

## **Vanguard Narrative Report Bristol Central High School**

Bristol Central High School is working diligently to become a great school. We work tirelessly to embrace and implement recognized standards of excellence. The nine standards indicated in the Vanguard application do not operate independently but rather in conjunction with each other, especially when a school is making significant strides towards excellence. Therefore, this narrative while recognizing the importance of each standard, discusses them interdependently.

Bristol Central High School is led by a school improvement team made up of department chairs (math, science, social studies, English, special education, world language, guidance, and technology education), our literacy coordinator, and the building principal. In addition to this core group of educators, we invite district administrators to participate in our meetings when necessary. It is the responsibility of the school improvement team to set the vision and direction of the school, monitor and assess our instructional practices, and provide support to the instructional staff. The school improvement team in conjunction with the entire faculty developed the mission statement and expectations for student learning. These important documents are used throughout the school improvement and decision making process.

A district data team representing all levels of the school district and chaired by either the Superintendent or Deputy Superintendent sets goals and benchmarks (Tier I indicators) for the entire district. Some of these Tier I goals are developed for all schools while some are specifically developed for one level (elementary, middle or high). Annually, the school improvement team at Bristol Central High School has the autonomy to develop or refine our accountability plan, but our plan must work to help the district attain its goals. Our accountability plan consists of six school wide goals (Tier II indicators) focused on helping our students improve attendance in school, significantly increasing their cardiovascular health, and meeting with success on the CAPT and SAT. We present our student performance through the use of the School Data Wall (visible when you first enter our school) in addition to the individual data walls that our departments create.

Each of the school wide goals are accompanied by quantitative benchmarks and specific strategies developed to help achieve those benchmarks. These strategies and benchmarks are determined cooperatively with the department coordinators and their department members. Each department understands its role in the school improvement process and helps develop strategies that will affect our results in a significant way. This autonomy allows significant input from constituents and increases the chances for complete buy-in by the faculty which should ultimately lead to systemic change. Although the departments have some autonomy to select strategies to reach the targets, the building data team must approve of the strategies as a whole. The building data team makes recommendations and asks questions to ensure that we are collectively making the best decisions to facilitate student success.

As an example of this process, our Reading Across the Disciplines CAPT scores were low for many years. Our school improvement team wanted to improve our scores significantly in this area. Through data analysis we realized that our students were doing poorly on the Reading for Information portion of the test. We determined that the skills for this non-fiction reading assessment were not being explicitly addressed in any of our content areas. Therefore, we developed a plan that required our science and social studies teachers in grades 9 and 10 to provide monthly assessments that mirrored the CAPT Reading for Information subtest. Grade 9 and 10 science and social studies teachers were provided embedded professional development by our literacy teacher to not only develop good assessments but also to explicitly teach literacy strategies to their students. These monthly common formative assessments focused on non-fiction reading were graded by the teachers, and the grades were sent to a central location for data input and further review. In addition, these teachers brought their student work to instructional data team meetings to discuss specific student weaknesses and to develop lessons that

could help improve students' skills in this area. Centrally, the building principal and literacy teacher examined student scores on the assessments to identify specific students who required additional support in small group settings and specific classrooms where the literacy teacher could provide mini co-taught literacy lessons designed not only to improve the student skills but also the literacy skills of the co-teacher. Ultimately, this plan was very successful. Our Reading Across the Disciplines' scores jumped from 68% to 88% of students reaching proficiency and from 28% to 45% at goal from the previous year.

Aside from the explicit CAPT focus, Bristol Central High School has developed and implemented highly successful curricula across all content areas. Each curriculum, consisting of high standards and expectations, is directly aligned with state standards. Student mastery of each curriculum is monitored closely through both formative and summative assessments. As an example of some of this rigor, ten AP courses are offered to our students (approximately 200 students this school year) and we are working to incorporate at least five more over the next four years. In addition to the AP courses, we are planning to expand on the number of UConn courses that we offer. Many of these courses are taught in multiple sections due to the high number of course requests. Six years ago, teachers from both high schools and all three middle schools in Bristol worked together by department to power (Reeves) the state standards in each curriculum area. As we continued through this process, we developed common midterms and final summative assessments for each of the core classes. In conjunction with the common assessments, pacing guides were developed to ensure that teachers were teaching all students at approximately the same rate. These pacing guides and common assessments ensure that all students are being provided with a high quality and equitable education regardless of the teacher. On any given day you can walk through our classrooms and see power standards and essential questions posted for the unit or lesson as well as the objective for the period.

The teachers at Bristol Central High School are also providing common formative assessments on a monthly basis that target specific student skills and concepts. These concepts and skills are directly connected to the school goals, the common assessments or both. These assessments are truly formative; they inform the instruction of each department's instructional data team. At Bristol Central High School, we have approximately 30 instructional data teams that are comprised of teachers who teach the same or like courses. These instructional data teams come together after school twice a month for a total of 145 minutes. During these meetings, the members of each instructional data team analyze the results from the monthly common formative assessments. They determine which students have mastered the intended skill, which students are close to mastering the intended skill, and which students are far from mastering the intended skill. During this process, the members of the instructional data team bring student work that is representative of common mistakes and misconceptions. The team then discusses which Effective Teaching Strategy (ies) (Marzano) is (are) most appropriate to help remediate the concern. After these teachers agree which strategies that they will use to improve student skills, they decide on what will constitute success on the next formative assessment. Teachers will then instruct their students and provide another common formative assessment to measure student mastery of a specific skill or concept. The team will meet again and continue the instructional data team process throughout the school year. Clearly, this approach to mastering curriculum is thoughtful in that it constantly considers each individual in his/her pursuit of mastery. Although we are far from mastering differentiated instruction, this data discussion process provides the collaborative structure to our teachers where differentiation of instruction is possible. This process also uses research-based instructional strategies and teacher collaboration to significantly improve the likelihood of student learning. Teachers also use technology in our building to improve student success. All teachers have available the link between their computer and television monitor in each classroom to provide presentations, utilize information on the Internet, and use Geometer's Sketchpad. In addition, we provide our math teachers with graphing calculators and multiple data probes to provide lessons that are more conceptual and visual.

Our school and district have been focused on implementing a thorough accountability system. In order for this system to function well, teachers must be provided with professional development. Like many other school systems, we currently have three full days dedicated to providing significant portions of our professional development. On these days, over the past six years, our teachers have been trained to develop power standards, un-wrap standards, develop big ideas and essential questions, develop common assessments and pacing guides, implement instructional data teams, and understand how to use effective teaching strategies. This professional development has been created and provided by teachers working in “ETS cohorts.” These cohorts of teachers met monthly and during the summer with a central office content expert to delve deeper into the strategies and then develop methods for teaching other teachers. Unlike many other schools, we provide further professional development to all faculty members each week. Students are released 25 minutes earlier each Wednesday, and teachers work in small groups for 100 minutes. These Wednesday meetings are used for instructional data teams, curriculum meetings, department meetings and faculty meetings. Each of these meetings is intended to provide valuable learning experiences to our entire faculty. Our teacher evaluation program is also directly tied to our accountability system. Tenured teachers develop professional growth plans that are directly connected to a Tier II goal. Additionally, a new teacher induction academy is provided a week before school begins where our newest members of the faculty are instructed on the many facets of our accountability system. Furthermore, we provide a new teacher induction academy that meets at least quarterly during the school year. During these meetings, an assistant principal works with the first year teachers on Special Education knowledge, classroom management techniques, assessment techniques, instructional techniques, reflective practice, and managerial issues. New teachers are also assisted by “senior advisors” who are responsible for observing new teachers throughout the year and providing them with critical feedback to improve their instruction. These senior advisors continue to work with these new teachers in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year to guide them through the BEST portfolio process. New teachers are also provided a department mentor who is responsible for helping the new teacher connect to the department and school. Finally, we conduct a “dine and discuss” program that provides the funding and structure for small groups of teachers to reflect on issues after normal school hours. Most recently, our Math Department worked with members of our Special Education Department. The Math Department coordinator in conjunction with the Special Education coordinator helped teach the Special Education teachers how to appropriately use the TI-84 graphing calculators. This training will help these teachers work with students who were not currently taking advantage of this technology.

In order for all students to learn, we must creatively use our instructional time. At Bristol Central High School, we certainly provide high quality curriculum and instruction to all students. However, we have also developed many further opportunities to help our students succeed. First, six years ago we eliminated the general level of instruction. We were convinced that this lowest level of instruction was not conducive to an excellent education. We were already providing a core curriculum to all students where all freshmen took either Algebra I or Geometry. When we decided to eliminate the general level of instruction, we took care in dividing the students who would have been in the general level and dispersed them equitably across grade 9 core classes. These same students were typically individuals that did not reach proficiency on the CMT in grade 8. Therefore, during the school day, if students had not been successful on their CMT scores in either math or reading, we provided them with double math and/or double English. Our high school schedule consists of a four period rotating A/B block schedule, where each period is 84 minutes long. We offer double English and/or math to these students by splitting blocks and having these students attend a math and/or English session for 42 minutes with a certified math or English teacher. We cap these sessions at ten students to make sure that teachers can work with each individual to improve his/her skills. For some of our most needy students, students who are reading near the fourth grade level, we provide a course that uses a reading intervention program called READ 180. We continue to provide these opportunities to sophomores who are still reading well below grade level. We provide further pullout instruction with small groups of grade 9 and 10 students who, through data analysis, are recommended for these services.

In addition to these support classes, we provide an after school program entitled “Extra Help.” This grant-funded program provides a quiet and organized learning environment for students to complete their homework or receive extra support for CAPT. Three days a week students may attend this program for 90 minutes. Each student who attends is provided with a nutritious snack and the chance to win a prize. In each of the two “Extra Help” rooms, there is a teacher and one student tutor. Furthermore, we offer a third room where different teachers provide support on CAPT skills. At the end of the day, a bus is offered to all attendees. To further personalize student learning we employ an outreach worker, have a school resource officer and have a student assistance team that meets each week. Additionally, our guidance counselors have a complete curriculum that keeps them working with classrooms of students besides their individual case load.

We offer our students many other opportunities that do not involve remediation. In the guidance office, our Career Counselor offers a variety of off-campus internships at local schools, businesses and community agencies. We modify our upperclassmen’s schedules to provide some students with the opportunity to come to school late or leave early. This flexibility allows our students further opportunities to intern or work in the community. We have most recently begun to tap into our students’ talents to complete internships within Bristol Central High School. We currently have about 40 students who are completing an internship with either a teacher or an administrator. The principal has developed an internship entitled “Student Ambassadors” where students with a high GPA, excellent attendance, and glowing recommendations can serve as student ambassadors to our school. These students are stationed at our main entrance throughout the day and act as customer support for both students and visitors who are entering or exiting the building. Through this process, these students learn how to communicate, work with peers, and make good decisions. Other in-school internships include students working as a lab technician with our science teachers, teacher helpers, and library support. This internship program, only in its first year, will continue to evolve and develop. We also provide students with the opportunity to take college/high school credit on-line and at local universities such as Tunxis Community College. A few of our students attend the School of Arts in Hartford as well.

We have worked persistently to develop a master schedule that allows students to take appropriate courses. It is very important to us to provide students at all levels with the courses that will make their educational experience complete. The most complex part of this process is to develop a schedule that ensures that students who are requesting upper level courses such as the fourth year of a language and/or AP courses are guaranteed entrance into the course. In order to accomplish this goal we must spend a great deal of time hand-scheduling these singleton and doubleton courses, utilizing an understanding of conflict matrices. In addition, we work relentlessly to schedule our freshman students onto one of four freshman teams. These teams provide a more personalized and relevant learning environment to our transitioning students. These freshman classes are constructed in a way that allows all students the opportunity to take any freshman elective. We also take the time to hand schedule students who may benefit from co-taught classes as well as students who were targeted for extra support based on their CMT and DRP scores from grade 8.

In addition to the internships that the greater Bristol community offers our students, a variety of other opportunities are available to our school and our students. First, the business community offers mini-grants to teachers for developing creative programs that work to improve our students’ performance. Each year, a number of our teachers apply and win these mini-grant awards. A number of our students are mentored by members of the business community as well. These relationships typically start in the elementary schools and work their way to the high school level. We work hard to make sure that students are provided an opportunity to develop or continue a mentor-mentee relationship without sacrificing valuable instructional time. In addition, our Career Counselor provides a monthly forum on a career cluster. She develops contacts in the major career clusters and then creates an interactive format where our students gain a better understanding of the variety of opportunities that are available in each cluster.

For example, for our health career cluster, we do not simply bring in doctors and nurses. Instead, our students also hear from technicians, administrators, and the insurance industry. This approach allows our students to open themselves to the vast opportunities that are present in each field.

Students are also afforded the opportunity to participate in one of our 30 plus clubs, sports or activities. There is such a wide variety of clubs available to our student body that all students could find a club that s/he would enjoy and take on a leadership role. Some of our more novel clubs include a video gaming club, which meets every Friday afternoon, our thriving Best Buddies club, and our math team.

Our parents are also very involved in our school activities; our four booster clubs (all-sports, football, performing arts and graduation party) represent the bulk of the parents who work to improve Bristol Central High School. Our school governance council includes teachers, administrators, parents and students. The governance council is charged with providing the school leadership team with educational issues and policies that should be considered for development or revision. We also offer a number of evening activities to celebrate our students' accomplishments or provide information to our parents and students. These evening activities include informational evenings from our guidance department to parents of junior and senior students embarking on the college application process, Open House, parent-teacher conferences, National Honor and World Language Society induction ceremonies, Awards Night, and open parent meetings. The open parent meetings act as a PTA of sorts where parents may receive pertinent information from the principal and where parents may voice their opinions. Parents of student-athletes also attend coaches' pre-season parent meetings in order to learn about the high expectations for our student athletes.

To further improve the communication between school and home, a monthly principal's newsletter and other special mailings are sent home. In addition, we make use of an electronic grade book that allows parents to see grades, attendance and discipline information for their children via an Internet connection. We also take advantage of an auto-dialer that allows us to provide a consistent phone message home to all or a select group of students. Each teacher is equipped with a computer in the classroom to use for instructional purposes as well as for contacting parents through email. All teachers are also equipped with telephones that can receive voice mails. These two communication tools help keep the lines of communication open between teachers and parents. Furthermore, we take pride in our website and keep it up-to-date through a teacher webmaster. Finally, we make sure that parents are aware of our open-door policy, which affords parents with multiple opportunities to discuss their educational concerns. Parents are encouraged to drop-in or call the principal's office between 7:00 and 7:30 on any morning.

Bristol Central High School has been known for its warm atmosphere and collaborative spirit. However, as we raised our expectations for our students and incorporated the necessary supports, our students began meeting with more and more success. This student success increased the number of teachers dedicated to our school improvement process. Our teachers were always supportive and readily embraced personal growth and change, but this further commitment allowed our school improvement team to consider more substantive and aggressive changes. Our data team process has opened the doors to our classrooms and teachers are talking about student success throughout the school year. Our parents are supportive of our efforts and our students work hard to be successful.

Bristol Central High School is a school heading towards greatness. Our CAPT scores clearly show impressive sustained growth. Our results are not due to luck. Instead, we are undergoing a complete transformation that utilizes best practices to gain results. We are in this business to provide students with greater opportunities through education, and although we have met with great success, there is still much to be done. As long as we continue to use data, both quantitative and qualitative, to determine areas of weakness and then work collaboratively to deal with these substantive issues, we will continue to see significant increases in our indicators of student performance.