



## Essex County Public Schools

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### *Information Release*

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#### ***Essex High School Accreditation Rating Official***

**January 28, 2016** - After months of waiting, the State Board of Education (BOE) denied Essex County Public Schools' application for a conditional accreditation rating for Essex High School. Dr. Burckbuchler, Superintendent, emphasizes: "This action **does not** impact individual students and the diplomas they receive are valid as any others in the state. What it means is that overall student performance did not meet new, more rigorous state benchmarks which are the same for wealthier communities as poorer communities like ours." Dr. Burckbuchler goes on to state: "I have full faith in the school administration and the EHS teachers that they are trying very hard to make improvement and mitigate the educational impact of poverty on our students."

In a joint statement Dr. Burckbuchler and EHS Principal Andy Hipple note: "Improvement takes time to implement and benefits to show. We have made strides to improve teacher quality, align curricula to state standards, identify areas to remediate students and improve the teaching methods through professional learning. But all of these efforts take time to show dividends in student testing performance."

Changes at Essex High School over the past 2 years include changes in administrative leadership, introduction of a standardized lesson plan to document instruction, introduction of more research-based and evidence-based teaching strategies and practices with follow-up observations during the school year, complete revision of the division curriculum guides ensuring alignment to the state standards of learning blueprints, introduction of pacing maps for teachers to guide the timing of instruction, common testing across courses, and introduction of Interactive Achievement as a formative assessment and diagnostic tool for teachers to simulate SOL-style testing questions, just to identify a few.

The Division-wide plan is dedicated on the following slide:

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In partnership with our students, faculty, staff, parents, and the community, Essex County Public Schools is committed to creating *Pathways to Excellence* by promoting a positive, student-focused culture striving for continuous improvement that meets the academic, athletic, artistic, and career-occupational needs of all our students by guiding, inspiring, celebrating, and teaching our students as we equip them to meet the challenges of a global society.



# ECPS Pathway to Excellence

## "The Plan"

**STEP 1: Create Vision, Mission, and Goals**

(emphasis on meeting individual student needs and creating a system of excellence)

**STEP 2: Restructure and improve School Board/Central Office**

(general administration, human resources and instructional improvement)

**STEP 3: Improve budget practices and provide updated resources**

(staff compensation, technology, textbooks, and instructional supplies)

**STEP 4: Restructure school level administration and support staff**

(assigning the right people to the right roles)



*Our school system must change to progress; therefore, we must interact positively, inspire our students, and be innovative in our work*

**STEP 5: Provide professional development**

(focus on evidence-based instructional practices, meeting state requirements, and building faculty/staff capacity)

**STEP 6: Strengthen Instructional Practice**

(focus on lesson planning, use of curriculum, and relevant, targeted, evidence-based instructional practices)

**STEP 7: Restructure school-level instructional staff**

(assigning the right people to the right roles)

**STEP 8: Build academic and behavior supports**

(promote student academic and behavior interventions (VTSS) and new alternative education program)

Mathematics performance has been our stumbling block for several years. Mr. Hipple states: "We have found that students have major gaps in mathematical concepts as a result of past scheduling of mathematics instruction in the middle grades." During the last school year, efforts were made to sure up mathematics sequencing from grade 6 through grade 12. New guidelines were implemented that require certain performance parameters be achieved before a student can be accelerated. Courses at the high school were re-configured to allow double the amount of instructional time for Algebra I and Geometry. Accountability for students to perform was placed upon classroom teachers. SOL testing at the end of the school year showed gains in student performance over the past year.

Mr. Hipple states: "It is unrealistic to believe that we can make up for years of non-performance in 1 year." Dr. Burckbuchler adds: "Any significant school Improvement process takes approximately 5 years to pay dividends. In addition, we need to continue to make strides in making education a priority within the community. It will require the contributions of all: students, parents, staff, and community partners, etc."

Again, the accreditation rating of a school does not affect its ability to give diplomas to high school graduates. Accreditation ratings are a measurement of a school or school division's progress toward meeting state benchmarks in student performance in multiple content areas. The school system must now enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with VDOE and the Office of School Improvement.