

1. Provide examples from the various subject areas of instructional strategies that indicate an alignment with the school's academic expectations.

Classification: Completed

Response: Brien McMahon High School's Performance Standards state that all students will:

- Read both fiction and nonfiction with comprehension.
- Write effectively using Standard English for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Demonstrate knowledge and application of basic concepts of arithmetic, geometry and measurement, algebra and functions, and working with data to solve problems.
- Demonstrate knowledge and application of basic scientific principles.

(See Appendix A)

The current school growth plan places an emphasis on improving reading comprehension and improving vocabulary for all students at Brien McMahon High School. Every classroom in the school building contains a word wall, which is comprised of defined vocabulary words pertaining to specific subject matter and instructions (words such as justify, explain, etc.). Teachers use direct and explicit vocabulary instruction in their regular lessons. Questioning strategies are used to encourage higher order thinking. Summary techniques are used to develop reading comprehension. Dialogue journals and learning logs use writing to develop deeper understanding of text. Teachers are also encouraged to use Robert Marzano's Nine Essential Teaching Strategies. These include identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort, homework practice, nonlinguistic representation of material, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and using cues and questions.

The English department is particularly strong in its use of Marzano strategies, especially cooperative learning, note taking, and summarizing. Project CRISS (Creating Independent Student-Owned Strategies) strategies are also evident, such as non-linguistic representations, graphic organizer, and active learning. There is also focus on higher order thinking skills, such as metacognition, analysis of literature, and using textual support. While the school's growth plan focuses on reading strategies, explicit instruction and textual discussion are always part of the lessons taught on a daily basis. However, it is the responsibility of all subject areas to focus on the building of reading comprehension skills.

The Social Studies Department places an emphasis on persuasive writing by asking students to create a variety of written work. Some examples include creating travel brochures, letters from the perspective of a historical time period or person and persuasive writing prompts. In 9th grade World History and 10th grade US History, students are routinely assessed using the CAPT rubric for persuasive writing on at least four different writing prompts throughout the school year. There are also essay requirements on most exams in the department. In Psychology class, students are asked to complete a written project where they must perform Myers-Briggs personality testing on family members and analyze the results by generating a written report. In Civics, students are asked to survey voters and analyze the data to determine who the likely voters are. Students then create ways to encourage other eligible voters to participate in the democratic process. The Social Studies department is currently in the process of instituting a school-wide research paper in conjunction with the library/media center. Freshmen and sophomore students will work with media center specialists to conduct formal research. Depending on the course, research will focus

on a famous person from a historical time period or an event from a specific time period. The honors level class will be asked to form and defend a thesis based on the research conducted.

Teachers in the math department use a variety of instructional strategies to help students develop an understanding of mathematical concepts that goes beyond a procedural level. In all levels of math classes, students are asked to apply their knowledge of mathematics to real-life situations. Manipulatives are used to help students create a link between the concrete and the abstract. Algebra Tiles are used in Algebra I classes as a method for teaching tactile learners how to solve equations. Tinker toys, plastic nets, and solids are used in Geometry classes to help students visualize properties of geometric figures. Graphing calculators allow students in Algebra 2 and Pre-Calculus to explore how parts of an equation effect a graphical representation and table of values. Probability and statistics students use candy to perform data analysis, including univariate data analysis and inference. Math teachers use open-ended investigations to encourage problem solving. For example, in Algebra 2, students are asked to investigate the effect amplitude and displacement have on the period of a pendulum. In Geometry, students are asked to investigate ways to minimize surface area of a rectangular prism while maintaining a certain volume. Pre-Calculus students are asked to determine the regression model that best fits a set of data and then use their model to make predictions. Students in Intro to Computer Programming must demonstrate their mathematical knowledge by creating Java programs that test mathematical concepts. Finally, in the Logic course, students must analyze arguments using standard logic format to determine the validity of the argument.

Science teachers use direct instruction, historical examples and indirect instruction to integrate basic scientific principles into all classes. These principles are explored and applied in every science course through experimentation. The first three CAPT strands of Energy Transformations, Chemical Structures and Properties and Global Independence serve as the basis for many of the experiments conducted in 9th grade General Science. Supplemental activities stress the use of inquiry and the integration of technology. The fourth and fifth CAPT strands of Cell Chemistry and Biotechnology and Genetics, Evolution and Biodiversity serve as the foundations for laboratory investigations in 10th grade Biology. Students use Vernier probes and a variety of dissections to understand Anatomy and Physiology. Chemistry and Physics courses also utilize the Vernier Probes to complete a wide variety of experiments embedded into their curriculums. Students demonstrate comprehension of these concepts through a variety of assessments including the use of lab reports, lab practical, CAPT based strand exams, computer based follow-up activities, lab-group discussions, clicker assessments, and student designed inquiry based labs.

2. **Provide examples of instructional strategies from the various subject areas that personalize instruction, engage students as active learners, and involve students in higher-order thinking to promote depth of understanding**

Classification: Completed

Response: Brien McMahon High School is a part of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI), which emphasizes using data drive decisions to help all students find success and ultimately close the achievement gap. Part of the CALI process calls for teachers to use data from the results of pre-tests and common formative assessments (CFA) to modify instruction as

appropriate. Every teacher at McMahon is assigned to a Professional Learning Community (PLC), and therefore uses pre-tests at the onset of a unit to gauge student competency before any instruction is presented. Midway through a unit, teachers will then administer a CFA. Within the PLC meeting, teachers share the results of their CFAs and discuss the instructional strategies that led to the most optimal results. Thus, instruction is tailored to the needs of students. On an individual basis, struggling learners can be identified through the data created by the CFA. Individual interventions can be implemented in the classroom or by alternating the student's schedule to include a math or writing center. Some teachers institute re-teaching days at the end of the semester. Biology teachers give struggling students extra support by moving those students into study halls run by biology teachers.

Learning at Brien McMahon High School goes beyond regurgitation and lower order thinking as students are asked to demonstrate understanding using a variety of methods. Students apply what they learn in all classes through CAPT-like questions and responses. Students in math courses compare regression models and determine which model is most appropriate for a given situation. Students in science courses conduct experiments to test hypotheses and model scientific concepts. In Social Studies, students are asked to create written work from someone else's perspective. The afore mentioned alternative assessments and those mentioned in Highlighted Item #1 provide poor test-takers with a means to showcase their strengths while developing a deeper understanding of the material presented.

In weekly lesson plans submitted to Housemasters, there is evidence of teachers involving students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding. One of the reading comprehension strategies discussed in Highlighted Item #1 requires for teachers to examine the questions they pose to students in lessons. There is a focus on inserting higher-order thinking questions into all classrooms that require students to develop answers that go beyond basic text recall. Good questions will ask students to make inferences from texts or to examine the validity of an opinion presented in a text. When teachers ask students to answer higher order questions about a text, they are promoting student depth of understanding of the text.

In order to help each student create a personalized learning environment, Brien McMahon High School implemented a student advisory program called "House" during the 2009 - 2010 school year. There are 110 Houses in the building. Students are assigned to Houses by gender and meet every other week for 20 minutes. Within each House there are freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Underclassmen have the benefit of making connections with and hearing advice from upperclassmen. The goals of House are:

- To provide a trusted, safe place for the organized discussion of school issues and appropriate decision-making.
- To help students identify, set, and achieve academic goals.
- To help ensure students fully access the academic and extracurricular opportunities available at Brien McMahon High School in support of their individual goals and interests.
- To ensure that each student has a positive relationship with an adult in the building, other than his or her school counselor.
- To foster caring and supportive student/student relationships.

While there are suggested topics provided by administration for each House meeting, discussions are encouraged to be organic and to be developed out of students' needs.

3. **Provide examples from various subject areas illustrating the expanded use of technology as an educational tool**

Classification: Completed

Response: Technology has become an ever present resource within Brien McMahon High School. The district is responsible for maintaining much of the technology used within the school. The district provides all faculty and staff with access to district e-mail, which improves communication between building personnel, families and the larger school community. During the 2009 - 2010 school year, each teacher was given access to a personal webpage through the use of Share Point. Teacher sites can be accessed from the Brien McMahon homepage. Information published on teacher sites includes class notes, directions for upcoming assignments and test, and supplemental resources for students. The websites provide another means for improved communication between school and home. Students who miss class due to absences now have a means of staying up to date with assignments and notes. Genesis, the student management database can be accessed by every teacher, administrator and secretary in the building or from a remote location. Genesis houses demographic information, parent contact information, attendance records, academic records, scheduling information and even has a grade book component for teachers. The district Data Portal is another technological tool provided by the district that contains itemized standardized test score information for every student in the district. Prior to the Data Portal, teachers had to physically look in student records to gather information of prior achievements. With information of student performance, teachers can tailor instruction to compensate for student weaknesses.

In individual classrooms, teachers routinely use power points to present information. There are 28 SMART Boards throughout the building with more expected. Teachers that have SMART Board use its capabilities to present applets that articulate concepts, access the internet to discuss current events and make use of supplemental textbook electronic resources. There are 12 computer labs available throughout the building. Teachers routinely bring classes into the computer labs to perform research on the internet, to create power point presentations, to write papers, or to perform subject specific tasks. To see an itemized list of how teachers use technology in specific subject areas see Appendix B.

4. **Describe the school's plan to communicate individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to the students and their families and the school's progress in achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community.**

Classification: In Progress

Response: BMHS has published the academic expectations and requirements on numerous places on the web site under the heading "About BMHS", in the BMHS Guidebook, in the NPS Handbook in English and Spanish and in the School Growth Plan. The Guidance web-page also outlines the academic expectations in the areas entitled "Guide to Subject Selection", "General Information" and "Graduation Requirements".

Progress is communicated through interim reports and report cards that are distributed to students eight times in the school year. The expectation is for these reports to be carried home by the students and shared with their parents. There is also a plan in place at the district level to give parents electronic access to student grades. This would provide parents with access to teacher grade books and attendance records through the Genesis Parent Portal. Teacher training and a shortage of IT at the district level have put this project on hold indefinitely.

School wide expectations for performance standards and assessment are outlined in the Guide to Subject Selection Guide (see Appendix A). Progress on this rubric is reviewed in a meeting between school counselors and students using the Graduation Requirement Worksheet (See Appendix C) in the course of planning their academic schedule for their senior year. The assessment standards directly correlate to performance on the CAPT test. The State Department of Education provides students with an individualized report, outlining their achievement in the areas of Reading, Writing, Math and Science. If a student has not satisfactorily demonstrated proficiency in the required Performance Standards, he/she must take a CAPT-like assessment in the Grad Prep course(s) in the area(s) of deficiency in the three content areas (English, Math, and Science) in his/her senior year.

5. **Describe the process for evaluating the delivery of services, beyond the evaluation of the personnel who deliver those services, in the areas of guidance, health/nursing, library/media, and special education.**

Classification: Completed

Response: Brien McMahon High School is currently in the process of developing a routine system for evaluating the delivery of services in the areas of guidance, health/nursing, library/media and special education. A survey was developed for the 2010 - 2011 school year and administered to a randomly selected group of students in grades 9 - 12. Statistical inferences were made from the results of the survey. Looking ahead, the school will use the electronic survey tool, Zarca, to generate data by performing a census of the entire student population. The survey will be placed as a link on the school website. At least once per school year, students will be brought to a computer lab to complete the survey. The results of the 2010 - 2011 survey are located in Appendix D. The results of these surveys will be given to respective personnel and be used to generate discussion about current practices and the identification of strengths/areas for improvement.

6. **Document that the school's curriculum documents include use of school-wide rubrics as one of the suggested assessment techniques**

Classification: Completed

Response: Curriculum documents are generated at the district level by a committee of members from all three of Norwalk's high schools. The first priority of these committees is to ensure the alignment of curricula with state and national standards. Therefore, the state CAPT content specifications are correlated into the Norwalk curriculum documents and CAPT rubrics are routinely used to assess student mastery of the curriculum across multiple disciplines. Other

curriculum documents generated by the district committees include course objectives, pacing guides, priority standards, and benchmark assessments. Benchmark assessments are used within each discipline, across grade levels. For example, the science department continues to utilize CAPT strand tests and embedded tasks. The English department utilizes student portfolios as a summative assessment to measure student growth over time. The social studies department uses state rubrics to assess and improve persuasive writing scores. The math department uses common quarterly assessments in all subject areas and grade levels.

At the building level, teachers currently meet in professional learning communities (PLC), grouped by subject. PLC meetings focus around student academic growth as determined by the district curriculum documents. Using the priority standards as a framework, teachers create common formative assessments (CFA) to monitor student achievement. Benchmark assessments are administered throughout the year in all subject areas. The results from these assessments are used to inform instruction. Teachers within the PLCs share responsibility of scoring CFAs, which ensures a universal standard of assessment. Collectively, all departments utilize CFAs to get specific feedback on students' skills and progress. The data generated by the individual PLCs is submitted to the building data team, which meets on a monthly basis to monitor student progress across disciplines and across grade levels.

This year, a Research Committee was created with representatives from the History and English departments, the library-media specialists, and two administrators. The purpose of the committee is to establish a common set of assured research experiences for all BMHS students, regardless of class level or instructor. The result of the work of this committee has been the development of an assured research paper for all students during each year of their high school career. Students in grades 9 and 10 will write a research paper in their respective History courses and students in grades 11 and 12 will write a research paper in their English courses. Teachers are using a standard rubric to evaluate students' research skills and writing and all students are exposed to rigorous instruction on the steps of the research process.

- 7. Submit a sample report provided to students and students' parents examples identifying the extent to which the student is achieving the academic expectations based on the use of school wide rubrics**

Classification: Completed

Response: See Appendix A for the academic expectations and Appendix C for the report given to students and parents.

- 8. Explain how the changes in the school's schedule best support the school's mission and expectations for student learning**

Classification: Completed

Response: The daily schedule at Brien McMahon consists of a non-rotating seven-period day with 30 minutes allotted for lunch. The layout of the schedule provides students with routine and

structured environment. In order to fulfill the goal of the mission statement, that all students will challenge themselves to “demonstrate high levels of achievement,” the master schedule was altered. The previous schedule contained a daily 10 minute homeroom with additional passing time. The current schedule eliminated the daily homeroom period, increasing student contact time with teachers by 4%. In order to support students in their endeavor of reaching “high levels” of achievement, support classes for were also added to the master schedule. Incoming ninth grade students, who have been identified in 8th grade as struggling learners, are assigned Enhancement courses to supplement the traditional English and Algebra curriculum. A similar course is offered for 10th graders in math. There are also math and writing centers, which are scheduled in place of study halls. Center class sizes are kept at less than 8 students and are staffed by subject area teachers who provide additional academic support to students of all grades.

To further fulfill the school’s mission statement for civic and social expectations, a bi-monthly advisory period called House was implemented. While the goals of House are to help students “fully access the academic and extracurricular opportunities available at BMHS,” conversations routinely focus on the importance of participation in the school and the greater community. To this end, students have “developed an understanding of the importance [that] each individual brings to the improvement of the quality of life for all in the community,” as is stated in the school’s mission.

As was stated in the Two Year Progress Report, Brien McMahon High School improved the master schedule to include more electives and college-level courses. Some courses that were added during the 2007 – 2008 school year included AP Psychology, Dramatic Experience, Forensics and African American History. The addition of new classes has continued. During the 2010 – 2011 school year, students have the option of taking classes such as Critical Approaches to Film and Media, Anatomy & Physiology and Comparative Religions. Increased enrollment in advanced courses allowed students to take AP Biology, AP European History and additional section of Honors level courses.

9. **Describe the process used by the school to ensure that current grouping patterns foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school’s mission and expectations for student learning**

Classification: Complete

Response: As was reported in the Two Year Progress Report, the school recognized the need for greater diversity in all classes, particularly upper-level and advanced courses. There is a push at the district level to make every student “college-ready” and a goal set forth by the school administration to have each student take at least one Advanced Placement class while enrolled in high school. In order to fulfill the school administrator’s goal, students are encouraged to push themselves into higher level classes and move vertically towards honors and AP classes. This has resulted in open conversations between students and teachers regarding the importance of a more rigorous course of study. Newly formed organizations with diverse groups of parents meet regularly to bridge the gap between school and home for those parents who have typically not been connected with the school’s culture. With the help of the school administration, teachers and translators, the message of advancing into higher-level classes is conveyed, bringing parents into the conversation about enrolling in challenging classes.

In a continual effort to remedy this situation, the course selection process has been altered as well. During the current course selection process, students, teachers, parents and counselors provide input on future courses. The barrier of pre-requisites has been removed. This gives students, who have not been diligent with their studies, the opportunity to re-prioritize and become active participants in their academic careers. Once course selection sheets have been submitted, guidance counselors review individual student records to ensure that appropriate classes have been scheduled for the upcoming year.

After all students have selected classes, school administrators examine Course Ethnicity Breakdown reports to monitor the diversity and heterogeneity in all classes. Currently, the average student enrollment at the honors level is 16% African American, 20% Hispanic, 9% Asian American and 2% Multiracial. The current average student enrollment in AP courses is 12% African American, 22% Hispanic, and 10% Asian American. It is important to note that the racial category of "Multiracial" was recently added, which can lead to skewed data.