



Superintendent-Director Mid-Cycle Report January 9, 2025

Introduction

This mid-cycle Report provides the Essex North Shore Agricultural & Technical School District Committee with a mid-year update on progress made within the context of our [5-Year Strategic Plan](#) and the Superintendent [SMARTIE Goals](#) approved by the Committee in October 2024.

We recognize that we will face budgetary challenges as we head into 2025. With the support of our administrative team and staff, I am now looking for cost savings and seeking alternative funding sources such as grants and donations. At the inaugural address on January 1, 2025, Senate President Spilka focused on career and technical education. Below is a quote from that day:

“In a Commonwealth where we need all hands on deck in fields like clean energy, life sciences, animal care, hospitality, and health care, we need Career and Tech Ed more than ever, and that is why, when it comes time for us to spend from our one-time Fair Share infrastructure fund, I am challenging us to commit more than \$100M toward expanding Career and Tech Ed capacity.”

Senate President Spilka, January 2025

Personal Growth and Development Statement

I believe in continuous learning regardless of formal educational experience. In 2025, I will continue to sit on many local and state boards focusing on workforce development, equity, belonging, and education. This has helped me grow professionally, and I can transfer that knowledge to my colleagues.

Recently, I completed a Women’s Education Leadership program with Assistant Superintendent/Principal Shannon Donnelly, which focused on supporting women in leadership roles. Together, we completed a one-year program on race and equity with the Essex County Learning Community, where members from social organizations came together to engage in equitable practices.

I am an adjunct professor at Fitchburg State University and have presented at workshops, providing a unique lens for currency in the instructional world. I continue to sit on several boards and organizations that allow me to grow professionally and provide valuable resources for the District. I was pleased to be part of the Good Scouts event and recognized as a Distinguished Good Citizen alongside James O’Brien, Topsfield Fair, and Brian Kelly, Kelly Auto Group.

This report will focus on the work we have done and accomplished since July 2024. I am proud of our entire team for coming together and for how much we have accomplished.



Teaching and Learning

This 2025 school year kicked off in July with the Leadership Retreat. We held it at the Wylie Center and Tupper Manor this year to reduce work distractions. Over forty participants' themes were communication, belonging, and bumping it up! We also reviewed the importance of our norms: Be Prepared, Be Present, and Participate. These norms will flow through our classrooms and meetings. At the retreat, we worked in teams to address collegial conversations that can be challenging and how to communicate more effectively. Day two started with Dr. Kenann McKenzie-DeFranza, from Gordon College, looking at our curriculum from an equity perspective. The Resolution Center engaged in challenging discussions with our Leadership Team and Lead Teachers. This work will continue throughout this year and next as we review all curriculum documents.

The uncertainty of graduation requirements surrounds the entire Commonwealth due to the change in regulations related to MCAS. Beginning in January 2025, students will not be required to earn a passing score in English, Math, or Science MCAS to meet the state graduation requirement. We will work over the next few months to determine the next steps. Our shift to internal assessments will expand to ensure we meet the Common Core standards. For example, a grade 9 student assessment completed in the Fall on IXL Learning indicated that 200 students were below grade level in English and Math. Our goal will be to conduct a deep dive into the data and plan for future changes to our instructional coursework.

We continue to offer the [Skillful Teacher](#) course for new teachers within their first three years through Research for Better Teaching. In August, the Teacher Academy and New Teacher Orientation support our educators in their first three years of employment. Several instructors have completed the OSHA train-the-trainer class and will train students to obtain an OSHA credential in their respective industries.

Four instructors completed the Train-the-Trainer: Enhancing Grade-Level Math and Science Instruction through a Multilingual Lens and are now certified through DESE to provide the mandatory Sheltered English Immersion professional development for all licensure recertification.

We hired eleven new multilingual staff members this fall, and they have helped us better meet the needs of our more diverse population. A new Family Engagement Team has been developed; this group works with consultants from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to ensure all families are welcome and included in our community. Our new Parent Square communication platform has also made communication with our families and staff more efficient. This platform allows families to view our communications in any language.



When our students returned to school, we continued with our cell phone policies. Students put their phones in cell phone caddies or lock boxes in classrooms and CTAE areas. This is working well and helping students remain on task.

123 students are enrolled in our Early College Program classes offered through North Shore Community College. 47 students are also enrolled in our grade 9 Spanish II Honors class for Heritage speakers. Our peer mediators participated in training with the Resolution Center this summer and facilitated several mediations this fall.

This year's professional development will include working with Michael McDowell to explore Deeper Learning. Two professional development sessions have been held with Michael, and three more are planned for Semester Two. A small cohort of teachers and administrators also attended additional PD sessions with McDowell offered by ECLC. In addition to our Professional Development work with Michael McDowell and Dr. McKenzie-DeFranza, our faculty and staff attended a full-day event sponsored by the ECLC. The day's topic was Conversations We Need to Have (but often avoid). Monthly Lead Teacher meetings are also being held to focus on revising our grading policy. In addition, a group of administrators and HTF leaders have had monthly meetings to allow for collaboration and keep the lines of communication open. A small group of HTF staff meets monthly with the Assistant Principals to review concerns from the teachers, determine solutions, and report back to the faculty. We are happy to report that our Culture Action Team has also started to meet again. This group is planning events for staff members and exploring ways to ensure that new staff members feel connected and supported at Essex Tech. Proudly, we welcomed graduate Jackson Skane and senior Taylor Skane who presented Skane Train to our faculty, an Autism and Disability Awareness program.

The District always looks at workforce trends and those programs where enrollment has been historically low. We are excited to report that we have received notification that the state has approved our Chapter 74 Metal Fabrication and Joining Technologies program. Further, we increased our offerings in our agricultural programs to include large Animals, and the staff has been working closely with our new large animal specialist. We have made the difficult decision to sunset the Automotive Collision, Repair, and Refinishing program. While this decision was not easy, it became more difficult to financially support a program with a large footprint and low enrollment.

Student Support Services (New Section!)

The 2024-2025 school year has brought numerous opportunities for growth and development within the Special Education Department.

In August 2024, Essex Tech welcomed 109 freshmen who are identified as Students with



Disabilities (SWD) and require special education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These students represent a wide range of disability categories. For the first time, our department provides access to Career and Technical Agricultural Education (CTAE) programs to a more diverse group of students.

Additionally, there has been a notable increase in students dually identified as multi-language learners (MLs) and Students with Disabilities. This presents excellent opportunities for cross-department collaboration, enhancing our ability to support all students. Our current Student with Disabilities enrollment is 385 students, 20% (20.12%) of our student population, which aligns with the state average (20.2%).

We have established systems and structures within the Academic Support block to support student learning. These include clear criteria for service eligibility and a plan for monitoring progress and meeting student goals.

[Draft Academic Support Criteria](#)
[Academic Support Plan](#)

A significant milestone this fall was the successful implementation of The NEW IEP Project, a five-year initiative from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This project modernizes the IEP, which has not been updated since 2001. With the launch of the new IEP, communication was sent to parents via Parent Square at the start of the school year. Staff members received training in Spring 2024 through the IDEA 274 grant, with ongoing follow-up opportunities during Late Start Wednesday PLCs, department meetings, and via a shared resource folder containing samples, examples, and exemplars for special educators. An [IEP Manual](#) was also distributed to staff to guide the implementation process.

Looking ahead, the Special Education Department will host the Office of Public School Monitoring in February 2025. Our liaison, Gillian Lange, will conduct a Group A Integrated Monitoring Review ([IMR Group A](#)) on-site and virtually. This review will include student record evaluations and document assessments.

Several mental health initiatives have been implemented or planned this year. Some of these initiatives include our continued partnership with [Cartwheel Care](#). This resource will be invaluable as we conduct three grades of Universal Mental Health Screens, beginning with our Grade 11 Signs of Suicide (SOS) Mental Health Screens in January, the [NAN Project](#) Grade 12 Peer-to-Peer Suicide Prevention Presentations and Screens from January through March, and our annual Grade 9 Break Free From Depression Screenings in late February. [MindWise Partnership](#): Our entire staff is completing the MindWise [SOS for School Staff](#) training, while School Counselors and administrators are also completing [MindWise's Trauma-Informed Practices for School Staff](#) training. In addition, we kicked off our Student [DirTY Hands Project](#)



Chapter in November. Efforts are underway for the Dirty Hands Project Chapter to work with Sustainable Horticulture and Landscaping to bring the [Yellow Tulip Project](#) to Essex Tech.

Family and Community Engagement:

We will continue with our [admissions policy](#), which includes the lottery for students in our surrounding communities. All our Open House Materials, including the information on our website, were provided in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. This fall, we enhanced our Admissions Outreach initiatives by attending the Salem ELPAC sessions and hosting five multilingual admissions information sessions via Zoom in December.

In October, we celebrated our annual Homecoming Week, which included multiple sporting events, the Homecoming Dance, and our first Hawktoberfest. Homecoming Week also included a food drive for Gina's Giving Back in Peabody. Our agricultural students worked to promote Essex Tech and the importance of agricultural education at the Topsfield Fair. The Culinary Arts program participated at the Essex Clam Fest, and the Guidance Department had its largest showing of colleges at our annual College Fair. In November, we hosted the Manchester-Essex Senior Football players and Cheerleaders for brunch before our Thanksgiving Day. During this time, a focus on The DirTY Hands Project and the importance of mental health awareness. We held our 10th annual Hawk Holiday Hope community service learning project, culminating in two school assemblies on December 6th to celebrate our whole-school holiday giving. Through this amazing project, we purchased gifts for over 135 North Shore children in need who are in Department of Children and Families (DCF) custody or receiving DCF services. This is possible through the dedicated efforts of our staff and students and many additional donations from families, the Essex North Shore PTO, the Essex North Shore School Committee, and several local businesses.

[Cooperative Education Report](#)

Our Cooperative Education Liaisons are gearing up for the Grade 11 students who will qualify to go out on paid job sites in early February. Currently, 53% (223), compared to 40% in October 2023, are participating in our cooperative education program. On January 10th, we will have a CTAE Career Fair, where they bring businesses to present job opportunities to our students.

Several community and student events have taken place this fall. These events include our New Caregiver Orientation, Student Assemblies with Alex Boye, Meet the Teacher Night, the Credit for Life Fair, and Saturday Open House. A new Leadership Council has been created with our Interim Coordinator of Athletics, Wellness, and Health Services. The Leadership Council is primarily composed of sophomores and juniors nominated by their coaches and academic and CTAE teachers. The Council meets monthly with a specific agenda for each meeting. The Council focuses on overall athletic culture, athletes supporting athletes, accountability, and the value of working together to impact the school positively.

Staffing

The District has been working diligently to increase our staff diversity. This school year, we hired 11 multilingual staff members, totaling 20 who can communicate in a second language. Our postings specifically state that we prefer multilingual staff to support our growing population of families where English is their second language. Currently, we are providing stipends to those bilingual staff who would like to become certified interpreters, which are being paid for by a DESE grant.

The FF&G department has experienced staff turnover, and we have hired five new team members. To date, they are doing an exceptional job keeping our campus beautiful. Our hydroponics system is up and running, and the large animal barn has never looked better!

Facilities, Farm & Grounds

Since July, we have kept the FFG active with numerous projects on campus and an expansion of our Animal Science program. Below is a list of the projects that have been completed to date.

Gallant Hall

- Epoxy floor in the secondary Electrical program area
- Reconfiguration of the Design and Media Communications program to create a production space
- Installation of 12 new window systems
- Removal of boiler to prepare for Geothermal heating and cooling system

Smith Hall

- Stair repair was completed using existing staff and adult students, saving the district over \$30K
- LED Lighting
- Power washing
- Business Office Flooring

Alumni Gymnasium

- HVAC System Completion
- Completion of Bathroom expansion by adding two bathrooms
- Removing of old boiler and remaining asbestos

Overall Facility Maintenance

- South Campus parking lot expansion and road widening
- Infrastructure work at the Larkin
- New VCT flooring in the main office, student services office, and the assistant principal

office suite

- Animal Science expansion completion
- Well water completion project
- Sealcoating of the parking lots
- Power washing of exterior building
- Painting of classrooms, hallways, and bathrooms
- New Poultry Coop and area
- New Dance Classroom
- New egress for the Equine Barn
- Epoxy flooring in the Automotive Technology program, the concession stand, stadium bathrooms, and locker rooms.

Fiscal Responsibility

The District has seen a significant reduction in competitive grant opportunities, which is the direct result of the loss of federal and state ESSER funding. However, we have received an increase of approximately \$100K in our out-of-district special education revenue and private donations. The District will continue to build relationships with private foundations to increase the opportunities presented to us.

Our Leadership Team is reviewing the budget documents to identify potential cost savings. I present a budget update and leave time for questions at each faculty meeting. I have also informed staff that they may meet with me anytime to discuss budget concerns. We will collaborate by receiving recommendations for efficiencies from all staff.

Please find a full list of grant funding received as of January 9, 2025.

<u>Grant Name</u>	<u>Grant Amount</u>	<u>Grant Start Date:</u>	<u>Grant End Date:</u>
Student Opportunity Act Evidence-Based Practice Grant	\$145,000.00	7/1/2024	6/30/2025
Title II	\$32,199.00	8/16/2024	9/30/2026
Title I	\$186,306.00	8/16/2024	9/30/2026
Title IV	\$13,243.00	8/16/2024	9/30/2026
Perkins	\$378,703.00	7/11/2024	6/30/2025
Skills - HVACR & BioTech	\$350,000.00	7/1/2024	6/30/2025



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Perkins Program Improvement and Equipment Grant	\$100,000.00	7/19/2024	9/30/24
MA Life Sciences	\$96,620.00	7/1/2024	Supplies 6/30/25 / PD 12/31/25
Interpreter in Education Setting Training Grant	\$11,250.00	7/3/2024	6/30/2025
FirstJobs	\$17,116.68	7/1/2024	9/1/2024
Early College Summer	\$36,500.00	7/1/2024	8/31/2024
CTE Partnership	\$83,655.00	7/3/2024	6/30/2025
ASOST Summer	\$30,000.00	7/1/2024	8/31/2024
Municipal Local Cybersecurity	\$100,000.00	TBD	6/30/2025
Congressman Seth Moulton earmark/HUD/Capital/Veterans	\$850,000.00	TBD	8/31/2032
CTI Round 9	\$2,000,000.00	TBD	TBD
IDEA	\$481,612.00	09/16/2024	9/30/2026
Skills - Lab Modernization Grant	\$750,000.00	TBD	6/30/2025
Early College	\$75,000.00	9/18/2024	6/30/2025
State Match - Municipal Local Cybersecurity	\$11,111.00	TBD	6/30/2025
CTE Frameworks & Competency-Based Implementation - Rnd 2	\$100,000.00	11/19/2024	6/30/2025
Mass CEC	\$25,000.00	10/25/2024	6/30/2025
MEGA Loss Control & Safety Grant	\$3,990.00	12/6/2024	5/31/24
EPA 2023 Clean School Bus - 4 electric buses	\$1,038,000.00	5/202024	5/31/2026
FEMA - Additional funds allocated from prior application	\$28,579.20	N/A	N/A
ECCF - Toby E. Claus Charitable Family Foundation	\$5,000.00	12/20/2024	N/A
Drane Douglas Charity	\$10,000	12/24/2024	N/A
Total	\$6,958,884.88		



Technology Department

Over the summer, the Technology Department completed the technology infrastructure installation for the Animal Science building expansion. This included running new network cabling, installing telephones, public address speakers, wireless access points, and Cleartouch interactive displays. In addition, the main building has six classroom projector systems with new and brighter laser projectors. In addition to replacing the projectors, we also installed a LightSpeed voice amplification system in these classrooms to ensure all learners have access to this assistive technology.

We started the school year by onboarding all of our new employees, creating multiple accounts for each, providing them with a new computer, and training them on best practices at Essex Tech. In addition, we have upgraded many instructor laptops this year, ensuring that long-time instructors have access to the best technology resources needed to perform their jobs.

We are pleased to share that we switched to a locally owned website hosting provider in November. This switch has greatly increased the website's overall speed and visitor capacity.

Safety and Security

Safety and Security are always paramount in education. To promote and further enhance security, the District has:

- A license plate recognition camera was added to the South Campus.
- Began the process of upgrading exterior parking lot security cameras.
- Security cameras were added to the Manning Ave bus lot.
- Added cameras at the Larkin

Before starting the school year, we met with the Danvers Chief of Police and Fire Chief to discuss the school's safety operations. We also conducted our annual Enhanced Lockdown training and drill with the aid of School Resource Officer Chase and the Danvers Police Department. The school crisis and emergency response team meets biweekly to debrief events, plan future training and drills, and review safety protocols and practices.

Union Relations

The District and HTF created a Labor Collaboration Team that meets monthly. It is made up of a variety of HTF members and administration. The purpose of the meeting is to increase communication and collaborative problem-solving between us. An example of this is a subcommittee with the Assistant Principals and some team members.

The District will soon begin negotiations with the AFSCME General Unit. The agreement is expected to be completed before the school year ends.



Conclusion

I am proud of the work we have completed together. It certainly is a team effort, and nothing is done alone. I recognize that we have some financial challenges ahead of us. I intend to work with our entire school community to seek efficiencies as we head into the second half of the 2025 school year.

I would like to thank the District School Committee personally. You have allowed us to expand and be creative in serving and training students for the future workforce. I thank the entire school community, whether students, families, faculty, staff, or our workforce partners. The commitment to provide exceptional career technical and agricultural education to our students day and night is to be commended. Their tireless efforts surround us. It is a team effort, not done alone or by a handful of members. I am grateful for the opportunity that you, the District Committee, have afforded me to continue leading this amazing school, and I appreciate your continued support.

Respectfully Submitted,

Heidi T. Riccio, Ed.D.
Superintendent-Director