

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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October 3, 2005

Carla Scuzzarella
Principal
Beverly High School
100 Sohier Road
Beverly, MA 0 1915

Dear Dr. Scuzzarella:

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools, at its September 18-19, 2005 meeting, reviewed the letter and materials submitted by school officials at Beverly High School in which they sought to show cause why a recommendation for termination of membership should not be forwarded to the Association's Board of Trustees.

After significant review and discussion of the school's show-cause correspondence, the Commission affirmed its decision to recommend that the school be terminated from membership in the Association for failure to demonstrate reasonable progress resolving facilities deficiencies originally identified in the decennial evaluation report and through Commission visits to the school, a number of concerns of which the Commission has judged to have a negative impact on teaching and learning as well as health and safety implications. The Standards areas of concern include Curriculum, Instruction, and Community Resources for Learning.

The Commission wishes to acknowledge the following:

- the approval by the City Council in September 2005 of \$3.6 million of design and preconstruction funds
- the reiterated intention of the current mayor, the City Council, and school officials to resolve the high school's facilities needs through support of a \$60 million renovation/ construction project with full funding to be provided during the interest only phase through new growth revenues
- the strong support of the school as expressed in letters of support from the school committee, the City Council, the League of Women Voters, the Chamber of Commerce and State Representative Mary Grant
- improved electrical capacity in some rooms
- steps taken to increase access to technology
- the completion of structural repairs and water infiltration problems with the structural columns in the summer and early fall of 2005
- the replacement and maintenance of ceiling and floor tiles
- the enclosure of many electrical, telephone, and cable wires
- the addition of a fourth computer lab
- the full operation of the fire alarm system

- the cleaning of catch basins
- the repair of all roof leaks
- the renovation of bathrooms once used for storage
- the painting of the ceiling and walls in the cafeteria
- the offering of courses through the VHS program
- the repair of science classroom sinks
- the repair of eye wash and exhaust capabilities in science classrooms
- the purchase of new chairs for the Upper Gym
- renovation of the Weight and Fitness room
- the replacement over the summer of 2005 of desks and tables that were bolted to the floors in science labs/science classrooms
- plans to renovate the culinary arts area, originally reported as scheduled for completion in the summer of 2005
- plans to replace rigging and stage curtains, originally reported as scheduled for completion in the summer of 2005

The Commission wishes to remind city and school officials that in the decennial evaluation report the visiting committee to Beverly High School identified facilities concerns that were reiterated in subsequent correspondence and updated by visits to the school. In July 2002 a feasibility study commissioned by the town of Beverly (one that reiterated many of the needs previously identified in the February 1997 study by Strekalovsky & Hoit, Inc. Architects) indicated that "major construction renovation will be necessary in order to bring Beverly High School into educational compliance with nationally accepted standards in order to serve the needs of its students." On May 9, 2003 the superintendent of schools informed the Commission that Beverly High School had chosen not to show cause why the recommendation for probation should not be forwarded to the Board of Trustees, ipso facto indicating the inability of school officials to submit new information contradicting the existence of the cited concerns. In sum, there has been no debate over the existence of longstanding and significant facilities deficiencies at Beverly High School or the fact that they have an impact on teaching and learning.

The Commission has never told a school community how to resolve its facilities problems, nor has it directed the town of Beverly how to resolve the facilities deficiencies of Beverly High School. It is a local decision whether to build a new school, to renovate the existing school, or to address facilities needs through a combination renovation/construction project.

What the Commission does require, however, is demonstration of steps taken to resolve identified problems in a reasonable period of time. This requirement has been shared through our correspondence to school officials, most notably, in the notification letter dated April 3, 2003 which stated: "School officials are reminded that all valid recommendations in the evaluation report should have been completed or be in the final stages of implementation when the school submits its Five-Year Progress Report." A year ago in a letter dated September 28, 2004 the Commission alerted schools officials that progress to date was inadequate, stating "the proposed timeline for reconstruction and new construction [then projected for completion in 2008] ..is unacceptable..."

For five years the school and local officials have assured the Commission that concerns about the facility were in the process of being resolved through the appropriation of monies, including those to complete design plans. For example, in a letter dated January 22, 2003 then superintendent William Lupini reported that the Mayor had introduced an order to City Council for their consideration to "appropriate \$60 million for a new Beverly High School, subject to a successful debt exclusion." On March 14, 2003 Dr. Lupini later reported that the mayor had introduced an order to City Council which would "appropriate \$734,000 for schematic design on the new Beverly High School, subject to a successful debt exclusion and/or the School Committee assuming responsibility for the debt when payments begin. The School Committee has

voted 6-1 in favor of this order and a public hearing on the measure will be held before City Council on Monday, March 17, 2003." This same correspondence then indicated that the Mayor had hired another architect to provide cost estimates for renovations to the current high school "as well as to provide current students with a quality facility in which to attend school until the new structure can be built." On March 27, 2003 Mayor Thomas Crean wrote "I can affirm for you that our city will be pursuing either the repair options presented in this report [from Fitzgerald Architects in Topsfield, MA dated March 17, 2003 projecting a cost of \$41,200,000 for reconstruction or remodeling or \$26,000,000 to rehab the existing high school including Patten] or the Construction of a new high school wing as quickly as financing will allow." The schematic design plans did not come to fruition and money was never appropriated. In November 2003 it was also reported to the Commission that the mayor had set aside \$2.3 million to start high school repairs, yet such funds have not been put into facility improvements since 2003 given the fact that in 2003 the mayor reported that "the city has invested nearly \$2 million in repairs and upgrades in the building in the last few years" and in its most recent report the school confirmed that to date only \$2.6 million in total has been committed to building repairs.

The Commission has also been told repeatedly that the town should be trusted to resolve the high school's facilities problems based on the city's demonstrated history of support for school renovation citing the recent renovation of six elementary schools. Yet information from the school and city officials indicates that elementary school renovations were completed in 2003. The renovation of the high school has yet to begin.

Although school and town officials by all indicators have relatively recently come to agreement on the preferred resolution of high school facilities needs through a renovation/construction project expected to cost \$60 million and although the mayor asserts that funding will be available through the city by the fall of 2006, no funding has actually been appropriated beyond the \$3.6 million previously noted for design plans. The high school project remains in the earliest planning stages and the students at the school continue to be educated in a substandard, deteriorating, and outdated facility.

Further, the timeline for the approval of funding and construction continues to change and be pushed forward. Most recently, for example, in the school's Special Progress Report submitted in September of 2004 school officials indicated that the earliest date that Beverly High School students could benefit from an updated facility would be September 2008. Then, in the school's show-cause response dated August 24, 2005 school officials indicated "a second vote of the City Council will be taken in mid 2006 to approve full funding for the project." In an interview on September 20, 2005, however, the mayor indicated that such a vote would not likely take place until the early fall of 2006. The constant moving forward of the date for approval of funding is problematic because it means that, at the earliest, it will be the 2009-2010 school year at which time students will be in an appropriate facility, and there is no guarantee that the project will actually come to fruition, potentially pushing the timeline forward even further.

The Commission is aware that school and city officials have reported that there are no outstanding health and safety concerns at Beverly High School. The Commission disagrees. The inordinate number of egresses (85) from the building pose security and super-vision challenges, the lack of handicapped accessibility puts individuals with disabilities at risk and at a disadvantage especially during an emergency, the original equipment public address system (identified in 1997 as needing replacement) that requires continued repair is undependable, use of extension cords poses a tripping hazard, electrical cords from the inordinate use of fans in hot weather pose a safety threat, the worn and slippery floor in the field house is unacceptable, and broken furniture is dangerous. The overall lack of cleanliness also poses a threat to student and faculty health.

There remain numerous other troubling facilities deficiencies that include outdated science laboratories in need of equipment upgrades particularly in light of the requirement that all students take three years of

science in order to graduate, clouded plexiglass windows throughout much of the building, continued water infiltration around windows, tired and worn chalkboards, the overall worn appearance of numerous areas in the building including water stained perimeter shelving in classrooms, many with cracked linoleum tops and some with bent, rusted univent grates, the continued cracks in exterior walls that require monitoring, continued solar glare and inadequate ventilation in the library, worn and wrinkled carpeting in the library, the presence of rusted window blinds in classrooms, the presence of a significant amount of old, worn, mismatched classroom furniture, inadequate electrical capacity to expand the availability and use of technology in the classroom, outdated infrastructure systems that have generally outlived their useful life, significant accumulated clutter in numerous areas of the building, the lack of evidence that water flooding problems have been permanently resolved in the section of the facility that is below grade, and the overall tired visual appearance of the school.

The Commission has concluded that school and city officials have failed to act on the urgency to resolve facilities deficiencies at Beverly High School. Through their repeated delays in committing to and acting on a solution and through their decision to repair only those systems that fail and only improve space that is transferable to a renovated facility the school system and the town have subordinated the educational needs of high school students and neglected their needs. The result is a pervasive culture of low standards for the learning and work environment, low expectations, and tolerance of an outdated and severely worn physical plant with conditions that affect every occupant, adult and student, in the day to day working and learning in the building. Most troubling is that there is no assurance that students will be in an appropriate facility anytime in the near future. It is for these reasons that the Commission has voted that Beverly High School should not hold accredited status in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

The Commission's recommendation will be considered by the Board of Trustees at its December 2005 meeting. The enclosed memorandum to the Board summarizes the Commission's reasons for recommending termination.

When there is a Commission vote to recommend that a school's accreditation be terminated, the school has the opportunity to appeal that decision to the Board of Trustees. We have enclosed a copy of the policy which indicates that a school wishing to appeal the action shall submit notice of its intent no later than fifteen (15) days following the date of this letter and memorandum. A binder of \$5000 must accompany such a letter of intent. Once the Board of Trustees of the New England Association decides to terminate a school's accreditation, the decision is final and cannot be appealed.

If have any questions about the Commission's action or the appeals procedure, please contact me at the Commission office.

Sincerely,

Pamela Gray-Bennett

cc: James Hayes, Superintendent, Beverly Public Schools
Judith Cronin, Chairperson, Beverly School Committee
Martin Gray, Chair, Commission on Public Secondary Schools