison environment certainly couldn't be more different from that of a high school, the fact of the matter is that the two environments do have something in common.

They are fundamentally isolating. And although isolation might make sense for criminals, it makes very little sense for teenagers.

The confining walls of our high schools must, figuratively speaking, come down. Today's high school (not that much different, in terms of fundamental design, than the high school of a century ago) is built on an assumption of isolation. Other than the occasional guest speaker or the once-a-semester field trip (which generally wreaks havoc on the standard school day), very little of anything or anyone comes or goes from the school.

What we need are high schools designed around the assumptions of connection, immersion and collaboration with the real world (the adult world) just outside the school walls. Students should be engaged in meaningful activities outside the school on most days, and not just in extracurricular sorts of ways, but in ways that are one and the same with the secondary school curriculum. Similarly, adults from the community need to be a regular part of what goes on inside the school.

There are three fundamental reasons why we need to move in this direction. For starters, students learn best when provided with an authentic context in which to apply developing skills and knowledge. We all do.

And it's a perfect fit with the more in-depth curriculum (organized around answering questions and solving problems) that I made the case for last week. It's also just plain common sense.

Good teachers do indeed do their best to build opportunities into their courses for meaningful application of skills and knowledge, but it's an uphill battle given the structure of the typical American high school today, and the applications are almost always contrived. Why not provide our students with the real thing?

Secondly, moving in this direction cultivates maturity and responsibility. Surrounding teenagers with teenagers all day every day in a teenager-dominated environment leads teenagers to act like, well, teenagers. But giving them a significant connection to the adult world around them and a true taste for real responsibilities leads these same teenagers to act like young adults.

Imagine a team of high school students working with a couple of teachers and four or five adults from the community over the course of a semester or school year to identify a local problem, develop a solution to it and then actually make it happen. And not on Saturdays or Wednesday nights, but as part of the regular school day and the regular curriculum. If we want real results and real learning, we need real stakes.

There is probably no population on the planet better at detecting when something is contrived or inauthentic, and scoffing at it, than the American teenager. And, frankly, good for them. I worry just as much about the kids who somewhat mindlessly go along with the "game of school" as I do about the kids who recognize that the system is broken and refuse to play along.

Lastly, immersion in the world around them helps high school students begin to make sense of what they might want to do for work someday and get a better handle on what they might want to study in college, or why they should even go. All too often today, it isn't until a young person is 18 or 21 or older that they even begin to get a taste for the real world and what their role in it might be.

Imagine high school students spending two mornings a week from 8 a.m. to noon working at a

hospital or at an automotive garage as part of their school day. Or three afternoons a week from 1 to 4 p.m. at a law firm or a local farm. Or a few evenings a week at the local newspaper or hardware store, again, as part of their school day.

And imagine that the students each have a mentor at their particular workplace, who also joins them and their teachers at the high school once a week for an hour or so. Fifteen, 16, and 17-year-olds certainly don't need to decide what they want to be when they grow up, but they are certainly old enough to begin thoughtfully exploring their interests. And this thoughtfulness, grounded in their various internships and apprenticeships, brings greater meaning to their high school studies.

It raises the stakes. It creates a sense of purposefulness.

Unfortunately, our current overly-departmentalized curriculum, our emphasis on coverage rather than more in-depth learning, the credit system, the traditional school day schedule, and the prevailing assumption that an isolating environment is just fine are among the things that fly in the face of meaningfully connecting our high school students with the real/adult world all around them.

Once again, we need to stop and think about what we're doing. If our focus is on maximizing student learning, then (1) a curriculum organized around answering questions and solving problems, (2) a focus on depth, relevance, application, and real learning (rather than broad "coverage"), and (3) an emphasis on real world immersion and lots of connection and collaboration with adults (beyond the faculty) must all be priorities. And the structure of the high school curriculum, the credit system, the school day schedule, and the school year calendar (among other things) must follow logically from these priorities. Not the other way around.

The model we are still using today is grounded in assumptions that are no longer helpful. Some of them, for that matter, were never actually helpful. It's time for significant change.

And if we get this right, not only will our kids get a lot more out of high school, we will all get a lot more out of our high schools. Imagine what it would be like if we actually viewed our high schools, and our high school students, as genuine community resources. Please think about this; it's a fairly significant shift from where we are today.

How in the world did we get to place where our teenagers are not viewed, first and foremost, for their energy, for their talents, for their creativity, for their resilience, for their contributions, for their questioning, and thus valued as the powerful resources that they are right now?

High school is precisely the place to unleash and channel all of this potential — throughout the community, not just in the school building.

*Fourth piece – DESIGN ELEMENT #3*
Article published May 26, 2009
FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT

**John Shea: Create a grading system that tells us something**

*Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of weekly columns by Spaulding High School Principal John Shea. He writes about his opinions of the state of American education and the need for change. The column will continue for the next several weeks.*

Imagine you've seen your doctor for a routine physical and, at the conclusion of a series of tests, he lets you know that you scored a 68 percent and he gives you a D+. Then he tells you to have a nice

day and sends you on your way. No mention of the ways in which you are healthy, no mention of precisely what it is you scored poorly on, and no discussion about the problem areas or how to improve them. You simply get your D+ and move on. No diagnosis, no prescription, no retesting in three or four weeks. I trust we all agree that an approach like this to medicine would be ludicrous. No one would stand for it.

Unfortunately, this is precisely the approach that prevails today throughout our high schools. It is part and parcel of a system designed more for efficiency than for learning. We test high school students, stamp a grade on their work, and move on. Little attention is paid to analyzing what they've actually learned. Or, more importantly, to what they've failed to learn. There is rarely a diagnosis of any sort for improvement. There is rarely an opportunity for additional studies, more learning, and a retest. The student gets their D+ or B- or whatever their grade may be and then moves on to the next chapter, unit, or course. Oddly, it is generally only when a student completely fails a required course that they get the opportunity to try again.

There are, essentially, three major problems with the way we assess and grade high school students. All three are remnants of a model that is now more than 100 years old and well overdue for a complete overhaul.

First of all, we don't as a matter of common practice clearly and tightly define learning goals for our students. We must know what it is, at the end of a particular course, that we expect the students to know, to understand, and to be able to do. We must identify what is essential and build the curriculum around these things. And it should be these things, and only these things, that we assess" multiple times and in various ways. What's more, we must clearly articulate what base-level "quality" or "competence" on any given assessment actually looks like. Our students need to have a clear picture of what they are aiming for" whether it has to do with how they organize their writing, work with percentages, present the findings of a science lab, or interpret the U.S. Constitution. Secondly, the norm in our current system is to label where the students are at the end of a unit or course and then simply move on. It is a convenient approach and arguably somewhat efficient. And given the overall structure of our high schools, a strong case can be made that "there's just no other way to do it." This approach, however, puts very little emphasis on ensuring that all students are actually learning. It's imperative that we rethink this. And it's critically important we move toward a system that facilitates (rather than hinders) sound assessment practices. Testing and assessing kids must be part of the process of getting all of them to their learning goals" not just a way to label where they are at a particular time before moving on to the next thing.

We need to move from a system of "teach, assess, move on, teach, assess, move on..." to a system of "teach, assess, diagnose, teach some more, test again, repeat as necessary, then move on..." The same way doctors stick with patients until they're healthy, teachers need to stick with students until they've reached their learning goals. Is this not common sense?

The third and final problem is our scoring system. It's overly complicated, not very helpful, and not linked tightly enough to actual learning. Frankly, I think the typical high school grading system is just plain goofy. Students earn grades (for tests, projects, courses, etc.) that typically fall somewhere on a 0 to 100 scale, are further categorized as an A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or F, and are often then converted to a GPA (or grade point average) on either a 0 to 4 scale, a 0 to 5 scale, or something in-between. And there's a formula used in calculating GPAs that weights more rigorous courses more heavily. Many high schools also rank students individually within their graduating class.

So what does it tell us when, at the end of an economics class, a student has earned a 72 percent (or a C-)? Well, not much other than they did well enough to pass and earn a credit. They did "OK." Is this very helpful? Does it actually tell us anything about the student's understanding of economics? Not really. Similarly, what does it tell us at the end of student's high school career if they have a GPA of 3.128 and are ranked 116th in a class of 400? Well, again, not much other than they did "OK" or maybe "pretty good." Is this actually helpful? Does it tell us anything about what they've learned, what they're best at, where they still need to do some work, or where their passions lie? Does it tell us they can read and write well? Does it tell us they are comfortable with basic mathematics? Does it tell us that they understand concepts like democracy, capitalism, and liberty? Or gravitational force, photosynthesis, and the periodic chart? I'm sorry, but the answers are no, no, no, no, and no.

Granted, our current grading system does do two things rather well. It feeds in nicely to our competitive spirit. And it's a great way to sort kids and help college admissions committees rationalize their decisions about who gets in and who doesn't. Student #116 (and their parents) can sleep easy at night knowing that there are only 115 kids in front of them, but a solid 284 behind them. And the 40 or 50 most competitive colleges and universities in the country can all quite conveniently rule this student out from consideration for admission without having to bother much with their application, essays, or letters of recommendation.

Can we not do better than this nonsense? The good news is that high schools all across the country are indeed tackling the first problem and are aiming to better define and tighten up essential learning goals. There are also plenty of folks working on the second problem and trying to get beyond the practice of testing students and simply moving on. Unfortunately, though, the problem is so intertwined with the current (i.e., old) high school model that we're never going to make any significant progress until we overhaul the secondary education system itself. The third problem (our grading system) is, regrettably, only being tackled in fairly limited ways. Many thoughtful individuals believe it's nothing short of intractable.

I disagree. I believe it has to change. Success in the typical workplace is more about collaboration than competition. Same goes for civic participation. And problem solving. Yes, a solid work ethic, personal drive, and a competitive spirit are all very important, but the reality is that there are very few places in the real world where your performance is reduced to a number between 0 and 100 or where each individual in an organization is ranked from first to last. It is, generally speaking, the results of what we do together that matter so much more than our own individual accomplishments. Collaboration and teamwork are absolutely critical.

And the truth is that most of what we do in the real world can be assessed on a simple and useful three- or four-point scale. At the end of the day, the performance of an employee in a typical business is either (1) not good enough, (2) good enough, or (3) very good. And, if you like, you can add a fourth point and call it "exceptional." What's more, in the very best organizations, that second point ("good enough") is very clearly defined for all elements of every employee's job making it obvious to all involved whether or not basic expectations are being met, not met, or exceeded.

What high school would look like if we were to successfully tackle the problems with our assessment/grading system is not that difficult to get our hands around. For every given course or project or assignment, there must be several clearly defined (and measurable) learning goals or, in other words, things that we expect students to know, understand, and be able to do when they are done. For each of these goals, there must be a clear definition of what base-level competency looks like, and the kids need to fully understand it. These are their targets, and the students need to really

own them. And then, throughout their studies, what students need from their teachers is regular and useful feedback relative to each of these learning goals. And this feedback will, in each case, essentially boil down to either (1) "we're not there yet," (2) "competent, you've got it," or (3) "expectations surpassed" with, if we choose, a fourth option along the lines of "exceptional/ distinction." Every day, every week, all year long, until all goals have been met with a demonstration of at least base-level competency.

Let's please stop pretending that a grade of B- or a score of 70 percent or a GPA of 3.95 or a class rank of 80 out of 250 actually tells us anything significant about what a student knows, understands, or can do. We desperately need to move to a system that actually measures student learning — in simple, direct, and useful ways. And for those of us who want better results and more accountability from our high schools, this is precisely the way to get it. How about report cards, transcripts, and diplomas that really mean something?

*Fifth article – DESIGN ELEMENT #4*
Article published Jun 1, 2009
FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT
**John Shea: Graduate when one is ready: Not sooner, not later**

Editor's note: This is the fifth in a series of weekly columns by Spaulding High School Principal John Shea. He writes about his opinions of the state of American education and the need for change. The column continues for the next two weeks.

Four weeks ago, in this forum, I did my best to make the case and articulate the need for thinking about high school differently. I am among those who believe significant change (i.e., an overhaul of the system) is well overdue. In the weeks since, I've offered (and continue to offer) my perspectives on the five key things we need to do differently.

For starters, I outlined the argument for organizing the high school curriculum around questions and problems —rather than narrowly defined disciplines or traditional subjects. We must also put a greater emphasis on depth of study rather than breadth of coverage. Secondly, I did my best to make the case for a significant and central focus on real world (or "adult world") immersion. Then, last week, I made what I hope was a compelling case for rethinking our approach to assessing and grading students. A simpler system more directly connected to learning goals would not only be more helpful to students, it would also produce greater accountability (from our schools and from everyone involved). Today we tackle the fourth element. I will make the case for moving away from the "four year" assumption to a model grounded in the idea children should graduate from high school when they are done, when they are ready, when they have achieved their learning goals — not sooner, not later.

Next week (for those of you who like to know where things are heading), we'll take a look at the fifth and final piece of the puzzle school governance, leadership, and organizational structure. And after that will come a final column of summarizing thoughts.

So, today the fourth piece. In the typical high school of, let's say, 900 students, there are about 250 or so eighth graders coming into the school in any given September to begin their freshman year. They all have different strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. Some children did pretty well in middle school; some of them struggled. Some students have diagnosed learning disabilities. Some

process information quickly others more slowly. Some are visual learners, some do well with oral instruction, and others need to touch things and move around. Some students are speed readers; others need much more time to get through a novel or a chapter of a text book. My point, somewhat needless to say, is an obvious one. Kids are different from one another. Often times very different from one another. And they learn differently from one another and at different paces. We all know this.

My second point is this. Is it not the case that all young people should know, understand, and be able to do certain things at the end of their high school career? Do we not owe it to our children and ourselves to see to it that all of them are able to demonstrate they have reached certain essential learning goals before graduating from high school? All of us, I imagine, would agree it is certainly fine and good some students will surpass one or more of these essential benchmarks but I am also hopeful we agree all students should at least achieve a basic or satisfactory level of competence with respect to each of these essential goals. Do we not all agree on this? Isn't this the fundamental mission of our education system?

My sense is we, as a society, do indeed agree on this. My concern, however, is we don't give the idea a whole lot more than occasional lip service. We are probably better on the rhetoric than the delivery.

Regardless, what follows quite logically from these two points is pretty clear at least when you stop to think about it. The fundamental assumption today that high school is a four-year endeavor is not only a poor one, it's an assumption that is really quite ludicrous. If kids come to high school in different places with different learning styles and different abilities... and if we agree and are truly committed to the notion all high school graduates should know, understand, and be able to do certain things (or, put another way, demonstrate achievement of their essential learning goals)... then it really should go without saying some students are going to get there in 3 years, some in 3½, some in 4, and some in 4½. And there really is nothing "late" about 4½ years or "early" about 3½ years. They should simply be graduating when they are done, when they are ready, when they have actually earned their diploma.

Fundamentally, what this means is the whole notion of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors goes right out the window. As does the idea of a freshman year, a sophomore year, a junior year, and a senior year. Completely gone. And, in place of this old and ineffective system, we end up with a better system designed around individual students making their way toward their high school diploma in various ways and at varied paces. Some students will be particularly strong in math, some will grow to be exceptional writers, and many will go beyond the goals we've set for them. But all of them, every single one of them, will know, understand, and be able to do certain things when they graduate. Their diplomas will mean more than that they made it through four years of high school. Their diplomas will mean they've actually learned the things they were supposed to (without regard for precisely how much time it took).

Graduation exercises should be occurring two or three times throughout the year at the end of each semester or trimester. At a time when the lines between secondary and post-secondary education are already beginning to blur (in very positive ways), letting go of the lockstep regiment of four years of high school makes perfect sense. It fits perfectly with the bigger picture direction of the K-to-12 system (a system that is actually better thought of as a pre-K to post-secondary system). What we need is an education system grounded in the developmental needs of individual children, adolescents, and teenagers " rather than one that puts convenience, tradition, and the illusion of efficiency ahead of real results.

And, yes, granted, this sort of approach will indeed lead to such difficult problems and critical questions as "which students will go to the junior prom?" and "what will we call the freshman football team?" But, hey, I'm fairly confident we can sort these things out.

*Sixth piece – DESIGN ELEMENT #5*

Article published Jun 8, 2009

FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT

**John Shea: In sum, it all adds up to getting results**

*Editor's note: This is the sixth in a series of weekly columns by Spaulding High School Principal John Shea. He writes about his opinions of the state of American education and the need for change. The series ends with the seventh installment next week.*

I think it's fair to say what we all want most from our high schools is results — all students getting an excellent education that sets them up for future success. And when you consider teenagers are all very different from one another, and the educational tools and technologies available to us aren't just changing from year to year but from month to month, and the body of research on teaching and learning grows every day, and the economy, the jobs, and even the postsecondary options we're preparing our students for are changing at ever increasing rates — it's pretty clear what is needed from our high schools. The only organizations capable of achieving consistent results in this type of demanding environment are forward-thinking, flexible, adaptive, agile, proactive and entrepreneurial.

So when you think about public high schools, school leadership, school systems, and school boards, what are the first words that come to mind? Forward thinking, flexible, adaptive, agile, proactive, and entrepreneurial? Well, probably not.

I imagine many of you probably came up with words like bureaucratic, unionized and political. Or maybe traditional and slow to change. And, quite frankly, I think you were right to come up with the latter list rather than the former list.

It's a given we want and need better results. It's a given that the stakes are high — for our children, for our economy, and for our democracy. And I would suggest that it's also a given — in the world we live in today — that we need schools, school systems and school leadership that are forward-thinking, flexible, adaptive, agile, proactive and entrepreneurial.

But this is not what we have. Things need to change. The environment we're operating in demands it.

To be precise, I believe there are three fundamental things we must change about the leadership and organization of the current system.

First, we need school boards that clearly understand and embrace their proper role. School boards need to provide appropriate oversight and direction — not manage the school system.

Second, we need to let principals (good principals) operate as the CEOs of their schools. Principals today are much more like "branch managers" than true leaders.

Third, we need to treat teachers as the professionals they are (or are capable of becoming) — and together, we must rise above the "labor-management" dynamic that often comes with unionism as well as the pettiness and restrictiveness that often come with collective bargaining agreements.

Most developed/industrialized countries have national or centralized school governance structures void of anything like the American school board or our notion of local control. And in the last couple of decades, many big city mayors here in the U.S. actually have done away with elected school boards.

Their aim has been to take the politics out of school governance and to give their superintendents some breathing room to truly lead and implement multiple-year plans without risk of having the plug pulled when they're only halfway there.

I understand and appreciate the arguments against local/elected school boards, but I, for one, happen to be a supporter of the concept. (Yes, I do indeed currently work for a 13-member elected school board in Rochester — but, nonetheless, please trust me.)

If ever there was a good case for elected community representation overseeing a public endeavor of some sort or another, surely the education of our children is it. It's grass roots democracy in action. It's parents and community members stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility for their children' schools.

The problem, however, is that school boards often go well beyond oversight and strategic direction.

The singular most important function of a school board is hiring a good superintendent, supporting him or her, holding them accountable and firing them if necessary. And, truth be told, when a school board gets this right (hiring and supporting a powerful, charismatic, and effective district leader), they are actually that much less likely to feel the need to overstep their boundaries and attempt to manage the school system.

Managing the school system is the role of professional educators/administrators. Running a school district is messy enough and political enough as it is; we certainly shouldn't be doing anything to make it worse.

As is the case with school boards and superintendents, one of the most important functions of a superintendent is to hire good principals, support them, hold them accountable and fire them if necessary.

I'm very comfortable (as I believe most principals are) with the notion that I am responsible for absolutely everything that happens in my building, what we do well and what we fail to do well. What is disappointing, however, to most good principals is the number of critical things we don't have enough control over.

And, no, I don't mean the 1,600 teenagers in my building. What I'm referring to are things like money and personnel.

The CEO of the typical business enterprise — particularly one that is forward thinking, flexible, adaptive, agile, proactive and entrepreneurial — has complete control over the organization's budget, staffing/personnel decisions, and salaries. Public school principals do not.

And, to be honest, mediocre principals really have no interest in seeing this change. ("Why would I want my neck on the line any more than it already is?") Good principals, on the other hand, would jump at the chance to operate more like CEOs.

Tell us how much money we have, but let us decide how to spend it. Let us decide who works in the building and who doesn't — and in what role and at what salary. Let us be real leaders — and hold us accountable, fully accountable, for producing real results.

Lastly, we need to treat teachers as true professionals. It's what they deserve.

I am not sure everyone fully appreciates how extraordinarily difficult it is to be a good high school teacher. The hours are long and the work is exhausting. My teachers work with as many as 75 or 80 students each day. They meet with parents at 7 in the morning, and they prepare lesson plans at home at 10 at night.

They grade tests over the weekends. They attend workshops and further their own studies when school is not in session. They work with some of the brightest young people on the planet and with some of the least motivated people on the planet. In the same room at the same time. And outnumbered 25 to 1.

Our best teachers are caring, competent, well-educated, and well-trained — and they each bring unique talents, skills, and passions to our schools. They are, in the best sense of the word, professionals.

But here's the difficult part — where I'm going to get myself into trouble. I am not sure whether or not such professionals are necessarily well-served by labor unions. Nor am I sure that our school systems and our children are necessarily well-served by our teachers' unions.

I do believe there was a time — long ago — when the unionization of the teaching field made perfect sense. Teachers were generally not well-educated and well-trained professionals 100 years ago. Today things are different — and I believe some rethinking of our current approach is overdue.

I hope that my faculty understands I will always go to bat for good teachers being well-paid and being provided with decent benefits. But, unfortunately, there is not much else in the typical collective bargaining agreement I can support. Over the years, I have also heard this same sentiment from good teachers themselves. It's almost as if they are anxious to be liberated from all of it.

I believe we need to rise above the current system. Teachers coming together as colleagues, professionals and caring educators to advocate for our children, our schools, and our communities is a powerful and good thing.

And, yes, it certainly makes sense that teachers would also want to look out for and take care of one another. But I am certain we can do so much better than traditional "us vs. them" unionism and collective bargaining agreements that all too often fly in the face of concepts such as "forward thinking, flexible, adaptive, agile, proactive and entrepreneurial." We just have to do better.

It has been said management generally gets the union they deserve. I agree. Maybe if were able to take district and school leadership to new levels, we might also be able to bring teacher collegiality to new levels.

And teachers are right to expect their school boards, superintendents, and principals to lead the way. Frankly, they should be demanding it. Parents and community members should be demanding it, too.

The choice is essentially between real leadership that puts values, vision and our children ahead of everything else and the status quo of bureaucracy, politics as usual, and somewhat mindless tradition. Doesn't seem like much of a choice to me.

*Seventh/final piece*
Article published Jun 15, 2009
FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT
**John Shea: It's all about needing change**

*Editor's note: This the seventh and final column in a series by Spaulding High School Principal John Shea expressing his opinions on the need for change in high school education.*

At the start of this series, I did my best to articulate the need for thinking about high school differently. The current system is by a range of measures simply not getting the job done. And I am among those who believe we need more than new initiatives aimed at improving the system. What we need is a whole new system. And, over the past several weeks, I have offered my perspectives on what I see as the five fundamental things that need to change.

First, I outlined the argument for organizing the high school curriculum around questions and problems rather than narrowly defined disciplines or traditional subjects — with an emphasis on depth of study rather breadth of coverage.

Second, I did my best to make the case for moving away from isolation to a central focus on real world (or "adult world") immersion.

Third, I made what I hope was a compelling case for rethinking our approach to assessing and grading students. A simpler system more directly connected to learning goals would not only be more helpful to students, it would also produce greater accountability from our schools.

Fourth, I suggested moving away from the assumption high school is a four year endeavor and toward a model grounded in the idea children should only graduate from high school when they are done, when they are ready, when they have achieved their learning goals — not sooner, not later.

Fifth, I raised some questions last week about the responsibilities of school boards, about the power and effectiveness of principals, and about the appropriateness of teachers' unions and collective bargaining agreements in the field of secondary education.

I know there are folks wondering how the principal of a high school can be so outspoken about the problems with our current system and the need for change. I believe the better question is how can a high school principal not be. Leadership sometimes means framing critical questions and engaging others in meaningful dialogue. Debate and conflict are sometimes necessary. And we must accept — even embrace — the challenges that come with it. Conflict can be a powerful engine for change. And leadership — from principals, teachers, school boards, superintendents, parents, students, tax payers, and community members — is most certainly about moving us forward and creating positive change.

The more appropriate question at this point is: "So now what?" Where do we go from here? Well, for what it's worth, I can share with you a bit about what we're doing here in Rochester. Several months ago, our school board unanimously approved a study to consider opening a new high school in our district — and they will vote again on a full/detailed proposal (after extensive community input) sometime in the coming school year.

A year ago, the teenagers of Rochester and Wakefield were all served by one school, Spaulding High School, with an enrollment of approximately 1,700 students. This year we have just under 1,600 students at Spaulding, and more than 100 students are now enrolled at the new Bud Carlson Academy (BCA) — a separate alternative school across the street from the high school. A few years from

now, if the school board and the city approve the proposal coming to them next year, our community will be served by three high schools — a scaled-down Spaulding of approximately 1,000 students, a BCA of 100-150 students, and a new school of 400-500 students.

Our aim is to make Spaulding one of the best comprehensive public high schools in the state — if not on the planet. Our vision is that of a high school that serves all students very well and that is truly the pride of the entire Rochester community. We are also seeking to establish the Bud Carlson Academy — a tight-knit community providing significant support, academic rigor, and non-traditional pathways to a high school diploma for young people who've found minimal success in typical educational settings — as one of the best small alternative schools in the region.

And, lastly, we are hoping to start a new high school (prospectively, if approved, in the fall of 2011 or 2012). Neither traditional nor alternative, the new school would simply be designed to be what a high school ought to be in the 21st century. The five core design elements at the heart of the school proposal are precisely the five topics we've covered in this series over the past several weeks.

What I hope and envision for our district's high school students five years or so from now are average daily attendance rates up over 95 percent (rather than in the 90 percent ballpark), significant reductions in the number of disciplinary issues and suspensions (from well over a thousand-plus each year to fewer than a hundred), a decrease in the dropout rate from more than 20 percent to less than 5 percent (if not zero), significant increases in the percentage of our high school graduates going on to post-secondary educational options each year (and finding success one and two years later), and marked improvement in our students' performance on standardized tests such as the SAT and the NECAP.

By "No Child Left Behind" standards (federal and state), Spaulding has been labeled a "school in need of improvement" for several years now. The label needs to go. Our children and our community deserve better.

Several months into our exploratory study, we have (in my opinion) successfully engaged a broad range of community members in the dialogue, generated some good discussion, and gotten ourselves to a place where caring individuals are comfortable talking frankly about our problems and about creative options for moving forward. My sense is that there is a willingness — if not yet a sense of urgency — to think outside the box.

Our superintendent is thoughtful, hands-on, and supportive. Our school board, immensely proud of and committed to our district, is proving (in tough times) to be courageous and forward-thinking. The Spaulding faculty and our teachers union put our children' best interests first and foremost — and have demonstrated a healthy and supportive willingness to work with me on the study currently under way. My administrative team here at the high school is nothing short of stellar. Lastly, but most importantly, the parents, citizens, and taxpayers here in Rochester are stepping up to the plate and engaging in the dialogue. Several folks in the community are actually doing research for me (both for and against some of the ideas I've expressed), sending me reports and links from time to time, and offering their own perspectives.

More than a hundred Foster's readers — from inside and outside the Rochester community — have sent me their thoughts (mostly via e-mail) over the past several weeks of this series. All but two or three have been immensely supportive and encouraging. Many of the responses have been longer than my columns. It is has all been quite heartening.

An educator for whom I have great admiration — now retired, farming and gardening in Maine, but

still contributing to the field in significant ways — recently shared this simple thought with me: "There is no doubt that your candor will evoke candor and, in turn, greater trust." I sure hope he's right. I have faith that he is.

The one thing we all do need to recognize and agree upon is that the current system is simply not producing the results we're aiming for. This is undeniable. That said, I do indeed respect the views of those who believe that improvements to the system will be enough. However, my sense is that the tide is slowly turning toward a broader acceptance of the idea we really do need to rethink the whole system. We need an overhaul. Unfortunately, the big problem we're still left with is sorting out and agreeing on what this change should look like. In which direction do we head? And what are the next steps? And how are we going to come together and decide? Difficult questions — all three of them.

I've put forth my opinions on the first question. As for the second question, I've shared with you — as an example — what we're doing here in Rochester. The third question I have no simple answers for — particularly as it relates to your community, your schools, and your children.

But I can tell you this with absolute certainty. Unless more folks start getting up off their rear ends, participating, engaging, and begin tackling this stuff with an acceptance for the fact it's not going to be easy, that conflict is difficult, and progress almost always requires some blood, sweat, and tears — precious little is going to change. The weight and inertia of the status quo is a powerful force. And to make matters worse, we all know that it's pretty easy to undermine progress on complicated matters — but immensely difficult to orchestrate that progress. We need to rise up to the challenge. It was Mohandas Gandhi who once said, "First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win." But there really shouldn't be any "they" and "you" when it comes to the education of our children. It's just us — all of us — together. What are we going to do? What are you going to do?

## APPENDIX B – COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW (AT SHS)

*Moving to a competency-based system*
*2009-10 (4th year of 6 to 7-year process)*
October 2009/Shea

***What this (competency-based system) means**:*

Well-defined (and clearly communicated) learning goals in all courses – essential content, basic skills, and higher order thinking skills.

Good assessment tightly aligned to learning goals (our "performance indicators"). Every performance indicator measured multiple times in multiple ways. With "good enough" (competent) clearly defined for all assessment tools (i.e., the heart of the rubric). And feedback to students (formative and summative) that is frequent, directly aligned with clear goals, and useful/helpful to the their learning.

Curriculum and effective instruction powerfully aligned with assessments/learning goals.

A final/summative grading system (course grades, report cards, transcripts) that keeps the focus on real student learning/achievement – i.e., greater accountability.

***Leadership team:*** Kate, John, and Mary – with support from Superintendent Hopkins.
Extension of leadership team/critical voice – SHS department heads (and full SHS admin team).
Policy matters & prospective changes – school board.
Key outside helper (through remainder of year): Rose Colby

***Eight "rubric coaches"** (for rest of this school year) – stipend positions – each of whom will work with teachers (one on one and in groups) throughout the whole campus. Each is getting two days of off-site training – and a half-day (plus) on campus led by Rose.*

* Karen Good - art
* Erica Stofanak - languages
* Ken Voss - science
* Beth Wright - English
* Jason Eberl - tech dept
* Cheryl Allen - business
* Lee Sheedy - math
* Erich Dietel - social studies

***Four discussion groups of about a dozen teachers each** – to be identified by early/mid-November. Groups will meet once a month for 90 mins (during the school day) – led by Rose – on rubrics, grading, etc. – with a particular focus on INSTRUCTION (powerful instruction in a competency-based system).*

* Tues, Dec 8
* Thurs, Jan 7
* Thurs, Feb 18
* Thurs, March 18
* Thurs, April 15
* Thurs, May 20

***Plan, timeline, key dates (looking ahead):***

* Wed 10/21 (early release): Rose Colby – rubrics & grading.
* Tues 11/3 (teacher workshop day): Bea McGarvey (Marzano) – rubrics, grading, instructional practice.
* Wed 11/4 (early release – two hours) – departmental.
* Fri 12/4 – eight coaches with Rose (for half day) – and work with dept heads, too (coaches included).
* Discussion groups – dates above (December through May).
* Third-quarter and/or fourth-quarter book groups – possibly on rubrics, assessment, grading (?)

***Goals/focus for this year (2009-10):***

* Well-designed rubrics being utilized effectively in all classrooms by all teachers – at least to some degree in classes where they are not already the norm. *And within two to three school years: good rubrics (utilized effectively) will be prevalent, the norm, common practice in all classrooms/courses.*
* Ensuring that all competencies (performance indicators) are assessed effectively – multiple times in varied ways (i.e., all assessments tightly aligned to essential learning goals (competencies).
* Review classroom grading practices – homework, formative vs. summative strategies, averaging, final class grades, etc.
* Revise and tighten up, as is found necessary, our defined course competencies and performance indicators. Many are pretty well-written. Some will need work as me move forward.
* Sort out – together – the implications (if any) for our current grading system (course grades, report cards, transcripts). *May take into next year.*

***Longer-term (three or so years from now and beyond):***

Significantly better student learning/achievement due to significant improvements in our curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices – with the critical catalyst being this competency-based movement – i.e., well defined student learning goals, better assessment practices, focus on quality of instruction aimed at preparing students to master these learning goals (and demonstrate it via the assessments), more direct and more useful feedback to students (via rubrics, etc.), and an overall grading system that supports a tight focus on student learning.

***Matters that have already been decided/accomplished:***

* Competencies (and sub-competencies – called "performance indicators") are defined for all courses. Some will need to be improved with time.
* Competencies (generally 5-10 per course) are the overall headings/categories/topics. Performance indicators (generally 2 or 3 to 10+ per competency) are the actual things we measure.
* Competencies are posted/listed on all course syllabi (starting this year – 2009-10).

* A student does not have to meet every performance indicator (or competency) in order to earn credit in a course. This is the goal. This would be ideal – but within the system we are operating, there will still continue to be some degree of averaging to determine if a student earns credit or not.

* Preliminary inventory of whether or not course assessments are tightly aligned to competencies/performance indicators has been conducted in all classes/departments – but lots more work to be done.

* We have decided on a FOUR-point rubric (not two or three, not five or six, not more) for providing students with clear expectations and clear/useful feedback. We are allowing some exceptions where teachers have already been effectively using a rubric with a different number of points. We'll decide later whether or not we ALL need to move to four – or want to leave room for limited exceptions.

* The SECOND point on the rubric will be base-level competency (not the third).

* The first point is representative of "competency not yet demonstrated. " The second point is base-level competency. The third point is a level of achievement going beyond base-level competency. And the fourth point represents distinction/exemplary work.

* We have decided to label the four points, quite simply, as follows: F, C, B, and A.

* Most courses/departments lay out their rubrics left to right from low to high (F, B, C, A). Some prefer to go left to right from HIGH to LOW (A, B, C, F). Either is fine. We will begin introducing these labels this year – and they will be the norm/standard starting next school year.

* NOTE: the decision to go with "F, C, B, and A" forces one key grading issue/question to be considered now rather than later. Lining up the four points of this rubric with our current A (93-100), B (85-92), C (77-84), D (70-76), F (0-69) grading system in a manner that is coherent and easy for students to understand probably means getting rid of the D. To be discussed. And it will need to go to school board.

***Matter to be decided together (in the months ahead):***

Any implications of all of this for our grading system (final course grades, report cards, transcripts, GPAs) – to be determined. With superintendent and school board input/approval. Might have implications for 2010-11 school year – but more likely it will be 2011-12 (if there are changes).

## APPENDIX C – SHS SCHOOL DAY SCHEDULE REVIEW PROCESS

Overview of Process, February 20, 2009

The 32-member SCHEDULE COMMITTEE (co-chaired by Deb Day and John Shea) is currently moving forward via three sub-committees. All three groups are aiming to complete their work by June, July, or August 2009. (And please understand that broad faculty input throughout these next four-six months or so will be critical.) In August or September we will reorganize and aim to bring forth a thoughtful and detailed schedule proposal to the full faculty before the end of the 2009-10 school year. A faculty vote (simple majority) will be needed at that time to move forward with the proposal. Superintendent and/or school board approval may also be necessary. If approved by the faculty, superintendent, and/or our school board – planning for implementation will go into place in the summer of 2010 – and the new schedule will actually be in place for the 2011-12 school year – or, at the latest, for the 2012-13 school year (if the proposed changes create significant implementation issues). Lastly, if the proposed/approved new schedule only involves minor tweaks to our current schedule, it would very likely be put into place in the 2010-11 school year.

The three sub-committees (described below) are essentially doing the critical foundational work that will set the stage for the work we'll do next year developing the actual proposal. Essentially this (right now) is phase two of a five-phase process…

Phase One was the group work last school year leading up to the proposal and the faculty vote (in the spring) to make reviewing and possibly revamping our schedule a priority. Overwhelmingly, we agreed we need to tackle this.

Phase Two – this school year/into summer – has consisted of building the large committee and is now about wrapping up the foundational work outlined below.

Phase Three, next school year, will be the hard work of developing a proposal and securing faculty (and/or superintendent/board) approval… toward the end of the school year. If we get Phase Two right, Phase Three will go much more smoothly and be much more productive.

Phase Four – coming right on the heels of an approved proposal – will consist of planning for the implementation of the new schedule. How long this phase takes will depend on how significant or minor the changes are. The current 32-member schedule committee is only signed on through the end of Phase Three. The "phase four" planning team will be put together after we have an approved proposal.

Phase Five will be the actual implementation of the new schedule – again, likely in 2011-12. Review, evaluation, and feedback systems will be built into the implementation process.

*So, again, this (below) is what's happening right now (through the end of the 2008-09 school year)…*

CRITERIA/RESEARCH TEAM

CO-CHAIRS: Deb Hoyt & Ken Voss

*continued on next page...*

*Mission of this team*: Bring forth to the faculty (by June/summer) a proposed set of criteria (ranked and weighted) for guiding our decisions about the high school schedule. This will likely be a 2-3 page document. We will discuss whether we think the faculty should vote to accept the criteria – or simply be involved throughout the criteria-setting process. Secondarily, this team will also gather research/data on high school schedules in support of the criteria they are proposing – likely resulting in a final product that is essentially a binder of the "best and most useful" research/ theory on high school schedules. It is imperative that this group get their work done – and difficult/contentious work it will be – by either the end of the school year or by the summer retreat.

CURRENT SCHEDULE/CONSTRAINTS TEAM

CO-CHAIRS: Erin Kelly & Marty Wintje

*Mission of this team:* Produce a detailed analysis/review of the pros and cons of our current schedule (what works, what doesn't…) – likely a document of 8-10 pages or so. Secondarily, this team will also produce a list of scheduling constraints, obstacles, considerations (real, current, Spaulding/Rochester specific). This will likely be a three-page or so document. Both pieces will need to be completed by the end of the coming summer.

MODELS/EXAMPLES TEAM

CO-CHAIRS: Dan Heeter & Shannon Turlis

*Mission of this team:* Produce a thoughtful collection (probably a 2 to 3-inch binder) of real high school schedules (maybe 20 to 25 of them – or more) that might be particularly useful for us to know about, to review, to consider. Commentary on each schedule should include key points that make the schedule worthy of our attention, any reservations about the schedule, data about the schedules effectiveness, interview summaries from talking with school representatives about their schedule, etc. We should aim to have this collection/binder completed by the end of the coming summer.

**KEY CRITERIA FOR SPAULDING SCHOOL DAY SCHEDULE (AGREED UPON BY FACULTY)**
October 2009

PRIORITY #1

A schedule that provides for adequate and appropriate instructional time/setting to ensure that students are able to reach the defined competencies (in each of their courses - and over four years)... i.e., maximizing learning.

* For most departments, 60 to 90-minute periods are deemed appropriate... with many teachers honed in on 60 to 75-ish minutes... and some content with less than an hour.
* For several departments... sequential course scheduling is deemed critical (no semester gaps)… meaning either year-long classes or back-to-back courses from one semester to the next.
* Many raised the concern that there needs to be greater equality between blocks/ periods... in terms of practical length of time, number of pull-outs/assemblies, early dismissals, announcements, good/bad times of day.

* And instructional time should not be interrupted (or, put more realistically, interruptions must be minimized) - announcements, pull-outs, etc.
* Related to the daily schedule is the following issue: Students need to be able to build a rational/logical four-year path to graduation in line with their needs/interests/goals. The structure or our daily schedule should facilitate not hinder this.

SECOND TIER PRIORITIES (four of them)

(A) Adequate teacher prep time (meeting individual teacher planning/prep needs). And "adequate" will need to be more clearly defined as we begin to consider options.

(B) Adequate time for collaboration, meetings, planning/working together. Common time – for faculty.

(C) Student "choice" time, an "X" block/time of sorts, and/or an open/free period during the day -- for guidance, administrative matters, getting extra help, seeing a teacher, remedial course work, club time, and/or possibly linked to the homeroom/advisory program. Significant support for this idea -- but lots of teachers/staff looking at it in different ways.

(D) School day schedule that maximizes/facilitates balance between courses (number of students, gender, etc.)

## APPENDIX D – SMALL SCHOOLS

### The research on small schools: size matters

*Produced in collaboration with Mark Conrad (Superintendent, Nashua School District) and Danielle Bolduc (Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Oyster River School District), University of New Hampshire, 2009*

The research on school size is consistent. Size matters, and smaller schools generally perform better than larger schools against a variety of benchmarks.

Substantial research into school size began in earnest in the 1980s, and a large majority of the body of research into school size concludes that students in smaller schools are more academically successful than students in larger schools, less likely to drop out, more likely to be engaged in extra-curricular activities, and more likely to have positive attitudes about their school experience. The positive impact of smaller schools is particularly strong for disadvantaged students.

Our report is divided into four sub-sections: (1) How small is small, (2) Impact on academic performance, (3) School size and student attitudes, and (4) Why small schools work.

*1. HOW SMALL IS SMALL?*

What is the upper limit of a small school? This is a variable number within the research. Some authors define an optimal student body size of between 200 and 400, others identify 600-900 students, and still others choose to leave the definition to the reader.

The influential 1996 report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and Carnegie Foundation, *Breaking Ranks,* recommends a student body of no more than 600 students. The U.S. Department of Education has adopted a goal of no more than 600 students in its Smaller Learning Communities Program (Boss, 2000). The balance of research indicates the most appropriate size for a secondary school is 400-800 students (Cotton, 1996).

*2. IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE*

Kathleen Cotton, in her often quoted 1996 study *"School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance"* concluded from a review of the literature, "Academic achievement in small schools is at least equal – and often superior – to that of large schools." In the same study she concluded that there is overwhelming evidence that students in smaller schools are less likely to drop out.

A higher percentage of students in smaller schools participate in extracurricular activities, and those students who do participate are more likely to participate in a wide variety of activities in a small school. This, in turn, has a positive academic performance given the positive and significant association between participation in extra-curricular activities and higher academic achievement and school engagement (Jimerson, 2006).

The positive impact of small size on academic achievement is most significant for disadvantaged students; that is, smaller schools reduce the achievement gap between students

of lower socioeconomic status (SES) and students of higher socioeconomic status. Lee and Smith (1994) have identified effective school reforms leading to reductions in this SES achievement gap in schools of varying sizes, but also found in their research that these restructuring effects were greater in smaller schools.

The Matthew Project, conducted in 1999, examined the impact of school size on student performance by socioeconomic status through multiple studies across four states – Montana, Georgia, Ohio, and Texas. This Project sought to replicate earlier similar studies conducted in other states. The results were consistent across states in supporting the equity affect of smaller schools. Studies conducted in all four states found that the variance in student achievement associated with SES was reduced by at least twenty percent, and by as much as seventy percent across all four states. In three of the four states smaller schools cut the impact of poverty across every grade tested (Howley, et. al., 2000).

It is interesting to note that some of the studies within the Matthew Project actually found that smaller school size can have a negative impact on academic achievement in very affluent communities.

These research results have led supporters of smaller schools to charge that school size can be viewed as an issue of equity for disadvantaged students.

*3. SCHOOL SIZE AND STUDENT ATTITUDES*

Students in smaller schools have a much greater sense of belonging than their peers in larger schools (Cotton, 1996). In other words, students in smaller schools are more likely to view themselves as part of the school community, and to believe that they are cared for within the school community.

Having this sense of connectedness makes it less likely that an adolescent will feel alienated within the community. The increase in this sense of belonging, with the associated reduction in alienation is positively associated with less violence, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and student pregnancy. A reduction in alienation also reduces the likelihood a student will drop out (Jimerson, 2006).

Similar to the research on the academic performance of disadvantaged students in smaller schools, the research on student attitudes also shows a stronger positive correlation between student attitude and school size for low socioeconomic and minority students (Cotton, 1996).

*4. WHY SMALL SCHOOLS WORK*

Small schools work better than large schools on multiple levels – maintaining stronger relationships among students and staff, holding all students to higher academic standards, developing stronger professional learning communities among teachers leading to improved instruction in the classroom, and implementing effective school reforms.

Smaller Schools as Intimate Environments. “Intimacy is a big part of the appeal of smaller schools. It’s easier for kids to connect and harder for them to feel anonymous or alienated in a

smaller community of learners" (Boss, 2000). In a small school environment students are less likely to feel isolated.

Smaller schools provide more opportunities for people to come to know and care about one another, whether it be among students, among staff, or between students and staff. Smaller schools are also more likely to establish relationships with the surrounding community (Cotton, 1996). Some researchers have pointed out that the bureaucratic organization of large comprehensive high schools actually inhibits the development of sustained relationships among students and adults (Copland and Boatright, 2004).

One explanation for the increased level of participation in extracurricular activities in small schools is the fact that every student is needed to fill the positions required to maintain student governance, a school band or student newspaper (Jimerson, 2006). Students are simply less likely to be overlooked in small schools.

Holding all students to higher academic standards. "Large comprehensive high schools reflect a mentality of sorting. Some kids will make it; others won't" (Copland and Boatright, 2004). Small schools are more likely to hold all students to higher academic standards. For example, there is some evidence that smaller schools are more likely to have heterogeneous classes, and the incidence of tracking students is much lower in smaller schools. (Jimerson, 2006).

Students in smaller schools generally take more responsibility for their own learning, and have a better sense of their own efficacy. Students are also more likely to receive personalized instruction, and scheduling is more flexible (Cotton, 1996).

There is increasing evidence that disadvantaged students gain when all students are encouraged to complete advanced academic work (Lee and Smith, 1994). Conversely, there is a negative impact in tracking for those students placed in lower tracks, and there is a disproportionate number of lower SES students in lower tracks. Taken together, this body of evidence is consistent with the data suggesting lower SES students benefit significantly from smaller schools.

Copeland and Boatright (2004) have also observed that students learn more when there are high academic expectations and strong social supports, than when only one of these conditions is present. The research supports the notion that these conditions are more likely to exist together in small learning communities.

Developing Stronger Professional Learning Communities. Teachers in smaller schools tend to have higher morale and report greater satisfaction with their work. Just as small schools provide a more intimate environment for students to develop strong relationships with one another, these schools also offer more opportunities for teachers to develop a stronger sense of being part of a professional community and working as a team (Jimerson, 2006).

In smaller schools there is more likely to be a culture of shared decision making which includes teachers, and communications among teachers and administrators become more substantive when teachers can make administrative decisions about matters of importance to their students (Copland and Boatright, 2004). Lee and Smith (1994) have referred to a school

environment in which teachers work collaboratively with input into decisions affecting their work as a "communally organized school". They contrast this structure to the bureaucratic model found in large comprehensive high schools. In communally organized schools formal rules are less necessary to govern behavior, and human contact is less fragmented.

Implementing Effective School Reform. Many researchers have noted that smaller school environments simply make it easier to institute effective educational reforms, and to gain consensus among teachers in implementing those reforms. As Copland and Boatright have noted (2004), "Accepting that schools are generally reactive, successful small high schools differ from their large counterparts in that they have the luxury (and perilously hard work) of reinventing their norms and expectations for academics, behavior, and professional work."

Suzie Boss (2000) has noted that because teachers on small faculties have more opportunities to interact with their peers, "small schools tend to be hotbeds for the teaching practices associated with student success and school improvement." Because smaller schools provide fewer administrative distractions than larger schools, and because consensus is easier to achieve within smaller faculties, leaders in smaller schools are more likely to focus the faculty on a consensus learning agenda which translates into gains in the classroom (Copland and Boatright, 2004).

In studying the impact of school restructuring Lee and Smith (1994) found that within the group of restructuring schools they studied students in smaller schools posted larger gains in math, reading, history and science, and those gains were more equitably distributed across the student body. It must also be noted that the research does not support a correlation between school size and the quality of the curriculum (Cotton, 1996).

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## APPENDIX E – CHARTER SCHOOL OVERVIEW/INFORMATION

*New Hampshire's Public Charter Schools: A Look at the Successes and Challenges that Lie Ahead*
New Hampshire Department of Education (2005)

A public charter school educates children from kindergarten through grade 12, is non-denominational and does not charge for tuition. There are no admission tests for enrollment in a public charter school, which is open to all students within the district. Applicants are admitted on a first-come, first-serve basis.

New Hampshire's two-part public charter school legislation guides the purpose, establishment, approval process, student enrollment and funding of public charter schools in our state. Since 1995, when the Granite State first enacted public charter school legislation, the Department of Education has been testing the public charter school waters in a careful and measured way.

In August 2003, New Hampshire received a $7.1 million national grant to evaluate the formation of public charter schools. In the same year, the Legislature adopted a "pilot" program for public charter schools in our state. The pilot program allows the state Board of Education to authorize up to 20 public charter schools in the next 10 years (*RSA 194-B:3-a*).

As of April 2005, funds have been used to plan, design and launch eleven innovative public charter schools throughout the state.

The focus of each public charter school in our state is unique and based on the education needs and interests of a particular community. Great Bay eLearning concentrates on hands-on learning and technology, while Franklin Career and North Country Alternative both educate at-risk students. Laurent Clerc specializes in educating hearing-impaired students; Seacoast Charter School in the arts; Cocheco in the arts and technology; and New Heights in business and technology.

The public charter school movement began more than 30 years ago. Today, nearly 750,000 students from kindergarten through high school attend the more than 3,000 public charter schools in operation throughout the country. Most public charter schools are granted a charter contract that must be renewed every three to five years. The school's charter is a performance contract outlining its mission, program, goals, targeted students, assessment methods and academic measurements.

According to a *National Study of Charter Schools* report, the three reasons most often cited for creating a public charter school include the realizing of an educational vision; gaining autonomy; and serving a special student population. This year, the Department of Education estimates there are 177 students attending public charter schools in New Hampshire. Next year, that figure is expected to grow.

Parents, teachers, community/business leaders, entrepreneurs and school districts have all taken an active role in starting public charter schools throughout New Hampshire . North Country Alternative, for example, was founded by a group of superintendents and school board members who were concerned with the region's high dropout rate. Nine school administrative units (SAUs) came together as part of this unique effort and collaborated with North Country Education Services to start the innovative public charter school. To date, 48 students who dropped out of the SAUs as far back as 2001 have enrolled in North Country Alternative to complete their high school education. In June, 21 of these students will graduate and receive their high school diplomas. North Country Alternative can enroll up to 60 students, and there is currently a waiting list to attend the school.

In the instance of North Country Alternative, local businesses also joined in the initiative to make the public charter school a reality. A local car dealership in Littleton donated a van used to transport those students who would unable to travel back and forth to school otherwise.

Public charter schools offer students several important advantages. They empower parents and students with more options for a quality public education so that students will meet their academic potential. In addition to high academic standards, public charter schools also offer small class size and innovative teaching methods.

Great Bay eLearning Charter School enrollment, for example, is currently limited to 50 students so that class sizes remain small and students have the opportunity to build strong, close relationships with their teachers. The teaching philosophy of Great Bay eLearning is "learning by doing" versus relying on textbooks and studying theory. The innovative use of educational technology inside and beyond the classroom is also an integral component of the school experience at Great Bay eLearning.

Although a public charter must meet state performance targets, it has increased flexibility with school approval regulations. This flexibility is given to the school in return for more accountability.

In many ways, public charter schools act as the "research & development" arm of public education. Since public charter schools have greater flexibility, they tend to attract pioneering educators that can try out new educational approaches. When proven effective, new teaching methods can then be implemented, tested and modified to meet the needs of students.

One of the more exciting aspects of a public charter school is that students and their parents choose for a child to attend. Students enroll in the school because it offers a specific mission in an environment that matches their needs. This means that students who may have skipped classes at a traditional public school, typically have a low absenteeism rate when they attend a public charter school. Tony Baldasaro, a teacher at Great Bay eLearning Charter School, says that one student who missed the school bus rode his bike to school that day. The student told his teacher that he was excited about attending the school and that he did not want to miss any classes.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing public charter schools today is receiving adequate education funding. As previously mentioned, a public charter school does not charge students tuition to attend. Similar to traditional public schools, funding is provided by the state's adequacy funding allocation. In essence, the state funding used to educate a student in the traditional public school is reallocated to the public charter school when a child enrolls.

Some critics argue that public charter school funding takes money away from the local school district. In reality, most public charter school founders see their school as a way to save taxpayers money while also providing more education options for students. Public charter schools are typically more entrepreneurial and can take advantage of philanthropic gifts. This means that in the long run, a public charter school is extremely cost-efficient to run. Additionally, public charter schools help solve the issue of overcrowding in fast-growing New Hampshire cities and towns where additional schools and teachers are needed.

## APPENDIX F – RACE TO THE TOP

*US Department of Education and NH Department of Education*

On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), historic legislation designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education. The ARRA lays the foundation for education reform by supporting investments in innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness. The ARRA provides $4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas:

(1) Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;

(2) Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;

(3) Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and

(4) Turning around our lowest-achieving schools.

Race to the Top will reward States that have demonstrated success in raising student achievement and have the best plans to accelerate their reforms in the future. These States will offer models for others to follow and will spread the best reform ideas across their States, and across the country.

The Department plans to make Race to the Top grants in two phases. States that are ready to apply now may do so in Phase 1; States that need more time may apply in Phase 2. States that apply in Phase 1 but are not awarded grants may reapply for funding in Phase 2, together with States that are applying for the first time in Phase 2. Phase 1 grantees may not apply for additional funding in Phase 2.

Applications:
Phase 1 applications due: January 19, 2010
Phase 1 awards announced: April 2010
Phase 2 applications due: June 1, 2010
Phase 2 awards announced: September 2010

The New Hampshire Department of Education is preparing for a submission to the USED for Race to the Top funds in the first round, due January 19, 2010. Districts interested in participating are encouraged to submit a brief description of their project addressing the four assurance areas: Standards and Assessments, Great Teachers and Leaders, Quality Data Systems, and Turning Around Struggling Schools. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to be signed by the Superintendent, School Board Chairman, and Local Teacher's Union Chapter President is also requested, no later than

January 11, 2010. These materials have been forwarded to Superintendents directly. NH will be eligible for $20 to $75 million, if awarded. These monies will provide resources to transform public education. Interested partner organizations are also urged to contact the Department by submitting a brief of services.

## APPENDIX G – NEW ENGLAND CONSORTIUM OF SECONDARY SCHOOL REDESIGN

**Nellie Mae Education Foundation and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Partnership to Support Bold Multistate Effort to Prepare Students Across New England for Success in the 21st Century**

*Groundbreaking four-state collaboration will work to reinvent the high school experience*

In an effort to transform the American high school for the 21st century and ensure that the academic performance and educational attainment of every student in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont will be competitive with their peers worldwide, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the largest philanthropy in New England focusing exclusively on education, has committed $1 million—which includes a $500,000 partnership grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—to provide initial support for the New England Secondary School Consortium. Coordinated by the Great Schools Partnership at the Mitchell Institute, the Consortium will initially include four states—Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—and bring together their departments of education, districts, and high schools with independent school-support organizations and educational leaders from across New England in a far-reaching regional alliance. The group will share resources, talents, and expertise while exploring cost-saving efficiencies in pursuit of a common mission: to ensure that by 2016 every public high school student in the four states will receive an education that will prepare them for college, career, and civic responsibility in the interconnected global community of the 21st century. Recognizing that the traditional ways of educating students are no longer aligned with today's civic and professional expectations, and that the time has come to rethink the traditional American high school experience on a regional scale, the Consortium will support the development of high-performing, internationally competitive schools and new learning experiences that will better mirror the lives and learning needs of today's students. These transformed schools will no longer be limited by building design, geography, or educational convention, but will be flexible, borderless, multidimensional community learning centers that blend secondary and postsecondary education—students will conduct research in their communities, acquire real-world skills through challenging internships, take online and on campus college courses, use powerful new technologies to access the world, and engage in other innovative learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

"We're thrilled to be working with the Consortium and the Gates Foundation to stimulate the transformative change needed in our public schools," said Nellie Mae Education Foundation President and CEO Nicholas C. Donohue. "We also remain open to extending membership to the rest of the New England community as the work of the Consortium develops. This is a tremendous opportunity to ensure that learners across New England acquire the skills and knowledge necessary today to be economically self-sufficient, lifelong learners. What sets the Consortium apart from other reform efforts is that we're focused on the next generation of educational standards, assessments, and other policies defining schooling."

Building on the success of the New England Common Assessment Program, the Consortium will leverage forward-thinking policies, model educational programs, positive messaging, and the combined resources and expertise of four states to launch a coordinated regional movement that will bring to scale systemic and sustainable innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education. Collaboration will be the engine of effective and sustainable large-scale educational transformation over the coming decades, and the Consortium intends to become a pioneering

multistate partnership that can serve as a model for the nation. “Far too many young people leave high school without the education they need or deserve,” said Andrew Smiles, Program Officer with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “We are proud to partner with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and are excited about the prospect this work holds for improving education in New England and beyond.”

“Changing an education system requires a serious commitment of time and resources from stakeholders across the spectrum of the education community,” said Peter McWalters, Rhode Island’s Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “In Rhode Island, we have been engaged for several years in implementing a Diploma System based on personalization, supports for students, and proficiency-based graduation requirements. We are eager to work with our partner states across New England to share our successes and to learn from and implement the best practices of the other states in the region.” The Consortium will also undertake a wide-ranging examination of state learning standards, teaching strategies, assessment practices, professional-development programs, and student outcomes in relation to the highest-performing international educational systems. New England students are part of a global community that has redefined the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that students need, and this work will identify the characteristics of effective education in the 21st century and apply these lessons to the creation of new models of teaching, learning, and leading. “The Consortium will bring bold, transformative innovations to the design and delivery of secondary education,” said Maine Commissioner of Education Susan Gendron. “Maine has already made great strides in connecting and bridging the high-school experience with postsecondary options. Working with the Consortium will allow us to pursue international standards and to explore the best ways to provide learners with the quality and variety that they need in a global society and economy. This partnership brings the sorely needed resources, tools, intellectual talent, and support our state needs to take our efforts to the next level.” In addition to building in-state educational networks that will connect state agencies, support organizations, postsecondary institutions, districts, and schools, the Consortium will also collaborate with the Council of Chief State School Officers, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and the New England Board of Higher Education to bring greater coordination and alignment to the promotion of best practices and common expectations across the region. “New Hampshire’s participation in the Consortium will help us strengthen our commitment to creating a personalized educational experience for every learner that includes extended learning opportunities that allow for learning in both in school and in real-life environments,” said New Hampshire Commissioner of Education Lyonel B. Tracy. “We see this collaboration as a way to create a system that can build the capacity all of our administrators and teachers to better identify and address the learning needs of individual students.”

A steering council consisting of representatives from governors’ offices and key legislative, education, and business leaders will be established to guide and build support for the Consortium’s work.

“All four of the states have made great strides on their own in recent years, but together we can reach every student in every school,” said Bill Talbott, Vermont’s Acting Commissioner of Education. “For more than a year, we have been laying the groundwork for this important

partnership. We know that we share the same goals and that we can work together effectively. This important grant will help us advance our transformation work from vision to implementation."

Vision and Mission (August 2009):

The New England Secondary School Consortium envisions every adolescent in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont graduating from a new generation of high-performing, internationally competitive high schools prepared for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of our interconnected global society.

By building equitable systems of public secondary education in each of our states, we envision the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that were once the possession of a few becoming the universal standard for all. Our students will not only be proficient in the traditional academic disciplines, but they will be creative thinkers, adaptable workers, and informed citizens equipped to face the diverse challenges of the 21st century.

We see our traditional public high schools evolving into versatile community learning centers that prioritize individual learning needs above other concerns, blend secondary and postsecondary experiences, provide engaging educational opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, and offer a variety of student-designed pathways to graduation—all while emphasizing global understanding, multicultural awareness, technological literacy, real-world applications, and other demanding 21st-century skills and proficiencies.

As we forge ambitious, forward-thinking partnerships among states, educational organizations, postsecondary institutions, and schools to leverage resources and expertise in pursuit of our common mission, we envision a fundamental cultural shift taking hold in the hearts and minds of our educators, policy makers, parents, and citizens as the traditional concept of the American high school is redefined to mirror the lives, interests, and learning needs of today's students.

Mission:
The New England Secondary School Consortium develops, supports, and promotes bold educational innovations that will empower the next generation of citizens, workers, and leaders to be prosperous, knowledgeable, and responsible participants in our global community.

**APPENDIX H – BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (Shea)**

John Shea

*Range of teaching, curriculum development, counseling, dean/discipline, and administrative experiences at a range of different high schools (public, private, college-prep, comprehensive, charter, residential, alternative, traditional, start-up, and vocational). And some experience (though limited) at both the middle school and post-secondary level.*

*Broad range of leadership and management experiences. Fund-raising experience totaling more than $30,000,000.*

**Principal, Spaulding High School**, Rochester, NH *(2007 – present).*

**Upper School Director, Berwick Academy**, South Berwick, ME *(2003–07).*

**Co-founder, Vice Principal, Dean of Students, and C.O.O., High Tech High Charter School**, San Diego, CA *(1999–2002).*

**Creator & Teacher/Director of Cambridge Service Corps, Cambridge Rindge & Latin School**, Cambridge, MA *(1994–97).*

*Teaching experience:* Rindge School of Technical Arts, University of Washington, Eagle Rock School, the Citizens School (middle school program), Berwick Academy, Spaulding High School, High Tech High, and Cambridge Rindge & Latin.

*Educational/curricular consulting experience:* Shackleton School, Do Something, Inc., New Urban High Schools Initiative, Tamarack Academy, York (ME) Public School Dept., City Year, Summer-bridge Cambridge, and the Echoing Green Foundation.

*Non-profit, fund-raising, and government relations work:* United Way of America, local United Way chapters (Los Angeles, Iowa, San Diego, and New York City), D.C. Cares, Inc., and the Salem Foundation Youth Initiative.

*Education:*

CAGS – University of New Hampshire *(2009)*

M.Ed. (Educational Leadership & Policy Studies) – University of Washington *(1999)*

MBA – Harvard Business School *(1993)*

BBA – University of Notre Dame *(1985)*

Have also studied at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Kennedy School of Government, Georgetown University, UCLA Law School, the University of Chicago, DePaul University, the Charter School Development Center's Leadership Institute, the National Academy for Volunteerism, Harvard's Institute on College Admissions, and the Colorado Outward Bound School.

New Hampshire principal certification *(current)* & superintendent certification *(pending).*

Member of NASSP, NHASP, ASCD, and NHIAA.

Have written published commentaries on education, public entrepreneurship, and social issues appearing in, among other publications, *The Boston Globe*, *Education Week*, *Who Cares: A Journal of Service and Action*, *Challenge 2000: Shared Visions*, and *Foster's Daily Democrat.*

Have occasionally served as a speaker at teacher workshops, local and national conferences, education forums, Notre Dame, Harvard, U.C.S.D., and the University of Pennsylvania. Currently serving as a NEASC school accreditation committee member.

Currently serving as a co-organizer/founder of Leadership Rochester, serving on the board of directors of Leadership Seacoast, coaching youth recreation basketball & soccer, serving as a senior youth leader at Portsmouth's South Church, and serving as the president of the Salter Creek Neighborhood Recreation Association.

Have also served as vice chairman of the United Way of the Greater Seacoast's Community Impact Panel on Housing & Basic Needs, as a member of the board of directors of the Seacoast Family YMCA, and as a facilitator with Portsmouth Listens. Also participated in six-month Leadership Seacoast program and in the New Futures Community Leadership training program aimed at reducing underage alcohol problems in New Hampshire.

*For no particular reasons… have bicycled 13,990 miles around the world, over six continents, and through 36 countries (over the course of a year), traveled through all 50 United States (and 10 Canadian provinces), run the New York City Marathon, bicycled 285 miles in one day, completed an Olympic-distance triathlon, hand built a bidarka kayak with no glue or metal fasteners, climbed to the highest point in the lower 49 United States (Mount Whitney), bicycled/hiked 225 miles from Portsmouth to the summit of Mount Washington and back again in less than 50 hours, completed a 72-hour wilderness solo with no food, bicycled across the United States (almost three times), and failed miserably at an attempt to backpack the length of the Appalachian Trail.*

**XI. FINAL WORDS**

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe