



Norfolk Public Schools

The Capstone

Building Continuous High School Improvement

November 24, 2003

A Newsletter for NPS High School Faculty & Staff Volume 1, Number 3

From the Editor

In this issue, we further our discussion of the domains that will help guide our work by discussing in detail "Expectations and Equity."

Also, we will share some input received from some of our high school students about their school experience and tell you about an *Issues in Education* program on Continuous High School Improvement that will be airing on Channel 47.

A new column, "Your Thoughts" will pose a question to each of you and ask for responses that we can highlight in future issues of *The Capstone*. We look forward to your feedback!

Expectations & Equity

Remember that we are using three domains to serve as the guidelines for our work around continuous high school improvement. In the last issue, we discussed the first domain, "Options and Opportunities." This issue includes a discussion around the second domain, "Expectations and Equity."

The second domain revolves around whether or not our high schools hold high expectations for all students so that all students are challenged to achieve to their fullest potential. Following is a partial list of **objectives** that will be used to guide these discussions:

- All adults in the school hold high expectations for all students.
- All students are helped to meet or exceed challenging expectations.
- All students participate in a rigorous curricular/instructional program that prepares them effectively for a wide range of post-secondary options in both education and career opportunities.
- All students are helped to have a "core interest" – something that drives them and engages them.
- Schools aggressively make sure that all students are sufficiently challenged.
- All students experience school staff who are highly qualified, motivated, and caring.

Your Thoughts

Welcome to a new column in *The Capstone*. In selected issues we will give you a chance to tell us what you think by posing a question about high schools. We will ask you to choose one of several possible responses and add any comment that you might have. The results of your answers will be reported in a subsequent issue of *The Capstone*. We intend on using every third issue of the newsletter for this column. In this issue, we ask ...

Should every student spend four weeks in school during the summer between Grade 8 and Grade 9?

- A. **YES.** Every student entering high school needs this transition time.
- B. **NO.** Students need their summers free of school — especially at this critical time in their lives.
- C. There should be some sort of transition program, but not four weeks during the summer.

E-mail your answers and your comments to chsi@nps.k12.va.us. Please put "November Your Thoughts" in as the subject line on your e-mail response. We welcome comments about your answer to the question as well as the specific answer.

Issues in Education

We recently filmed the first in a series of programs to be broadcast on Channel 47 around the efforts and issues of Continuous High School Improvement. The program will air several times during the next month.

The first program speaks to the need for our work, the work to be done, our partnerships for the work, and the methods of letting all of our stakeholders know about the work.

Guests on this show include Dr. John Simpson, Dr. Thom Lockamy, Dr. James Victory, Mr. Ted Daughtrey, Ms. Margie Stallings, Dr. Cathy Lassiter, and Mr. Vince Rhodes. We hope that you will take an opportunity to view this show hosted by Dr. Denise Schnitzer.

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From the Principal's Perspective

by Michael Caprio

My first introduction to this effort came at the meeting with instructional teams at the Radisson Hotel in August. Having just returned to NPS, I had heard about high school reform or high school improvement, but I was not exactly sure about the intent. After this meeting, I knew there was a need to get more input from both the staff at my school and my parents. I have attempted to do this over the past two months by holding monthly focus groups with both staff and parents.

My parent focus group sessions are open to any parent who wishes to attend. The first half of this session is geared to their concerns about their child or things going on at the school. The second half is devoted to discussing continuous high school improvement. We have discussed areas such as the characteristics of their high schools and the characteristics of successful students when they went to school. Then we looked at the characteristics of our school currently as compared to how they think our school should look.

It was an interesting discussion given many of the parents did not have much to say about what they think the characteristics of our high school should be. They took this on as a "homework" assignment and, thus, we will continue this discussion during our next focus group meeting.

I would like to hear from my colleagues as to what how your meetings with parents and/or staff are going and the results of these meetings. Please e-mail me with your information and I will include it in future issues of *The Capstone*.

From Our Students

Recently, approximately 110 high school seniors were questioned about their high school and the preparation, support, and expectations it has provided to them. The questions related to the three domains that are guiding the continuous high school improvement work. There were mixed reviews as to whether high school has prepared them to pursue "lots of options." Students applauded AP course offerings, but felt that once a diploma type is chosen, there are a limited number of opportunities to take electives as well as a limited choice of electives, especially to seniors. Students also felt that the pressure created by SOLs has slowed expectations and limited teachers' creativity. Some students also expressed concern about students not always taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them.

While some students felt that the adults in their school were supportive and "connected" with students, many others alluded to the fact that some adults were demeaning to students and were simply "in it for the job." These were the same adults who did not hold high expectations for students. Also, there was some frustration expressed about the counseling program and counselors not having ample time to provide appropriate counseling to students.

Most students concluded that their high school experience thus far has been positive. However, throughout the conversations, they pointed to the SOLs as a hindrance to getting the most out of high school. They felt that teachers had too much pressure on them about the SOLs and, therefore, they were more tuned into covering SOL objectives rather than teaching students.