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NEASC PANEL PRESENTATION  
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2017

FOCUS OF THE SCHOOL'S CORE VALUES, BELIEFS AND LEARNING  
EXPECTATIONS

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being here on a beautiful fall afternoon, as we begin the long-awaited culmination of our school's decennial accreditation process. My name is Rick Swanson and I'm the principal here at Hingham High School. As you may know, I've been principal for all of about three months; and what an honor for me, as a rookie principal, to welcome all of you here as participants in a very special event, an event that marks a truly significant moment in the life of our school. To those of you here who belong to our own school community, thank you for choosing to spend a part of your Sunday afternoon with us. Whether you're sacrificing the Patriots' game, some family time, or maybe even the final beach day of the year, we are so appreciative of your presence in this room. And to our sixteen visitors (*especially to you*) we are *hugely* appreciative of the commitment you have made, leaving your own homes and families for the better part of a week, in some cases traveling

long distances, to play a crucial role in our school's quest to be the best it can possibly be. Above all, this accreditation process is about renewal; it's about thoughtful reflection and careful analysis; it's about celebrating those areas where we already succeed, and, more importantly, searching for ways to improve. Here at Hingham High School, we're very proud of what we've accomplished in the decade since our last visit from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. But we make no claim to having arrived at our destination. We're eager for growth, we're determined to continue moving forward, and we understand that no school can achieve its full potential without the support of others. So, to our sixteen guests, we extend a warm welcome. In addition to the expertise, the knowledge, and the vast experience you bring, I know you'll also share of your energy and your spirit. I promise you, we will honor your generosity by doing the same in return.

In addition to welcoming all of you here today, and presiding at this opening panel, I've been asked to say a few words about our school's core values and beliefs about learning. This topic is the first of several that we'll address on this panel, in accordance with a standard outline that is routinely followed by teams at the start of the four-day accreditation visit.

You'll also be hearing from our superintendent, one of our assistant principals, two of our department directors, and one particularly impressive student who happens to be the president of our junior class. Each of them will address a different topic, as prescribed by the outline we were given.

At the top of that list, my topic: *Hingham High School's core values and beliefs about learning*. If you look them up, as our guests surely have in preparing for this visit, you'll find that our school community has agreed on (and published) six "core values." They are as follows:

1. fulfillment of individual potential;
2. respect for self and others;
3. civic responsibility;
4. commitment to life-long learning;
5. environmental stewardship; and
6. global citizenship.

In addition, our school community has found consensus around eight essential beliefs about learning. We believe (and I quote) that "all students learn and succeed best..."

1. In an atmosphere of mutual respect

2. With comprehensive educational programs that offer opportunities to explore, experiment and excel in academics, arts, athletics, and other extracurricular interests
3. With a curriculum that promotes essential 21st century skills -- notably creativity, curiosity, resilience, teamwork and global awareness
4. In a culture that establishes a commitment to both high academic expectations and the support of intellectual, social emotional, and physical well-being for all
5. In a community that fosters environmental responsibility
6. With teachers who employ a variety of instructional practices and assessments
7. In an atmosphere that encourages independent learning, self-advocacy, and intellectual risk-taking without fear of failure
8. In a community that actively promotes the development of personal responsibility, integrity, and ethical behavior

Those are some powerful words. And, collectively, these statements of value and belief offer a vision of education that is ambitious, high-minded, and even noble. But are they more than words? Have we found ways here at Hingham High School to breathe life into those ideals? Are we true to what we have said on paper? That is the real question our guests will ask. It's the question they *must* ask. It's the question we *want them* to ask. It's the question that will help to lead us closer, as a school, to where we want to be.

A little more than three weeks ago, a far more accomplished speaker was standing at this very podium to deliver an address to our teachers on our convocation day. You may have heard that David McCullough, regarded by many as "America's Greatest Living Historian" and often described as "a national treasure," accepted our invitation to speak to all of Hingham's teachers on their first day back to work. This room was filled close to capacity with several hundred teachers, representing all four of our elementary schools, the middle school, and our high school. We know now

there were even quite a few people impersonating Hingham teachers that day so they could be in the room to hear from a man who has won two Pulitzer Prizes, two National Book Awards, and even the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award. Mr. McCullough spoke for close to an hour, and his address lived up to our highest hopes. Our teachers left the room feeling totally inspired, totally appreciated, and totally eager to begin what Mr. McCullough described as the most important work in the world. I know I felt that way. And as I left the auditorium that morning, a colleague turned to me and held up a copy of Mr. McCullough's latest best-selling work of history, which she was hoping to get signed. The book is called *The American Spirit: Who We Are and What We Stand For*. "What a great title," this colleague said to me. "And what a great theme for the school year ahead." It got me thinking: If somebody wrote a book about this high school and used the same subtitle ("Who We Are and What We Stand For"), what stories would be told in its pages? Now, we've only been back to school for thirteen days, and in a

real sense, I've only been principal for thirteen school days, but I've already got a bunch of brand new examples of stories that could find a place in that book:

1) I think of our girls' volleyball team organizing a major fundraiser at their home opener to raise money for pediatric cancer research. And not only that, but the players inviting a young girl from a neighboring town, battling cancer herself, to join them on the bench, and making her feel like a part of the team.

2) I think of the three boys, all juniors, who approached me two weeks ago, looking for some guidance on how they could raise funds to support hurricane victims; if you were among the many hundreds of people who attended our first football game, you might have purchased one of their "Hingham for Houston" wristbands.

3) I think of the four senior captains of the football team who stepped to this microphone during the first week of school to deliver a powerful

message about healthy choices to hundreds of their younger peers in our grade level assemblies; to me, that's what powerful leadership looks like.

4) I think of those students in the crowded hallways during the first few days of school who were looking out not just for themselves but also for those new students who might have been lost and needed a friendly face to help them find the chorus room or some other far-off part of a pretty large building.

5) I think of the twenty-plus members of our school's incredibly active environmental club who showed up here *yesterday morning*, in the rain, ready to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty because the work matters to them. They sifted compost (collected on site during school lunches), cleaned up the courtyard garden, and planted some fall crops: kale and lettuce that will eventually be consumed in the school cafeteria. They're called the HHS Green Team, and the name is entirely fitting. As somebody mentioned during yesterday's project, our Green Team shares something in common with New England's most acclaimed sports team.

Among other things, both teams (the Patriots and our Green Team) subscribe to the motto of “No Days Off!” Their show of force at the compost bins on Saturday morning showed that it’s more than a slogan.

6) And I can give you an even more recent example of that “No Days Off” philosophy. Many of the same students who were here yesterday morning joined legions of their classmates just this morning over in Wompatuck State Park, a half mile up the road, for a 5K run and walk to benefit another cause we hold dear. Hundreds of our community members turned out to raise money for medical research designed to combat a rare kidney disease that plagues one of our own students, a member of the junior class. Most of the field hockey team, most of the cross-country team, and many others came out to run, walk, or staff the event. As I ran the course, myself, shoulder to shoulder with so many of our students, parents, and staff members, it occurred to me that every one of our school’s core values were on vivid display, and all at once.

6) At the same time, of course, I think of classrooms where powerful learning is already taking place, where our students are not only achieving new insights about the world around them, but where they're also gaining an ever greater desire (and an ever greater *capacity*) to *improve* that world;

7) Finally, I think of the parents and, especially, the 32 teachers who will arrive here shortly (if they're not here already, as some of them are) to participate in interviews with members of the visiting team because it's just one more way for them to make a contribution to the important work of this school.

*That's* who we are and *that's* what we stand for.

Look to the published documents for a clear statement of our core values and beliefs. But look instead at our *behaviors*, and examine our *actions*, for a more genuine and meaningful understanding of who we are.

It's my pleasure now to introduce our next speaker, a person who truly needs no introduction here in Hingham. Her reputation for excellence is widely known, and no doubt even to many (or perhaps *most*) of our

guests. To say that she has devoted a lifetime of service to Hingham Public Schools is no exaggeration; it is a statement of fact. Dr. Dorothy Galo grew up here in Hingham, graduated from this high school, and later returned here to teach math after graduating from Radcliffe College. She has served our district in numerous capacities, first as a teacher and later as a department director, assistant principal, assistant superintendent, and finally superintendent. I honestly think it's fair to say that nobody has ever made a larger impact on our school district than our esteemed superintendent. She will share some thoughts today about key data and information from the school and community summary. Please welcome Dr. Dorothy Galo. [DR. GALO SPEAKS]

Like Dr. Galo, our next speaker has a longer history here in Hingham. Assistant principal Jennifer Henriksen has worked here at HHS since 1996, first as a Spanish teacher and then, since 2002, as assistant principal. Which makes this her sixteenth year as assistant principal. That is impressive, and yet it's only one piece of Mrs. Henriksen's long history in

this community. She grew up here, she graduated from Hingham High, she married another graduate of Hingham High, and she has raised her family here. In fact, the youngest of her three children just graduated from Hingham High School in June. She chaired our school's self-study and has done as much (or more) than anyone to ensure the success of this project. She will address issues and challenges facing the school in light of its core values, beliefs about learning, and learning expectations. Please welcome Mrs. Jennifer Henriksen. (JENN SPEAKS]

In 2007, the last time Hingham organized a panel presentation for a visiting team, we invited the president of our junior class. His name was Michael Page. And if you happened to turn on NBC-Boston for the news this morning, you heard a pretty favorable weather forecast from that same Michael Page. He's only 27 now but already well on his way to a terrific career in meteorology. Today, we're turning again to our junior class president. Whether or not he aspires to that same kind of fame or celebrity, I have no doubt that he'll accomplish whatever goals he sets for himself.

He's going to share some thoughts today about our school's critical strengths and needs. I'm sure you'll agree that he is also a very impressive young man: Billy Johnston. [BILLY SPEAKS]

Our next speaker is a key member of our district's leadership team. Katie Roberts has been a teacher here for exactly twenty years, and for the last six of those years, she has also served as the K-12 Director of Science. In that role, she has spearheaded incredible growth in her department, both in terms of curricular offerings (biotechnology, robotics and botany, just to name a few) and also in terms of infrastructure, as we recently added a greenhouse to support the science curriculum. Today, she will speak about elements of the two- and five-year targeted plans: Ms. Katie Roberts. [KATIE SPEAKS]

Our final speaker is another key member of our district's leadership team. Andy Hoey has been a teacher here for more than a decade, and for the last three years has served as the K-12 Director of Social Studies. Like Katie Roberts, he has also led important changes in his department while

contributing enormously to a range of school-wide issues. Today he will review how the school measures achievement of its learning expectations:

Mr. Andy Hoey. [ANDY SPEAKS]