



Redesigning Pittsfield Schools for 21st Century Success



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introduction

Since 2008, the Pittsfield NH School District has been engaged in a community-wide effort to significantly remodel our schools for the needs and demands of 21st century life. Our goals have been clear from the beginning: to shape a hopeful and prosperous future for our town, and to ensure that all young people in Pittsfield have the knowledge, skills, and habits they need to thrive in a complex global society.

We are on a journey of discovery about how best to educate our young people for college, career, and citizenship in an era of unprecedented social and economic change. In the past, some students excelled in school and others did not, but every student still eventually passed from one grade to the next. This system worked in an industrial economy because there were jobs for everyone, whether on the assembly line or in the office suite.

Today, our 21st century economy requires that every young person master a broad set of higher level skills and abilities that were previously expected of just a few: for example, the ability to write and speak well, to analyze and synthesize information, to solve problems as part of a team.

As part of our efforts to redesign our schools to accommodate a rapidly changing global society, the School District has secured a series of large government and private foundation grants that have provided the additional time and resources needed to shift the way we teach and learn. We continue to tap the considerable talent within the Pittsfield schools and the community at large, as we engage in an ongoing community conversation about what our young people need to succeed. We also rely on state, regional, and national experts who specialize in various aspects of school redesign.



Putting Students at

We are proud to be part of a growing movement in New England and beyond to make education more “student-centered,” in contrast to “teacher-centered” environments that have typified the vast majority of classrooms in the United States during the last century. Student-centered learning (SCL) has the following features:

Learning is personalized.

We recognize that every learner is different; the educational experience should be customized to support each student’s specific learning needs and passions. We have the know-how and the technology to make this a reality.

Teaching is focused on coaching and facilitating.

The educational model of our childhoods, with the teacher delivering content that the students were expected to absorb, is replaced by a more active back-and-forth between teacher and student. Like the athletic coach who motivates his players to reach their personal best, a 21st century teacher designs projects that set students’ discoveries and talents in motion.

Learning reaches beyond the school walls.

Students learn through real-world experiences in the community, through internships, apprenticeships, college courses, collaborative projects, and exposure to different adult role models. They also have the opportunity to solve real-world problems

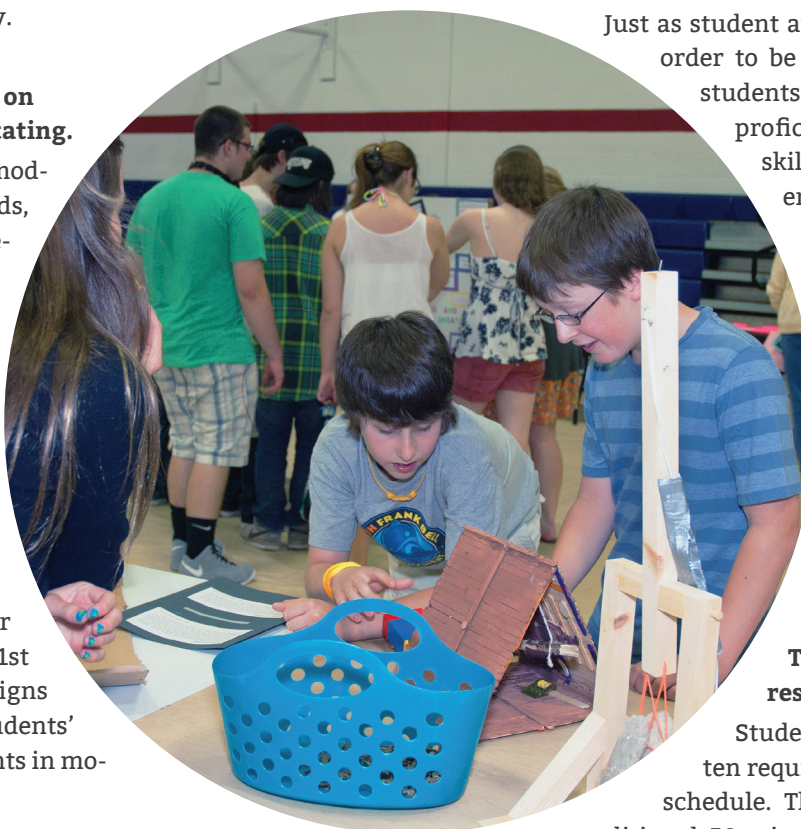
on behalf of the community. In addition, online learning gives students unusual access to the wider world.

Progress is measured by mastery, not by age or the number of classroom hours.

Just as student athletes must practice in order to be able to play the game, students must reach a level of proficiency in their academic skills and knowledge that enable them to “show what they know.” Those who demonstrate mastery in a given area can move on; those who need more time can continue learning. High-stakes exams are replaced by more everyday—and authentic—assessments of progress.

Time is a flexible resource.

Student-centered learning often requires changing the school schedule. The confines of the traditional 50-minute class, 6-hour school day, and 180-day school year are replaced with a philosophy of “anytime, anywhere” learning. For example, many of our students see the summer and school vacations as opportunities for intensive learning experiences outside of the classroom.



the Center

A Community Vision

Through a multi-year process that included literally hundreds of conversations both within our schools and in partnership with the larger community, we have set forth a mission and vision to serve as a compass for all that we do.

Vision

The Pittsfield School District is a school community in which all decisions are based on the best interests of our learners, supported by a learning environment that enables all of Pittsfield's young people to be fully engaged in their own learning, pursue their college and career aspirations, and be strongly supported to realize their dreams.

Mission

The mission of the Pittsfield School District is to ensure that our learners are supported in the achievement of their college and career goals through student centered learning practices and strong partnerships with our community. We encourage and guide our students to become self-directed, lifelong learners who demonstrate a high level of knowledge, skills, and social-emotional health through self-advocacy, self-governance, and commitment to community.

Areas of Focus

As a community, we determined that the following five areas of focus are central to realizing our mission and vision.

Area 1: *Student Ownership of Learning*

Area 2: *Core Knowledge and Skills for Success*

Area 3: *21st Century Skills & Habits of Mind*

Area 4: *The Changing Role of Adults*

Area 5: *Community Engagement*

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In a society with ever-changing technology and diversified culture, one-size-fits-all is not necessarily the most effective approach to educating our students. I believe it is important to find innovative ways to keep all members of the community, including students, actively engaged in the process.

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Linda Small
Pittsfield Selectperson

Student Ownership of Learning

Focus Area One



Implementing a Comprehensive Student Advisory Program

Experienced educators teach us that, “nothing is more important than that each student is known well and that the people who know each student have the authority and flexibility to act on that knowledge.” At PMHS, small groups of students meet every day with the same teacher in “advisories,” where they develop a strong sense of belonging and work with a dedicated teacher mentor. Students participate in team-building activities, engage in conversations about their learning, and explore college and career opportunities.

Both research and common sense tell us that students are most successful when they are engaged in what they are doing, when they have a voice in decision-making, and are given the opportunity to make some choices about how, what, when and where they learn.

Traditional schools do not typically foster student ownership of learning. Instead, adults make all of the decisions, with students as compliant recipients. In Pittsfield, we have shifted from this passive, one-size-fits-all culture, to one in which student ownership is encouraged by:

- » Implementing a Comprehensive Student Advisory Program
- » Creating Multiple Pathways for Students to Meet Learning Standards
- » Providing Student Leadership and Significant Decision-Making Opportunities



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Our students now have a much more equal say about what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. They learn better when they have a voice.

.....
Kiza Armour, PMHS Science Teacher

At PES, students participate in “morning meeting,” which is similarly geared toward personalizing the learning experience for every child.

A central aspect of the advisory program is the Personal Learning Plan (PLP), a very detailed document that follows each young person from the time she enters middle school through high school graduation. A student’s hopes and aspirations are at the center of the plan. Each fall and spring, every PMHS student presents her PLP and Portfolio—a collection of work products—to her Advisory teacher, her parent, and another member of the school community in a Student Led Conference. In contrast to the conventional teacher-led conference of the past, the Student-Led conference has led to more than 90 percent parent participation among parents in Pittsfield.

Creating Multiple Pathways for Students to Meet Learning Standards

“Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me, and I understand.” As this old adage reminds us, involvement is what leads to understanding. But what leads to involvement? Experienced educators would say that it’s inquiry: the natural process of asking questions.

In the Pittsfield schools, we build on student’s natural curiosity by designing curricula that stimulate inquiry. We also honor the fact that every learner is different by personalizing the learning experience. Students are offered a variety of pathways to meet the learning standards and competencies for high school graduation.

For example, a student may want to work part-time in the morning, come to school in the afternoon, and take on-line classes in the evening. Through creative scheduling, we can easily accommodate such requests. Some students may want to continue their



learning during the summer, perhaps through an Extended Learning Opportunity in the community. Others may want to do the lion’s share of their course work on-line while simultaneously earning college credit. We believe that when students design their own learning pathways they are more invested in learning.

Providing Student Leadership and Significant Decision-Making Opportunities

As part of our efforts to give students more “say” in decision-making, we created the Pittsfield Middle High School Site Council in 2010. The Council, made up of students, faculty, and members of the community, provides PMHS with a leadership body to review, modify and make decisions that influence the learning experience. Students comprise

the majority in the Site Council; they have developed initiatives such as Open Campus, and have implemented important policy changes related to grading and cell phone usage in school, among other issues.

Similarly, PMHS has created the I.M.P.A.C.T. Team, a student-led group that uses survey data to monitor school climate and strategize ways to improve it. Moreover, students may serve on the Student Council, become class officers and serve as mentors to their peers. The Writing Center at PMHS is staffed with knowledgeable student tutors. Open throughout the school day, it is a great resource for students who need support at any stage of the writing process.

Core Knowledge, Skills, and Habits for Success

Focus Area Two



Like a contractor building a home, our educational system must lay a strong foundation for learning by defining the core knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that our students will need for post-secondary readiness and life-long success. We are building that foundation by:

- » Defining Clear Learning Standards and Competencies
- » Implementing Quality Instructional Strategies
- » Implementing Quality Assessments
- » Providing a System of Support

Defining Clear Learning Standards and Competencies

Clear learning standards and competencies are the driving force of our educational system. A standard defines what students need to know. A competency is a demonstration and application of that knowledge.

For example, literacy is an important state and federal English & Language Arts standard. An English Language Arts competency is the ability to listen and view critically and to speak purposefully and effectively. Students demonstrate the mastery of a competency through a set of well-defined learning activities and on-going assessments of their progress.

Implementing Quality Instructional Strategies

A knowledgeable and skilled teacher is perhaps the most important factor in student learning. A 21st century teacher is an activator, guide, and coach who asks questions and helps students shape their own learning experience.

Today's teachers practice what is known as "differentiated instruction," in which each student is treated as an individual who is fully capable of learning; the teacher's job is to work collaboratively to find the best set of strategies to realize each student's success. In other words, every teacher has a full toolbox of ideas for reaching different kinds of thinkers and learners and every student assumes a high level of personal responsibility. Failure is not an option.



Implementing Quality Assessments

Just as there is no ‘one size fits all’ way to help students meet the learning standards and competencies, there is no single test that will accurately measure what students know and are able to do.

In Pittsfield, we use three kinds of assessments. Formative Assessments allow a teacher to capture learning as it occurs. Interim Assessments help a teacher understand how far along a student is toward reaching mastery. Summative Assessments evaluate progress at the end of a course of study. All of these assessments guide teachers in their support of student mastery and offer a variety of ways for students to show what they know.

Pittsfield has access to valuable assessment tools through New Hampshire’s affiliation with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, a national organization that guides states in designing cutting edge ways of measuring student progress.

Providing A System of Support

For young people to do well in school, they must feel fully supported. Academic problems can lead to emotional difficulties, and, likewise, emotional problems can lead to academic difficulties. That’s why we have developed a “multi-tiered” support system that reaches young people wherever they are to catch them before they fall. Pittsfield utilizes a range of student support models and interventions. Some of these are school-wide and support every student; other interventions are more targeted to students who have specific academic, social, emotional, or physical challenges. You may hear such terms as Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) that refer to specific strategies to support students along a continuum of need.

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It gives you more of an opportunity to find what you like to do and to fix things that you’ve messed up...It gives the student a lot of initiative and it teaches them a lot of responsibility. It’s a lot better than the old methods.

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Michael Duquette
Middle School Student

21st Century Skills & Habits of Mind

Focus Area Three

In bygone days, mastery of the 3R's was a ticket to a good job and a living wage. That's no longer the case. Over the last two decades, school, community, and business leaders have identified a set of "21st century" skills and "habits of mind" that—in addition to the 3Rs—are absolutely necessary for success in work and life. In Pittsfield, we prepare our young people ready for a 21st century world by:

- »Integrating 21st Century Skills Into the Curriculum
- »Establishing and Supporting a Digital Environment for Learning
- »Increasing Opportunities for Participation in the Community
- »Improving School Culture and Climate

Integrating 21st Century Skills Into the Curriculum

Employers across the country say that recent graduates do not possess what are often referred to as 21st century or "soft skills." In fact, scientists say that these are the critical brain-based skills that lead to thriving. They include:

- »Flexibility and adaptability
- »Ability to set and manage goals and work independently
- »Ability to communicate clearly through the spoken and written word, and to listen attentively
- »Capacity to research and analyze data, solve problems and produce results
- »Ability to work well in teams and respect diverse perspectives

In the Pittsfield schools, we aim to infuse every aspect of student learning with activities and supports that build these important life skills.

Establishing and Supporting a Digital Environment for Learning

Because media and technology skills are also essential, we want to create a robust digital environment in our schools. Pittsfield is well on its way to developing a solid technology infrastructure that includes full wireless access. In 2013, with support from a variety of funding sources, PMHS faculty and students each received an Apple iPad for classroom use.

New tools require training. Our Technology Integrator, a new, grant-funded staff position, works closely with teachers and students on how to enrich learning through creative use of technology.

Online learning is another element of our digital learning strategy. Pittsfield's grant-funded Online/Dual Enrollment Program enables our high school students to recover high school credits or gain college credit by taking courses on-line.

To ensure that Pittsfield's digital learning environment continues to evolve, we regularly solicit ideas and address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders through informal conversations and community forums.

Increasing Opportunities for Participation in the Community

One way of mastering 21st century skills and habits of mind is through real-life experiences in a real-world environment. In Pittsfield, we are fortunate that so many organizations and professionals in our community are opening their doors to young people. Through Extended Learning Oppor-



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Manufacturing businesses in town are in need of well-educated and skilled workers. Why should they have to bring people in from outside of Pittsfield when students here can—if trained properly—fill the need?

.....
Ted Mitchell,
Chair, Pittsfield Economic
Development Committee



tunities (ELOs) including internships and “job shadows” in such fields as culinary arts, genetics, criminal justice, engineering, veterinary science, theology, and journalism, students gain valuable experience while meeting rigorous academic standards.

Students are also encouraged to do in-depth research projects, follow their artistic passions through performance, and engage in more than two dozen co-curricular activities such as yearbook, newspaper, Winter Guard, gaming, and athletics. To graduate, they are also required to complete 37.5 hours of community service, beginning as early as seventh grade. All of these opportunities give students a chance to develop leadership skills and to view themselves as individuals who can make a real difference in their community and beyond. Every student is required to write a written reflection

of his/her experience, which fulfills a graduation requirement.

Improving School Culture and Climate

Students learn well when they feel safe and cared for in the school environment. Educators refer to these environmental qualities as school climate and school culture. Numerous studies document that a healthy school climate leads to better grades, higher self-esteem, fewer suspensions, less anxiety and depression, and less substance abuse. In Pittsfield, teams of students and faculty members actively pursue a climate and culture that celebrates students’ strengths and aspirations; we regularly conduct school-wide surveys to measure our progress.

For example, we learned that our system of discipline was falling short. This led to the development of a new,

research-based system of discipline known as “Restorative Justice,” which focuses not on punishing students, but rather, on holding them truly accountable for their actions. Together, the team of students and faculty determine how an offending student will repair the harm done to the school community. In the process, everyone learns valuable conflict resolution skills that will last a lifetime.

Climate surveys also taught us that we needed to do more to ease student transitions—from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to post-secondary education. In response, Pittsfield School District has created strategies and implementation teams for transition planning.

The Changing Role of Adults

Focus Area Four

Most educators in public schools across the country, including in Pittsfield, were trained to teach in a traditional education system that was designed for the agricultural and industrial economies of the 19th and 20th centuries. (The teacher delivering content to students sitting politely in neat rows was sufficient for those times.)

Our current economy and society, however, require teachers to have a much broader set of skills and strategies. In Pittsfield, we support teachers in deepening their own learning by:

- »Providing Professional Development for Expanded Roles
- »Developing Structures For Meaningful Collaboration
- »Creating a Performance Management System

Providing Professional Development for Expanded Roles

In a student-centered educational system, teachers wear many hats. In addition to having solid content expertise, teachers must be activators, coaches, and advisors to their students. Because most teachers have not been formally trained for these roles, it is up to the educational system to provide opportunities for teachers to practice new skills. That's why professional development is embedded in actual classroom practice, with help from respected technical assistance providers. In addition, teachers in the school have been trained to provide professional development and coaching for their colleagues.

Pittsfield teachers are also learning to integrate technology into their daily classroom practices—through creative use of the Internet, smart phones, tablets, digital cameras, software applications, and social media platforms.

Developing Structures For Meaningful Collaboration

Today, to help students meet higher standards, effective teachers must work closely with their peers. The research shows that when teachers work in teams, students are less likely to fall through the cracks and student outcomes improve dramatically.

In Pittsfield, we have greatly expanded the amount of time that our teachers collaborate. Teachers meet regularly in grade level teams to examine student work, develop curricula, and assess student progress. Our “Late Start Wednesdays” at PMHS give teachers time to deepen their knowledge and practice.

Creating a Performance Management System

In a 21st century learning environment, a very deliberative performance management system is necessary. In Pittsfield, we work hard to clearly define the role of each and every position in the school system so that the right people are in the right places. Whether it's recruiting, screening, hiring, or orienting new employees or evaluating individual performance of existing employees and creating professional growth plans, we recognize that all of the roles in our educational system are important and interconnected. For this reason, our Performance Management System now includes a Professional Growth and Evaluation plan for all educators and a 360-degree feedback process that enables multiple stakeholders, including students, to assess administrator performance.

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I don't think you get much out of it if you just sit there and do worksheets. This is more hands-on, doing what you want to do, building what you want to build, and using your own imagination. So it's a lot of fun.

Ryan Marquis
High School Student



Community Engagement

Focus Area Five

In most cities and towns in the United States, the school and the community are seen as separate from each other. In reality, they are inextricably linked. The future well being of our town depends on our ability to provide a world-class education to its future leaders and contributors. Likewise, the strength of our schools depends on our ability to harness all of the human assets of the community on behalf of our young people. In Pittsfield, our motto—"Strong Community, Strong Schools"—is an expression of our commitment to:

- »Promoting Structures to Support Ongoing Community Engagement
- »Creating Vehicles for Ongoing Two-Way Communication
- »Developing Relationships With Post-Secondary Institutions
- »Networking with Other School Districts

Promoting Structures to Support Ongoing Community Engagement

One of our first efforts to bridge school and community was the creation of the Community Advisory Council (CAC), a group of faculty, community members, students, parents and local leaders whose goal was to develop a seven to ten year plan for redesigning the educational system. Through the CAC's efforts, Pittsfield secured the Nellie Mae Education Foundation grant. The CAC's succes-

sor is the Good to Great Team (GTGT), whose role is to ensure the schools' continuous improvement through meaningful progress and bring new energy to the redesign efforts.

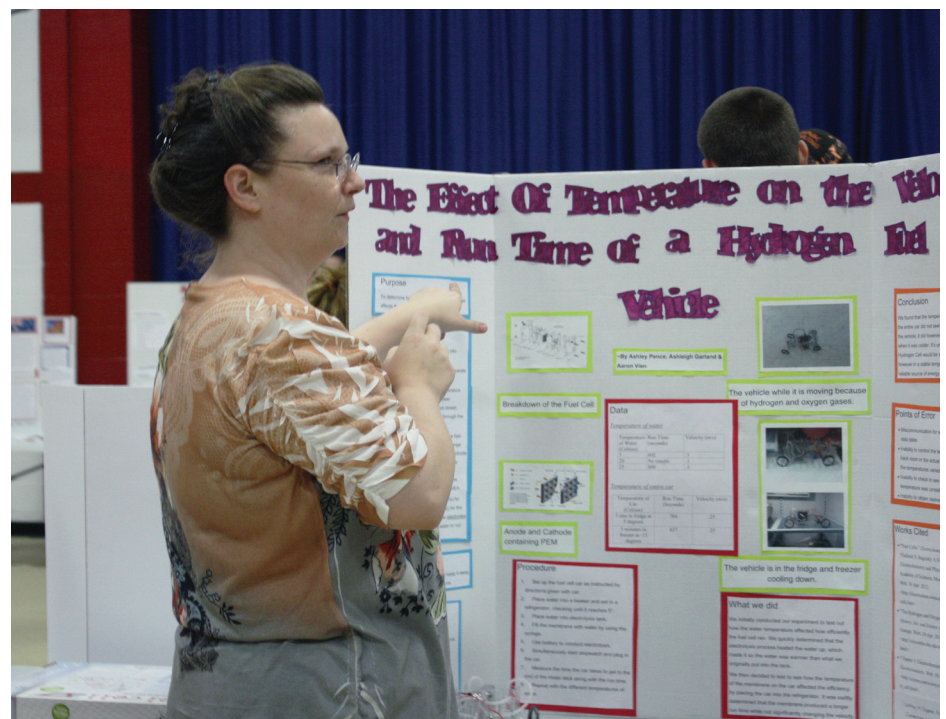
In partnership with the schools, the Pittsfield Youth Workshop and Pittsfield Listens provide opportunities and support for community members to develop and assume leadership roles in a process to make positive change. Pittsfield Listens does this through a variety of ways, which include community-wide dialogues, leadership and facilitator trainings, a Community Connection Series, action committees and a youth organizing committee. The ideas and concerns that emerge help inform the ongoing redesign of the educational system, making Pittsfield a better place for everyone to live, learn and play. Pittsfield Listens is part of New Hampshire Listens, a project of the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

The Pittsfield Parent Connection and the PES PTO bring together educators and parents to strengthen the vital connections between home and school. They organize community forums and keep their finger on the pulse of the different parent constituencies in the community.

Creating Vehicles for Ongoing Two-Way Communications

The Pittsfield Schools have a strong presence at community events, such as Old Home Day and National Night Out. Our superintendent, faculty, and students are frequently invited to speak at civic meetings about the redesign of the educational system.

Our part-time, grant-funded Community Liaison builds relationships across the community through attendance at events and meetings, and through ongoing communication with stakeholders. The Liaison, along with the Com-



munications Team, creates a variety of materials to keep the community informed. The Team also notifies local, state, regional and national media of Pittsfield's accomplishments.

Developing Relationships With Post-Secondary Institutions

From the time they enter kindergarten, we want every student in Pittsfield to assume that learning extends beyond high school. That's why we work hard to establish and deepen our relationship with colleges, universities and career centers in the region. For example, the New Hampshire Higher Education Assistance Foundation (NHHEAF) sponsors New Hampshire Goes to College Month and hosts college and career events in our schools. We also have strong relationships with the University of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Technical Institute, and the Lakes Region Community College.

Networking with Other School Districts

Pittsfield is fortunate to be part of several school networks that both advance our thinking and give us an opportunity to share what we are learning.

As one of four District Level School Change districts funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation in New England, we attend and present at cross-site meetings and are given access to a wealth of resources. Our teachers and staff also participate in professional learning teams with colleagues in these districts whose roles are similar.

Through our ability to secure large government grants, including the prestigious Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the School



Improvement Grants (SIG) of the U.S. Department of Education, we have gained access to individuals and organizations possessing many different kinds of educational expertise. Pittsfield also participates in a variety of professional learning networks sponsored by the New Hampshire Department of Education.

In recent years, invitations to share our successes at a variety of statewide, regional, and national meetings have dramatically increased. Recently, representatives from PMHS presented at conferences of the New England Secondary Schools Consortium, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Learning Forward and Breaking Ranks.

The Pittsfield School District will soon be host to the Pittsfield Educational Resource Center Summer Institute, a series of four three-day workshops for communities and schools in New England that are interested in focused explorations of student-centered learning.

We hope this review of our community-wide effort to reshape our schools for the needs and demands of the 21st century has been helpful to you. There is always room at the table for your ideas and we fully welcome your participation in this once-in-a-generation enterprise.

