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## Ruopp: Dissecting the accreditation report

By **Charlie Ruopp**/ Guest Columnist  
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**A**s many of you may be aware, Wayland High School recently completed a program and facility review performed by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). This decennial review process culminates in the high school being awarded accreditation at a level determined by the NEASC Commission.

This exhaustive process started two-and-a-half years ago with the staff at the high school preparing a self-study that examined our students' educational experiences in light of seven common standards established by the NEASC. The culmination of this review process was a visit, last May, by 15 New England educators who were charged with preparing a final report and recommendation for the NEASC Commission to consider.

I am pleased to announce that this long awaited report from the high school's New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation visiting committee has finally arrived. The bottom line of the report is that Wayland High School was granted continued full accreditation.

While there were some very strong cautionary overlays the overall assessment is certainly encouraging. The good news is that the school was commended in almost every area possible. The visiting committee observed a high school that is promoting high academic standards and expectations in a caring environment.

This trend was noted in each of the seven NEASC standards that comprise the body of the report (mission and expectations, curriculum, instruction, assessment of student learning, leadership and organization, school resources for learning, and community resources for learning).

In my role as principal, I feel privileged to work in an educational community that has established such an exemplary and vital learning environment for its students. The credit for this goes to the faculty, who strive each day to expand students' knowledge and expertise; to the parents, who are supporting their children and the high school; and finally to the students, who come here ready and eager to learn.

The visiting committee affirmed our self-study report and informed us that we are well on our way to meeting our mission and expectations vision statement.

However, as one reads the visiting committee's report (posted on the school's Web page at "www.wayland.k12.ma.us"; copies are available at the school offices and in the public library), there are four major concerns that appear in different contexts in many of the seven standards.

The first two of these recommendations center on how we evaluate and report our academic and social/civic expectations. Although we have developed a set of comprehensive school-wide academic rubrics, our challenge is to embed these rubrics in every course we teach. During the next few years we will be providing training for teachers to enable them to make the expectations for academic success even clearer for students. We are already beginning the task of developing a set of indicators of our social/civic expectations that will permit us to measure the level of student engagement in these stated values. In both of these efforts we are attempting to quantify our current status and establish an improved system for reporting our successes.

The areas that we have less control over are the ones that require a significant financial commitment to correct. The two most apparent issues identified in the report that will require a great deal of community cooperation are the development of an effective technology infrastructure and the improvement of the conditions of our building.

I will not restate the report's extensive findings in these areas, but I would invite you to read the multiple recommendations for yourselves. The visiting committee felt so passionately about the sub-par condition of the educational space at the high school that they commented, "Overall, the severe limitations of the current facility seriously impact teaching and learning at Wayland High School, despite the efforts of all school personnel to work around the obstacles" (p. 54 of NEASC report).

This is an issue that the New England Association of Secondary Schools Commission

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deemed so serious that they requested a special report be submitted by this spring that outlines our short- and long-term plans for addressing the identified safety and welfare issues for students and staff. These findings have been brought up with the Wayland School Committee, and we will be working together in the upcoming months to address this critical issue.

The long-range implications of this report are indeed significant. We have two years to respond with our plans to address each recommendation and five years to resolve all problems. If we do not make overall adequate progress with each recommendation, the NEASC commission can recommend that the high school be placed on probation, with a possible outcome of termination of our accreditation.

This is a most crucial time for the high school, and I hope that all of you will become involved in thinking about and developing solutions to the identified issues that require the town's financial support.

In these uncertain financial times our responsibility to provide our students with a stellar learning environment will present all of us with an enormous task. Given the incredible capabilities and unlimited potential of our students, this is a task that the entire community must dedicate themselves to completing. This town has supported a wonderful high school for years and now we are being challenged to continue that tradition.

As an entire community, young and old, with children or without, we need to pull together and meet the building and learning issues identified in this report. If we can manage this we will insure a bright educational future for our children for years to come.

Charlie Ruopp is the principal of Wayland High School.

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