



Hillside School Improvement Plan, 2009 – 2011 Presented to Needham School Committee May 2009

Hillside School Council members:

Ken Wollins, parent
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WELCOME: AN INTRODUCTION TO HILLSIDE SCHOOL

“Hillside Elementary is an inclusive neighborhood school, kindergarten through fifth grade, in Needham, Massachusetts. Our school community has expanded to include a successful METCO program, a growing ELL (English Language Learners) population, and the Early Learning Center II program for students with special needs in grades three through five. Our student body is a diverse, creative, and energetic group of 400 or so students. They certainly make the very most of what we have to offer. Our parents have been wonderfully supportive by funding a steady stream of creative arts programs and educational technology into our classrooms. The teachers and staff continue to develop and hone the best possible curriculum for our students while being ever mindful of the importance of creating and maintaining a healthy emotional school environment. At Hillside, it is important that all children and adults feel safe. Just as important is that we all – students, parents, teachers and staff – respect each other and are treated with that same respect.”

– From our school’s website which we encourage you to visit at:

http://hillside.needham.k12.ma.us/hillside_school/welcome.html



THE HILLSIDE 2010–2012 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Needham Public Schools has identified the core values of Scholarship, Citizenship, Community, and Personal Growth as being fundamental to its mission. These values provide a foundation for educating our children and support district goals and plans as outlined in the district’s 2008–2009 Values and Goals Statement. The Values and Goals Statement also provides the broad framework upon which Hillside School advances its own programs and initiatives.

In order to conceptually align this connection, the Hillside 2009–2011 School Improvement Plan states and models many of the district goals and objectives articulated in the Values and Goals Statement. Under these selected headings, Hillside has articulated its own “Plan of Action” and “Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside.” With this new format, we proudly present our school’s goals and plans as described in the Hillside 2009–2011 School Improvement Plan. A brief overview follows and a glossary of terms can be found at the end.



OVERVIEW OF THE HILLSIDE 2010–2012 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Please read the complete Hillside 2010–2012 School Improvement Plan for details about the programs and initiatives that make Hillside a vibrant and exciting community of learners that values Scholarship, Citizenship, Community, and Personal Growth.

District Goal #1: Advance Standards Based Learning

Hillside strives to make use of multiple assessment tools and to process the resulting evaluative information in order to best meet the needs of all its students. Data that is made available through standards based reporting (MCAS, NPS math and reading assessments, etc.) is compiled and used as a formative assessment tool. For example, teachers are provided with designated time to examine MCAS results through the TestWiz program, and are given the opportunity to share information in full faculty forums. This provides the tools for teachers to use assessment data to hone future instruction and support the needs of each student in a collectively diverse group of learners. Further, the Lesley@Hillside program provides lower student/teacher ratios that support this objective on many levels.

District Goal #2: Develop the Social and Emotional Skills of All Students

Hillside strives to support its students in this area in many different realms and we highlight two noteworthy initiatives. First, Hillside addressed the topic of anti-bullying this year by providing targeted programming to all of its constituents: parents, teachers, staff, and students. Parents benefited from an anti-bullying program led by Dr. Elizabeth Englander of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center. An Anti-Bullying Day was held on April 29, featuring workshops and activities at all grade levels. Second, Hillside has initiated the exploration of a school-wide mentor program similar to the advisory program recently established at the middle school level.

District Goal #3: Promote Active Citizenship

Hillside has historically been engaged in activities that promote the larger sense of community. For example, for many years the Program on Disabilities (POD) has provided diversity awareness through evolving programming to Hillside students. Each year, from kindergarten through fifth grade, Hillside students learn about people who have different disabilities. The “Buddywater Curriculum,” based on the UNICEF Tap Program, was piloted this year by a second and fourth grade class. This cumulative service learning project touched the entire school, district, and local community, and helped to raise global and environmental awareness.

District Goal #4: Ensure Infrastructure Supports District Values and Learning Goals

Because our school is an older building, maintaining and maximizing infrastructure is a priority at Hillside. The Hillside Health and Safety Advisory Committee (HSAC) has been meeting since the early 1990’s, when it was first formed in response to the release of chemicals at the Microwave Development Laboratories property upgradient of the school. This committee has remained active in ensuring standards of air quality at Hillside by monitoring an ongoing testing program and establishing protocols and guidelines. More recently, the scope of the committee was expanded to include any health and safety issues that might arise within the campus environment. Hillside also is striving to extend its use of outdoor space, including a new outdoor classroom and future plans for [REDACTED] that incorporates better access to and more explicit use of outdoor space for learning.



District Goal #1: Advance Standards Based Learning

To refine and continue to put into practice a system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that enables each student to be engaged in challenging academic experiences that are grounded in clearly defined standards.

Objective #1:

Essential content and learning expectations that are aligned to state standards will be clearly identified for each grade level/subject area, and will be clearly communicated to teachers, students, and parents.

Plan of Action

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

Develop an outdoor space that can be used as a classroom.

- Over the past two years, the Hillside community has planned, raised funds for, and built an outdoor classroom that will offer access to and use of the outdoors as an educational setting. With financial support from the Hillside PTC, individual and family donors, and a grant award from the Needham Education Foundation, the Learning Garden will be completed in the Spring of 2009. A team of faculty is currently working with principal Michael Kascak and Learning Garden Project Leaders to create a formal program for curriculum-related lessons, activities, and experiences that could be extended into the garden beginning in the Fall of 2009. These faculty representatives will continue so serve as liaisons and coordinators for activities in the garden, and it is wholly anticipated that this outdoor learning space will become a fully-integrated resource to compliment and support the elementary curriculum.



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Objective #1:

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Plan of Action

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

Create a school-wide book room.

- As a result of faculty participation in NPS professional development offerings in Guided Reading instruction, faculty and parents have begun creating a school-wide book room to centrally house all multiple texts for reading instruction. All text sets previously housed in individual classrooms or hallways are now together and shelved by guided reading level. Parent volunteers are assisting in creating a database of titles, levels, and genres, so that all faculty can easily access what materials are available for reading instruction. In addition, an electronic book program for grades two and three has been ordered, in support of Hillside's integration of Smartboard technology into classroom learning.



District Goal #1: Advance Standards Based Learning

To refine and continue to put into practice a system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that enables each student to be engaged in challenging academic experiences that are grounded in clearly defined standards.

Objective #2:

Common assessments, collaborative data analysis, and specific student feedback will become a part of the instructional practice of all teachers.

Plan of Action

Ensure that common assessments that help teachers to gain insight into student learning are in place for each grade level and subject area.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- We have adjusted faculty meeting times to better ensure teachers have time to meet with grade level colleagues to review student performance data, work on honing existing assessments, and creating new ones which will complement the standards based reporting system. Our next step is to vertically articulate assessments across grade levels.



District Goal #1: Advance Standards Based Learning

To refine and continue to put into practice a system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that enables each student to be engaged in challenging academic experiences that are grounded in clearly defined standards.

Objective #3:

Students in all classrooms have the opportunity to increase their achievement because they experience instruction that is differentiated and grounded in best research practices.

Plan of Action

Provide teachers with the opportunities to learn, practice, and receive specific feedback on instructional methods that are grounded in best practice.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- Faculty meeting schedule has been adjusted to give more time to grade levels to meet with focus on looking at data pertinent to improving academic achievement.
- Teachers meet in grade level groups to examine MCAS results through the TestWiz program and are asked to develop plans to improve scores in targeted areas (specifically, written responses in math and ELA tests). Plans are shared with entire staff (all grade levels) in full faculty forums.
- Teachers have been meeting in grade level groups to review data from NPS math and reading assessments for the past few years.
- This year, the six-trait writing rubrics are being reviewed and honed to better suit the standards based reporting protocol.



District Goal #1: Advance Standards Based Learning

To refine and continue to put into practice a system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that enables each student to be engaged in challenging academic experiences that are grounded in clearly defined standards.

Objective #4:

Students (and parents) receive explicit feedback regarding progress towards meeting identified learning objectives on a regular basis.

Plan of Action

Examine, plan, and implement standards based feedback systems at each level.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- Hillside piloted the grade three standards based reporting system in June 2008. A series of informational meetings was held for Hillside parents prior to the pilot.
- Grade three teachers, Principal Michael Kascak, system-wide curriculum leaders, and technology support staff led a system-wide evaluation of the pilot, including results of a parent survey.
- The grade three reporting system was implemented system-wide. Hillside and Eliot School piloted a grade four standards based reporting system in January 2009.
- Both grade three and grade four teachers shared the new report cards with parents at Fall conferences and will do so again in the Spring.
- Planning for a grade five report card has begun.



District Goal #1: Advance Standards Based Learning

To refine and continue to put into practice a system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that enables each student to be engaged in challenging academic experiences that are grounded in clearly defined standards.

Objective #5:

The professional development and teacher supervision programs ensure learning opportunities that: are job-embedded; enable teachers to acquire rigorous and relevant content knowledge; enable them to implement best instructional strategies; provide support and guidance; and are directed towards individual teacher career growth.

Plan of Action

Implement comprehensive professional development and supervision and evaluation programs.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

The Lesley@Hillside Collaborative Teacher Training Program has provided a wide variety of professional development opportunities for staff at Hillside. Teachers are teaching graduate level content courses, supervising interns in their classrooms, and offering content specific seminars in their areas of expertise (i.e., classroom management, art, music, PE, counseling, etc.). Former and/or retired faculty have also been hired to supervise interns' practica and teach seminars. Vouchers from Lesley university generated from the collaboration range from \$25,000 to \$50,000 in tuition for NPS staff.



District Goal #2: Develop the social and emotional skills of all students

To ensure that students have the social and emotional competencies that enable them to be self-aware, to have social and relationship skills, to self-manage, and to make responsible decisions.

Objective #1:

All students will have a meaningful connection to an adult in the school system.

Plan of Action

Establish structures (advisory, mentoring, etc.) at all levels that facilitate adult/student relationships.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- The METCO mentoring program was introduced six years ago to address the need to better connect our Boston students to the Hillside community. Since the program's inception, all but one student has participated in the program which matches a Boston student with a Hillside mentor (teacher, nurse, administrator or aide). The goal of the program is to develop a trusting and respectful mentor/mentee relationship over the period of a student's enrollment at Hillside. This is accomplished through mentor/mentee weekly social meetings and large group gatherings three times a year.

- Building on the success of the METCO mentor program, a team of teachers will join the principal this summer to develop a school-wide mentor program that will be similar to the advisory program recently established at Pollard Middle School. Our plan is to assign a group of approximately ten students, two from each grade level first through fifth, to each staff member. The immediate goal is to establish mentor groups that will meet at least three times a year to discuss or reflect SEL topics which commonly arise in elementary schools (i.e., bullying, fairness, respect). The long term goal is to establish a model within which a student can sustain a relationship with the same multiage group mentored by the same adult throughout

the next two years at Hillside (two first graders will replace two fifth graders as they move on to middle school).



District Goal #2: Develop the social and emotional skills of all students

To ensure that students have the social and emotional competencies that enable them to be self-aware, to have social and relationship skills, to self-manage, and to make responsible decisions.

Objective #2:

Strong school cultures will promote a sense of participation, safety, and security for all students.

Plan of Action

Ensure that the school culture is healthy and positive, and that adults are modeling the social and emotional skills that we wish students to emulate.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- After staff participated in Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) training, an Anti-bullying Committee was established to plan an "Anti-bullying Day" (April 29th) featuring workshops and activities to provide all students with the opportunity to discuss their experiences, concerns, and any questions they might have about bullying.
- Fifth graders continue to actively participate in the Student Sidewalk Department (SSD). Their charge is to help students arrive safely when being dropped off in our problematic parking lot. This year, we reached out to AAA and received badges, booklets, and safety belts. A few representatives of the SSD also addressed the School Committee about school safety.
- The PTC has added the Child Assault Prevention Program (CAPP) to its budget for the upcoming school year and will continue to fund this historically successful program.
- The "Drum-Up Character" program was introduced last year to help address the theme of inclusion and complement our Responsive Classroom practices. All teachers have been trained to lead drumming circles and many teachers continue to use the instruments to build community, creativity, and teamwork. The drums have become our Hillside culture and, this year, they are now also being used in whole school assemblies, our Hillside School Improvement Plan, and faculty meetings.



District Goal #2: Develop the social and emotional skills of all students

To ensure that students have the social and emotional competencies that enable them to be self-aware, to have social and relationship skills, to self-manage, and to make responsible decisions.

Objective #3:

Schools will partner with parents to provide consistent social and emotional experiences for students.

Plan of Action

Establish parent programs at all levels to educate parents about the social and emotional skill development of their children and to involve them in supporting these efforts.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- An anti-bullying program for parents, run in conjunction with Mitchell School and funded by the PTC, featured Dr. Elizabeth Englander of MARC. Hillside staff was trained concurrently, with the goal of establishing a series of workshops and/or forums for students to explore issues around bullying and cyberbullying. (See Objective #2, Goal #2 above.)
- Dedicated parent participation and organization of the Family Friends program brings the Boston and Needham communities together by providing opportunities to increase the breadth of cultural experience of our children. With 28 METCO children enrolled at our school, parents facilitate play dates for the children and provide local contacts for Boston families to gain information and have their questions answered. The program promotes a strong sense of inclusion and a feeling of community by bringing Boston and Needham families together in a social setting to encourage relationships outside the classroom and support the goal of providing a quality integrated education for all. This year we have had pizza parties, game playing, and a magician on our early release days, and we plan to expand the activities next year.



District Goal #2: Develop the social and emotional skills of all students

To ensure that students have the social and emotional competencies that enable them to be self-aware, to have social and relationship skills, to self-manage, and to make responsible decisions.

Objective #4:

Students will improve social and emotional skill development through consistent, layered, and effective instruction at all levels.

Plan of Action

Improve current instruction by ensuring fidelity, consistency, and quality of instruction.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- Hillside's new Learning Garden (see Goal #1, Objective # 1) offers a unique setting for practicing the elements of Responsive Classroom and developing the foundations of social/emotional learning. Beyond the physical confines of a busy Hillside classroom, students have the opportunity to connect with and relate to and engage each other in an open-air natural classroom.
- An Anti-bullying Committee was created, comprised of teachers and staff who attended MARC training in the fall. The committee developed and administered a survey to students prior to April 29th, a Wednesday which was designated "Anti-bullying Day" at Hillside. A few general themes that came through in the data collected from the survey were used as talking points during morning meetings in all classrooms on that day. In addition, fourth and fifth graders were divided into small groups of approximately ten students to participate in "breakout" sessions at which more specific data from the survey was addressed.



District Goal #3: Promote Active Citizenship

To ensure that students have the knowledge and skills necessary to participate productively in the local and global communities and commit them to action as learners and citizens.

Objective #1:

Students will engage in service learning appropriate to their grade level that helps students make the connections between service activities, state and district curriculum frameworks, local and global issues; and promotes reflection and the development of social, civic, and academic skills.

Plan of Action

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

Partner up with a global organization or a “sister school” in another country.

The “Buddywater Curriculum” was piloted this year by a second and fourth grade class and presented to the whole school, at the system-wide Science Evening, as well as at various venues throughout town. The curriculum introduced a single academic theme to the solidly established and effective Hillside buddy program (pairing every student in the lower grades with an upperclassman). Through a cumulative service learning project, the UNICEF Tap Program, the desire was to establish a foundation of empathy and social responsibility. Students were introduced to local water sources, the values of water conservation, and an appreciation of the world water crisis.



District Goal #3: Promote Active Citizenship

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Objective #1:

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Plan of Action

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

Continue to update POD material to stay current in terminology and optimal in educational experience on diversity training.

Parents continue to organize and participate in the Hillside Program on Disabilities (POD). POD presents programming on different disabilities to students at each grade level (vision, hearing, physical challenges, learning differences and intellectual disabilities). The goal of the program is to promote awareness of people who have a disability, and to create understanding that each person is an individual, similar to the next person in some ways and different in others (whether by disability or not). This year's K-3 assembly featured Unseen Borders, storytellers in both sign language and voice. Next year, Dancing Wheels, a national dance troupe featuring professional stand-up and sit-down (wheelchair) dancers will perform for grades K-5. POD leaders are also working to integrate SmartBoard technology into the classroom component.



District Goal #3: Promote Active Citizenship

To ensure that students have the knowledge and skills necessary to participate productively in the local and global communities and commit them to action as learners and citizens.

Objective #4:

Every student will have the opportunity to become proficient in a foreign language.

Plan of Action

Define and implement a continuum of instruction that enables all students to become proficient in a foreign language by graduation.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

Hillside plans to organize an exploratory committee of staff and parents to review options/recommendations from the NPS Language Task Force and consider the feasibility of piloting a language program at Hillside.



District Goal #4: Ensure infrastructure supports district values and learning goals

To build and carry out a sustainable plan for financial, building, technological, and human resources that enables our learning goals and is responsive to student and school needs.

Objective #1:

Long-range resource planning documents will be developed that support sustainable school infrastructure and operations.

Plan of Action Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

Articulate and disseminate information and plans that detail school needs.

- The Andrea Wong Garden and Learning Garden (see Goal #1, Objective #1) are the first two phases of a larger “Emerald Necklace” project, which grew out the “Campus for Hillside” committee work started a few years ago. This ongoing work focuses on developing long range plans and implementing explicit projects to optimize the outdoor space around the school. Future tasks include adding outside doors to specific classrooms and reconfiguring the clusters of grade level classrooms so all K through 2 students will have direct access to the outdoors.

- An energy audit of the building was done in December 2008. Members of the town's Space Needs Committee also visited Hillside this year. Results of these two activities will be used in future, long range planning.

- The Hillside Health and Safety Advisory Committee (HSAC) was originally formed in the early 1990's in response to the release of chemicals at the Microwave Development Laboratories property upgradient of the school. Comprised of school administrators, teachers, parents, and town health officials, the HSAC has been meeting regularly since its formation. The committee is charged with reviewing the reports generated from the ongoing indoor air quality testing program conducted at the school, and responding to any other health and safety issues that arise within our school environment. Currently, the HSAC is

conducting two initiatives: 1) to update the original fact sheet that was published and widely distributed at the time of the initial indoor air quality testing program at the school and the air quality testing program was initially developed; and 2) to research and develop a set of indoor air quality protocols and guidelines for teachers in the classroom.



District Goal #4: Ensure infrastructure supports district values and learning goals

To build and carry out a sustainable plan for financial, building, technological, and human resources that enables our learning goals and is responsive to student and school needs.

Objective #2:

The technological infrastructure, including hardware, software, support, and training, will be sufficient to meet 21st century needs for accessibility and reliability in order to enhance communication, enrich collaboration, and sustain teaching, learning, and administrative environments.

Plan of Action

Implement the district's technology plan to support learning.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- Two years ago, Hillside was selected to be a Smart Showcase School by SMART Technologies, maker of interactive white boards. We were awarded \$25,000 worth of hardware, mostly in the form of SMARTboards. Additional boards were allocated by the ETC (NPS's Educational Technology Center) and more were purchased through generous PTC grants. We now have SMARTBoards in all second through fifth grade classrooms, as well as one in our Media center and one portable "floater" for specialists, kindergarten, and the first grade classrooms. This year, the ETC provided us with a portable laptop cart which holds 25 ibooks and includes wireless access to the internet. We have just purchased two complete electronic book programs to be used with the interactive boards and laptop cart. Each program contains multiple sets of leveled fiction and nonfiction titles for grades two and three. We also hope to attain at least one new SMARTtable for the kindergarten next year.
- This past month, another generous PTC grant allowed us to install a new (and much needed) sound system in our "gymatorium."



District Goal #4: Ensure infrastructure supports district values and learning goals

To build and carry out a sustainable plan for financial, building, technological, and human resources that enables our learning goals and is responsive to student and school needs.

Objective #4:

Core services including staff recruitment, compensation and benefits management, employee relations and human resource information management will promote a safe and healthy work place that facilitates and promotes a positive work ethic and reflects the district's core values.

Plan of Action

Continue to build on success of the Lesley Intern Program.

Actions Taken or Scheduled at Hillside

- The Lesley@Hillside Collaborative Program has continued to expand as planned. We have accepted eight interns for the 2009–10 school year, the first year we will run the program without additional funding from the NEF. The program was designed to be self-sufficient by year three and we have reached that goal. The graduate interns are a wonderful resource for our school and the benefits are felt in many areas. Their presence at Hillside enables us to lower student/teacher ratios (particularly in younger classrooms), be less reliant on outside substitutes, and offer seasoned faculty additional professional development opportunities. It also affords administration the opportunity to thoroughly review potential candidates for future classroom teaching positions in our school and district.



GLOSSARY OF HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS AND TERMS

Anti-bullying Day– scheduled on April 29, 2009, a day featuring workshops and activities to provide all students with the opportunity to discuss their experiences, concerns, and any questions they might have about bullying.

Anti-bullying Parent Program– An anti-bullying program for parents, run in conjunction with Mitchell School and funded by the PTC, featured Dr. Elizabeth Englander of Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC).

Anti-bullying Teacher Training– Staff was trained concurrently with the Anti-bullying Parent Program, with the goal of establishing a series of workshops and/or forums for students to explore issues around bullying and cyberbullying.

“Buddywater Curriculum”– a cumulative service learning project piloted by a 2nd and 4th grade “buddy” class. Through the UNICEF Tap Program, students were introduced to local water sources, the values of water conservation, and an appreciation of the world water crisis and provided an opportunity to establish a foundation of empathy and social responsibility.

Child Assault Prevention Program (CAPP) – curriculum presented by trained community volunteers that teaches elementary school children simple strategies to reduce their vulnerability to verbal, physical and sexual assault and violence.

“Drum-Up Character” Program– Hillside houses a collection of drums that are an important part of the culture at Hillside and are used in the classroom and beyond in order to help address the theme of inclusion and complement our Responsive Classroom practices.

“Emerald Necklace” Project– an ongoing project that focuses on developing long range plans and implementing explicit projects to optimize the outdoor space around the school.

Family Friends Program– PTC run committee that brings the Boston and Needham communities together by providing opportunities to increase the breadth of cultural experience of Hillside children.



GLOSSARY OF HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS AND TERMS

Hillside Learning Garden—an outdoor classroom on the Hillside campus that will offer access to and use of the outdoors as an educational setting.

Hillside Program on Disabilities (POD)— POD presents programming on different disabilities to students at each grade level (vision, hearing, physical challenges, learning differences and intellectual disabilities).

The Lesley@Hillside Collaborative Teacher Training Program— Lesley University School of Education’s partnership with Hillside Elementary School offers students the opportunity to complete field placements while taking graduate education courses. Teacher interns actively participate in all aspects of school and classroom life: working with students, developing curriculum, participating in teacher–parent conferences, and joining in many other school activities.

METCO Mentoring Program— a program that connects Hillside’s students who are from Boston with a Hillside adult mentor (teacher, nurse, administrator or aide). The goal of the program is to develop a trusting and respectful mentor/mentee relationship over the period of a student’s enrollment at Hillside.

MCAS – Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.

School-wide Book Room – a room designated to centrally house all multiple texts for reading instruction.

SMARTboards – interactive white boards created by SMART Technologies. Hillside was selected to be a Smart Showcase School by SMART Technologies, and has integrated SMARTBoards in all second through fifth grade classrooms, as well as one in the Media center and one portable “floater” for specialists, kindergarten, and the first grade classrooms.

Star [redacted] Reporting System –new format for progress reports at the elementary level, piloted at Hillside.