

Self-Study Report
of
Webster Academy

This is a sample comprised of the section on Standard 4 only. It is provided as an illustration of one school's approach. It is not intended as a model that other schools must follow.

SCHOOL DATA SHEET

(To be completed and submitted with the Self-Study; this Statement may be copied and included with the Visiting Committee Report)

Webster Academy

**Main Street
Webster, New Hampshire**

Date of Founding: 1924

	Enrollment at the time of evaluation visit														Total Enrollment	327
	PS*	K*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	PG	Totals
Male									22	22	33	30	29	28		164
Female									23	23	25	30	30	32		163
Day									45	45	58	60	59	60		327
Boarding																

*full-time equivalent

Number of Faculty 24 full-time; 5 part-time

Number of Administrators 4 full-time; 2 part-time

Brief Statement of School's history and mission - what makes this school unique?

Webster Academy was founded in 1924 as a high school to prepare boys for the most competitive New England colleges. In 1948 the school admitted girls and added 7th and 8th grades. Today the Academy is a coed, 7-12 day school enrolling 330 students.

The mission of Webster Academy is to challenge young people with an intellectually rigorous course of study that will prepare them for admission to and success in the most competitive New England colleges. Webster Academy believes that students learn best in an environment in which much is asked of them and where responsibility is placed on them to manage their time and studies.

Person(s) completing this form: _____ Date: _____

Standard 4 (Program): The school provides a comprehensive program of intellectual, aesthetic, and physical activities that stems from the school's beliefs about teaching and learning, is appropriate to support its mission and core values, and is consistent with the needs of the range of students admitted.

Rate the school on the following six-point scale with regard to this Standard:

Passed (Student experience is supported)

1. Exemplary.
2. Fully in compliance.
3. Acceptable but needs attention.

Failed (Student experience is compromised)

4. Non-Compliance with Standard to be resolved within one year.
5. Non-Compliance with Standard is recognized but no specific plan for rectification exists.
6. Non-Compliance with Standard not recognized by the school.

Brief narrative summary of the school's position with regard to this Standard
(This summary may be copied and used in the visiting committee's report.)

Webster Academy offers a full program of intellectual, aesthetic, and physical activities for all students. We are a college preparatory school with a student body of above average ability. Our curriculum for grades seven through twelve includes three languages, A.P courses in all disciplines, three years of required arts and two additional years of electives. We believe students learn best when they are responsible for guiding their own studies. The sciences are built around extensive laboratory experiences; language classes are all conducted in the target language and use the internet and partner schools to provide realistic interaction with another culture; the study of history builds on research and primary sources; English classes in the 11th and 12th grades are conducted in seminar format; mathematics is taught in a more traditional manner, but does emphasize real world applications. All classes are grouped heterogeneously except for high school math and writing sections (meeting two times a week) in 8th and 9th grade English. Study skills classes are provided for students in grades 7 and 8 who need help structuring their work.

Webster Academy requires all students to participate on sports teams (intramural or interscholastic) at least two seasons a year. The school's policy is that all students on a team will have significant playing time. Physical education classes for students in grades 7 through 9 focus on health, safety, nutrition, and life-long recreational activities.

Webster Academy also offers a full range of activities during and after school and on vacations. These include a major service program in which all students participate, in-school for grades 7-9 and in the community for grades 10-12; an international travel opportunity in grade 11 that is coordinated with language study and for which funds are raised so that all students can participate; student government; and a host of clubs, student publications, and other activities. These activities are organized to encourage student initiative and leadership.

Self-Study Committee membership, meeting schedule, and procedures

The six members of the self-study committee for Standard 4 included the Dean of Studies, department chairs for English and science, the middle school art teacher, a Spanish teacher, and the librarian who served as chair. We met weekly for an hour and a half after school for six weeks, presented our draft report to the full faculty for comment, and then met twice more to make edits and finalize our report. At our first meeting we reviewed a summary of survey information related to program and we read through the reports from the departments, curricular areas, and major programs. Our second meeting was devoted to discussing and completing the indicator check list. Members of the committee volunteered to draft comments on the indicators and identify additional indicators for discussion at our third meeting. At our fourth meeting, we discussed the Webster Academy's strengths and weaknesses and aspects warranting attention. Members were assigned to draft these sections. Our fifth meeting was an opportunity to review a preliminary draft of our report, rate the school with regard to the Standard, and identify recommendations for the Action Plan. Our chair volunteered to write the overview section for our report for the sixth week, at which time we also planned our presentation to the full faculty. We drew up a list of questions we wanted to ask the faculty to confirm our conclusions and we assigned members to present and lead a discussion of each of our recommendations.

The feedback we received at the faculty meeting was very helpful and we used it as a guide in finalizing our report. We also polled the faculty on the ranking for this Standard and, as a result, changed our rating from "exemplary" to "fully in compliance." We added to our report a discussion and recommendation concerning communication between middle and high school. We also modified our assessment of the extent to which faculty integrate technology into their teaching.

List of background materials reviewed and people interviewed

- Faculty survey
- Parent survey
- Student survey

- Department and major program reports
- Publications (list)

Other: We interviewed the Director of Technology regarding plans in this area; members of the committee met with the math and history department chairs to clarify points in their department reports, especially with regard to teaching methods; we interviewed the Middle School Director about the professional development programs she has been sponsoring on middle school issues.

Comments regarding suggested indicators

(Indicator checklists should be included in the Supplementary Materials)

Webster Academy meets all of the suggested indicators, although there is room for improvement with regard to some.

The faculty, other than teachers of foreign language, are divided between middle and high school. The middle school faculty has hosted a series of presentations and workshops on issues of early adolescence and middle school faculty meetings are often devoted to discussions of approaches different teachers have found successful with a given class. Full faculty and high school faculty meetings have a more administrative focus. Overall, departments meet monthly by division (3 times a year as 7-12) and often discuss possible curriculum changes.

The program at Webster Academy reflects the developmental stage of students. Middle School is designed as a supportive environment with a cluster of classrooms, a separate faculty, and an active advising system that deals with a full range of academic support, social adjustment, and health activities. The high school gives students increasing responsibility and independence to prepare them for the situation they will find when they matriculate in college. At all levels the service learning program confronts students with their obligation to care for others who are less fortunate.

Departments are responsible for approving any new course in their area. This procedure assures continuity in the curriculum; however, there was some concern and frustration expressed in the faculty survey that it is difficult to introduce new courses that cross over or do not fall in traditional departmental areas. This is an issue that came up also during our review of the curriculum last year. A majority of the high school faculty has been at Webster for many years and is very satisfied with the current course of study, but there are younger faculty in several departments who are urging change, perhaps through the introduction of more electives. The middle school teachers tend to do more team teaching and offer more interdisciplinary courses. Because they work so closely together, they are able to focus on continuity of program and transitions for students.

At the curriculum review last year, middle school teachers presented expected outcomes for students by the end of 8th grade and 9th grade teachers presented their expectations. There was a very productive discussion that resulted in adjustments at both levels. For example, middle school language classes will devote more time to grammar and writing, completing the first year text in full over the two years of 7th and 8th grade; the math department will offer optional after-school review classes for students beginning algebra.

At the end of the school year, meetings are held for 8th and 9th grade teachers to talk about students who will enter the high school in the fall. Student academic files are available to all teachers at any time.

Webster Academy is committed to educating future citizens of the world. The academic course of study (at least in the high school) does not allow much time for study of third world countries, but our International Club is very active sponsoring events throughout the year that highlight customs and traditions around the world. The two international buffet lunches are very popular. The 11th grade trip abroad is also an important way for our students to see and appreciate how others live.

The one suggested indicator that Webster does not meet relates to technology. We have no Technology Plan. Right now technology is unevenly used in different departments. All students are taught word processing, spread sheets, and power point in middle school. In

the high school, the science has integrated technology extensively for laboratories. The U.S. history course requires a research project and power point presentation. Otherwise, it is mostly up to the teacher how much (or little) to use technology. Teachers were offered a workshop on integrating technology last summer, but only a few were free to attend.

Comments regarding alternative indicators proposed by the school

The “proof of the pudding” for Webster Academy is the outstanding college placement record, the state championship teams in soccer, basketball, and tennis, the testimony of satisfied parents, and the public recognition of Webster as the pre-eminent school in the area.

The breadth of curriculum and the quality of teaching are the strongest attributes of Webster Academy. On the surveys of parents, students, and faculty, no item scored higher than the one that begins, “I find the school provides a comprehensive program of intellectual, aesthetic, and physical activities that...” The success of our graduates in gaining admission to the most competitive colleges confirms the rigor of our program.

Notable strengths of the school in this area

The faculty is Webster Academy’s greatest strength. They are both scholars and teachers, equally committed to their disciplines and to their students!
Our self-study confirmed our belief in the rigor of our traditional academic curriculum and its effectiveness in preparing our graduates for the most competitive college programs. One surprise in our self-study, we came to recognize that a major strength of Webster Academy is the broad array of non-academic offerings. They are not always acknowledged as primary opportunities for students to exercise initiative and experience leadership.

Notable weaknesses/needs

The greatest challenge we face with regard to program is finding time in the day and in the students’ schedules for new initiatives. For example, we would like to introduce students more to the history and literature of non-western nations, but we have proven courses and teachers committed to an existing curriculum. The idea of offering more electives is appealing and may be feasible for seniors, but faculty in every department are reluctant to see students forego the core curriculum in grades 9-12.

As a result of the self-study, we discovered that Webster Academy has work to do in integrating technology into the curriculum. It is clear from the surveys and from talking with faculty that many teachers are uncomfortable with the idea of bringing technology into their classrooms. It is also clear that the voluntary sessions for faculty during the summer have primarily reached the already committed.

During the course of the self-study, a number of differences between middle school and high school emerged. This is perhaps explained by the division of faculty, the age of

students, and the separation of classroom areas. While this does not seem a particular issue for Standard 4, we feel it is important to structure more communication and dialogue across the divisions.

Recommendations for school improvement and issues for further discussion

- 1) We recommend that a faculty task force be formed to examine the school schedule, the requirements in the current course of study, and the demands on students' time. The task force should be charged with bringing forth recommendations to allow for more flexibility in instituting new courses and in students' choice of program.
- 2) We recommend that a faculty task force be formed to establish guidelines for integrating technology into the curriculum. This should include goals for every department, plans for professional development offerings, and a timetable against which to measure progress.
- 3) See the suggestion above regarding discussion of differences between middle and high schools.
- 4) We recommend that we amend the mission statement to include reference to "a comprehensive program of athletics and student activities outside the classroom." This would recognize the scope of our non-academic programs, affirm their importance in providing opportunities for student initiative and leadership, and balance the emphasis on academic rigor in the mission and in presenting the school to the public.