

Academy for Math, Engineering and Science

5715 South 1300 East Salt Lake City, Utah 84121

April 24, 2008





Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

Academy for Math, Engineering and Science 5715 South 1300 East Salt Lake City, UT 84121

April 24, 2008

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 24, 2008, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Academy for Math, Engineering and Science (AMES) is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Al Church is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at AMES, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at AMES.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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VISITING TEAM REPORT

ACADEMY FOR MATH, ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Academy for Math, Engineering and Science is to prepare a diverse student body for success in college or other post-secondary education.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- 1. AMES believes that all students are capable of meeting high expectations, thinking critically, and becoming life-long learners.
- 2. AMES believes that learning opportunities should be connected to the community.
- 3. AMES believes that students should be provided with a variety of instructional strategies to support their learning.
- 4. AMES believes in fostering a diverse student body where mutual respect and tolerance are celebrated.
- 5. AMES believes in developing strong, lasting, positive relationships.
- 6. AMES believes in promoting the physical, mental, emotional, and well-being of their students.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

- 1. All students will communicate effectively.
- 2. All Students will think critically.
- 3. All students will integrate and apply knowledge in civic, social and personal contexts.

Date of Visit: April 24, 2008

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ted P. Lovato, Accreditation Consultant, Utah State Office of Education, Northwest Association of Accredited Schools, Team Chairperson
 Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist, Utah State Office of Education
 Rob Stillwell, Principal, Northern Utah Academy for Math and Engineering
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 Sonia Woodbury, Executive Director, City Academy

VISITING TEAM REPORT

ACADEMY FOR MATH, ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

The Academy for Math, Engineering and Science (AMES) was the first of six early college high schools chartered under 2002 charter school legislation. Each of these schools was to have a higher education partner, offering students college credit to prepare them for post-secondary pursuits. From the beginning, AMES has made a deliberate effort to recruit students of diverse backgrounds who are traditionally underserved by the education community, especially in the math, engineering and science areas.

University of Utah classes are taught at AMES in calculus, chemistry, statistics, college algebra/trigonometry, quantitative reasoning, academic writing, physics and communications/humanities. AMES students also have the opportunity to participate in Cottonwood High courses, both elective and required, such as driver's education, health, debate, drama, music, art, athletics, etc. These two educational partnerships give AMES students the opportunity to receive a full, well-rounded course of study that would meet almost any student's interest or ability level, while still maintaining the math and science emphasis.

AMES is housed in a remodeled, previously underutilized space at Cottonwood High School, located in the southeastern part of the Salt Lake Valley. Students are bussed from 21 feeder schools in Granite and Salt Lake City school districts. However, the school attracts students from 25 middle-level schools, five private and five charter schools in Salt Lake and Utah Counties. The enrollment for 2007-2008 is 433 students in grades 9-12. AMES students represent an ethnic mix, with 45 percent from ethnic minorities: Asian, 7.5 percent; Black, six percent; Hispanic 22 percent; Native American, two percent; and Pacific Islander, 7.5 percent. Forty-three percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. AMES qualifies as a Title I school. Sixty-eight percent of the students are MESA eligible, and 28 students have IEPs.

- a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?
 - The diversity of the student body was a significant discovery. From its inception, AMES has been successful in recruiting and maintaining a very diverse population. The high number of minority students is impressive. The number of students who will be the first in their family to attend college is also notable.
- *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

AMES should continue to track student progress to determine trends in course taking, demographics, and achievement. The school might consider additional analysis of demographic data to determine trends or pockets of students coming from various ethnic groups or areas of residence.

c) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The self-study was honest and straightforward. Strengths were celebrated, limitations were examined, and possible actions toward change were set and discussed. The self-study was reflective of the culture and climate of the school.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- If possible, it would be informative to track students after they graduate. The self-study included a limited amount of this information, but a longitudinal study might be of worth for future plans.
- Exit surveys might be helpful in retaining students. This type of survey might provide evidence as to why students decide to leave, and where they go after AMES.

CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

a) To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?

As a charter school, AMES's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs have been directly derived from the school's charter. However, AMES has made a shift in its priorities regarding its mission statement and beliefs, which came about as the school's leadership and staff have interacted with their school's students, parents, and university partner. According to the school's charter, AMES would focus on college preparation for diverse students, with college preparation being the primary goal. After much interaction with and discussion amongst stakeholders, the focus has shifted to attracting a diverse population first, and then preparing those students for "for success in college or other post-secondary education." This shift in focus in strong evidence for the collaborative efforts made by the

school's governing board, administrative leadership, staff, and partnership with the University of Utah. Throughout the team's visit, additional conversations were held by various team members with the school's leadership and staff which provided additional evidence of the strong collaboration and onus the staff has taken for the school's beliefs and mission. One teacher described having left his profession as a geologist and returned to teaching because of what AMES could do to help underrepresented student populations be better prepared to pursue careers in the sciences. Another science professional also came to the AMES for similar reasons. He has gone so far as to work with the school's leadership to create a hands-on math course to better facilitate the learning for students struggling to grasp some of the higher levels of mathematics necessary for them to be successful pursuing degrees in the sciences in college. Overall, there has been a high degree of collaboration and buy-in in making the AMES mission and beliefs a reality in the lives of the students.

b) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?

For a charter school, and particularly in the case of AMES, it might be more appropriate to rephrase this question as "To what extent do the school's DRSLs align to support the school's mission and beliefs?" Again, for AMES, the DRSLs have come about in part due to the school's unique relationship with the University of Utah. A member of AMES's governing board is a University of Utah Vice President and provost, and AMES also has several University of Utah instructors that teach on the AMES campus. This has provided AMES with the advantage of receiving direct feedback from the university level on what strengths and weaknesses their students take with them to college and post-secondary education. Therefore, the DRSLs AMES has chosen are a direct response to their students' needs to be successful in college, thus directly fulfilling the AMES mission. There could be a closer alignment between the beliefs and the DRSLs, which would strengthen the school.

c) Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.

The school selected three DRSLs, with at least one indicator in each content area for each DRSL. The DRSLs and indicators are outlined as follows:

- 1. All students will communicate effectively by:
 - a. Language Arts presenting a thesis and supporting it with logical argument and evidence.
 - b. Language Arts writing informational and literary texts to reflect, inform, and persuade.
 - c. Mathematics using the language of mathematics to express mathematical ideas precisely.

- d. Mathematics communicating mathematical thinking coherently and clearly to peers, teachers, and others.
- e. Science using the language of science to express scientific ideas.
- f. Social Studies developing critical writing skills.
- g. Technology using technology to communicate in all content areas.
- h. Fine Arts developing fluency in language acquisition and personal artistic expression.

2. All students will think critically by:

- a. Language Arts reading, comprehending, and evaluating informational and literary texts.
- b. Language Arts engaging in inquiry to develop new understandings.
- c. Mathematics solving problems that arise in mathematics and in other contexts.
- d. Mathematics developing and evaluating mathematical arguments and proofs.
- e. Science using the scientific method to understand natural phenomenon.
- f. Science forming alternative hypotheses to explain a problem.
- g. Social Studies evaluating events from multiple perspectives.
- h. Technology using inquiry and technological skills to research, expand, apply, and connect knowledge.
- i. Fine Arts analyzing complex issues and making informed decisions.

3. Personal contexts by:

- a. Language Arts recognizing the value of written work and its role in life-long learning.
- b. Language Arts reflecting on their own learning, progress, goals, increasingly technological and complex world.
- c. Science demonstrating awareness of the social and historical aspects of science.
- d. Social Studies exploring personal learning styles and interests to deepen understanding of the social sciences.
- e. Technology demonstrating awareness of the possible abuses of the internet.
- f. Fine Arts connecting with other disciplines through comparing and contrasting own cultural foundations within a broader expression of human diversity, utilizing language and cultural patterns, and recognizing viewpoints of target language and artistic expression, traditions, history, and values.
- g. Mathematics recognizing the value of mathematics.

While some of these indicators can be and are assessed to some degree using traditional assessments such as Utah's UPASS, CRTs, and ACT results, many of them cannot be assessed in this way. In order to asses the students' progress towards the school's DRSLs in aspects not measured by traditional assessment

tools, AMES has students finish a senior project or portfolio. Through this tool, it is possible to more accurately asses such things as a student's ability to communicate effectively using the appropriate content vocabulary, and their ability to integrate and apply their knowledge across a broad array of contexts. While the senior project is a culminating project, the Visiting Team also recognizes that the staff is constantly conducting informal evaluations of student progress toward the various indicators and DRSLs.

d) To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school, and appear evident in the culture of the school?

The AMES mission, beliefs, and DRSLs appear to strongly influence the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school, and are evident throughout the school's culture. First of all, the school diligently recruits and seeks out underrepresented student populations for enrollment in accordance with the school's mission. The school also makes the financial commitment to fund transportation for students who otherwise could not attend—despite not receiving transportation funding. It was evident to the Visiting Team that the AMES leadership and staff go to great lengths to provide the additional needed encouragement and support to students who will be first-generation college attendees. The leadership and staff also provide a great deal of ongoing communication with parents and students regarding student progress. As evidenced by student/teacher interaction witnessed by the Visiting Team, anecdotal evidence from parents and students, and self-reporting from the school leadership and governing board members, the AMES mission and beliefs guide and influence most, if not all, aspects of school and its culture.

Curriculum:

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success?

The AMES staff has worked diligently to clearly define standards for student achievement. Staff members have worked collaboratively to ensure the Core Curriculum is met. Professional development has been specifically targeted to the philosophy and the practice of Utah's Life Skills. Implementation of the Life Skills curriculum is evidenced in the development of the school's DRSLs.

b) To what extent does the curriculum engage **all** students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills?

AMES does an outstanding job of educating all students in its rigorous curriculum. All students are enrolled in Advanced Placement courses in social studies. This exposes all students to college-level expectations.

c) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's DRSLs?

AMES teachers work collaboratively to an exemplary degree. The development of the DRSLs encompasses the mission of the school. The senior portfolio review demonstrates the effective communication, critical thinking and social responsibility skills the teachers teach every child.

d) How does the staff use assessments to drive curriculum to ensure that **all** students can reach the intended learning outcomes?

The AMES teachers have incorporated formal assessments into their curricula with a high degree of effectiveness. They are developing informal assessment to assist them in making adjustments in the delivery of instruction so that all students can reach the intended learning outcomes.

Instruction:

a) To what extent do teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning?

The teachers of AMES bring a wide variety of experience and knowledge to the AMES culture, which reflects in the use of varied instructional strategies and practices—including technology enhancement in mathematics using Smart Boards and graphing utilities, lecture, demonstration, teacher-directed guided practice, and small-group teacher-guided collaborative learning. In addition, teachers use a variety of strategies and classroom routines to involve students actively in reading, writing, and learning many times per week, and provide modeling and guided practice opportunities to assist students in meeting high expectations.

b) To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?

At an AMES weekly professional development meeting in November 2007, teachers and administrators were involved in a survey entitled, "Teacher Priorities: Focus for Instructional Planning." Twenty-two focuses were listed with Likert scale choices of High Priority, Medium Priority and Low Priority.

Writing was listed as the top priority, with 79 percent. Comprehension, intervention for struggling readers, and content reading instruction were all tabulated at 69 percent, while monitoring student progress was ranked at 63 percent, followed by vocabulary at 53 percent. Results from this key survey will be used in the overall AMES School Improvement Plan, with a strong emphasis on desired results for student learning.

c) To what extent is the school's professional development program guided by identified instructional needs, and how does it provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning?

The Visiting Team was pleasantly surprised at the high number of professional development opportunities afforded the staff to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning. The staff meets each Wednesday to develop its understanding about differentiated instruction, reading across the curriculum, enhancing critical thinking, and generally developing efficient and effective research-based instructional strategies. Professional development included a wide variety of titled topics, such as "Brain-based Layered Curriculum," "Differation for Special Ed and At-risk Students," "Talking the Talk," "Understanding CRT Proficiency Level Trends," "3 Tiered Reading," "Assessment as a Tool for Learning," etc.

d) To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?

The administration has taken great pains to hire the most qualified and knowledgeable teachers that are available and desirous of teaching in a unique educational environment. All teachers are indicated as highly qualified, with degrees in the fields they are teaching. Teachers have developed classroom climates that are inclusive and comfortable for all students. AMES's unique partnership with the University of Utah affords a communication and collaborative model that allows teachers access to university faculty and staff regarding curriculum expectations and alignment about common issues for student success. Teachers are afforded opportunities about current research on effective instructional approaches. The AMES leadership offers a very noteworthy professional development program for teachers, in which group and individual reflection about teaching practices are discussed.

e) To what extent does the school effectively implement a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction, and assessments?

AMES came about because Utah's growing economy needed to invite more high school graduates to pursue higher education paths in math, science, engineering and technology. Technology is an obvious high priority at AMES. It is evident

that resources have been used to provide students with state-of-the-art technology labs, well-equipped science labs, and Smart Boards and geometer's sketchpads to enhance mathematics instruction. Students have access to Internet-linked computers for research and simulations. Seniors present their senior projects using PowerPoint and other technology-enhanced means. Students may also take technology-oriented classes, not only at AMES but also at Cottonwood High School and the Salt Lake-Tooele ATC.

Assessment:

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments with performance standards based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

AMES does a good job with its overall assessment program. The school uses multiple strands of data to measure achievement and college readiness, including ACT, UBSCT, and CRT. The 2006-2007 ACT composite score was 23.6 percent, compared to 21.7 percent for Utah and, 21.1 percent for the nation. To further articulate expectations for AMES students, the school recently added the ACT Explorer and ACT Plan for the earlier grades. In 2006-2007, the graduating class had a total of 82 students, and all passed the state basic skills test, the UBSCT.

b) To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?

The AMES leadership and staff evaluate data to improve instructional practice. The staff continuously analyzes existing data, develops formative and summative assessments, and evaluates the students' progress in meeting the school's goals in the action plan.

c) To what extent does the professional staff use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its academic expectations?

AMES strives to meet its academic achievement goals, which pertain to increasing the college readiness of its students. Goals are to increase the number of credits AMES students can earn by taking University of Utah college-level concurrent courses, increase the number of Advanced Placement courses taken by students, increase the number of AP tests taken and passed, and increase the percent of students taking the ACT.

The standardized tests to assess achievement of the school's academic expectations include UBSCT, CRT, IC3, MAP, DWA, UALPA (for ESL students), AP tests, ACT, Explore, and PLAN.

d) To what extent does the school's professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?

A major focus of the AMES professional development efforts is how the staff members can improve curriculum design to meet the changing needs of the students they serve. The AMES leadership provides a strong collaborative effort in working with teachers to know, understand, and use data as a powerful tool. "Beyond UPASS: Linking Formative with Summative Evaluations" is a two-year project funded by the Federal Dissemination Grant and lead by the assistant principal, who has several years of experience in writing assessment rubrics. The project assists teachers to examine multiple dimensions of learners and connect assessments with instructional strategies that promote increased student academic achievement. Resources from the grant were used to hire substitute teachers, thus affording teachers the opportunity to grade the exams as an entire faculty and to achieve professional growth as it applies directly to meaningful assessment strategies to improve student achievement.

e) To what extent is there organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSL?

The AMES community is to be applauded for the DRSLs, which support the unique student population of AMES, of which many will be the first in their families to have a post-secondary educational experience. The school leadership and staff use a variety of assessments, and believe that assessments are relevant and that assessments are not biased but are indeed fair.

However, the teaching staff believes that there are potential areas for growth. Expectations of assessments are not always clearly articulated, and standards of excellence (rigor) are not always upheld regarding assessments.

CHAPTER 3: NAAS SUPPORT STANDARDS

Leadership and Organization:

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?

The AMES leadership is to be commended for the high level of quality instruction and an academic learning environment. The administration's high level of effectiveness is pervasive throughout the school and the community.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?

The members of the school leadership—including the administrators, board, and University of Utah partnership—are to be commended for working together to bring about the evolution of the school. They collectively look at results. They analyze and interpret data to help them make informed decisions. The positive influence of the principal must be sited as a strong contributing factor in the success of the school. He has an important role, as does the assistant principal, who is highly respected by the faculty. They function as an effective team.

c) To what extent does the leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?

AMES is a model of stewardship for articulating the work required for a school that goes from nonexistence to a thriving educational community in five short years. The task was and is enormous. Bringing a rigorous but supportive college-level curriculum to a complex, diverse population of maturing adolescents is much easier said than done. The leadership of AMES paved the way for other startup early college high school charters to follow. Constant focus on the mission has helped the school persevere. The good will the school has created in the community, the partnerships, and the success in college of their graduates is a tribute to work of the school leadership.

d) To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?

As a charter school, AMES is governed by a board of which at least one quarter of the governing members are parents of students in the school. This allows parents to have a direct role in the policymaking and the financing of the school. The school leadership has also started an internship program for all seniors at the school. This brings about a great deal of involvement with different stakeholders in the community as they sponsor interns, provide feedback to the intern program, and become more aware of the AMES programs and students. The school leadership also gives University of Utah instructors a full voice the school decision-making process, which strengthens the school's relationship with the university as well as furthering the school's mission. The AMES administrative staff also provides the faculty and staff with wonderful leadership opportunities within the school and its decision-making process. Overall, comments from parents, students, staff, university partners, and the school's administration all suggest a strong level of opportunity participation by the various stakeholders.

e) To what extent has the school established a formal system through which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?

AMES ensures student support in a couple of different ways. First of all, AMES has two counselors, one of whom is part-time, for a student population of approximately 420 students. This provides for a counselor-student ratio far less than the ratio found in traditional public high schools. According to anecdotal evidence from students and parents, the counseling program is strong and provides support to meet the needs of most, if not all, students. Second, the lunchtime situation at AMES also provides valuable informal opportunities for students to receive support from staff. At AMES, there is no faculty lounge for lunchtime, so teachers eat in their rooms. AMES also has a culture where students are able to eat in the classroom with the teachers, which provides great opportunities capitalized on by the teachers to provide support to students in need. Of course, if AMES had a student population of 2,500 students like many traditional schools, such a practice would likely not be possible.

School Services:

This standard is dealt with in the school's NAAS Annual Report, which requires specific responses and information regarding student support services, guidance services, health services, library information services, special education services, and family and community services.

Facilities and Finances:

This standard is addressed in the school's annual report to NAAS, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

CHAPTER 4: NAAS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

Culture of Continual Improvement:

a) To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using Collaborating for Student Achievement, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?

In developing the AMES six-year plan, the AMES team wrote, "Because our Action Plan is dynamic and always a work-in-progress, we will review our plan

and make adjustments as necessary." It was apparent to the Visiting Team that the AMES leaders and teachers are continuously seeking ways to improve the school while focusing on student learning and achievement.

AMES is committed to the mission of *Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success.* The domains and life skills are incorporated into the professional development for AMES teachers and practiced in the classrooms. The self-study document claims, "AMES is committed in its philosophy and practice to educate the whole child. *Life Skills* is an excellent resource for Utah educators in meeting these ends."

b) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through an aligned and ongoing professional development plan focused on the school's goals for improvement?

AMES professional development is an ongoing, data-driven process of improving teacher quality to ensure high levels of learning for students. Staff professional development happens during weekly meetings, where a wide variety of topics are presented along with the daily needs of the AMES operation. Some of those topics to improve student achievement include REACH multicultural training, differentiated instruction, integrated/thematic curricula, sheltering strategies for ELLs, writing across the curriculum, portfolio- and performance-based assessment, affective and character education strategies, parent/family communication, and integration of technology in the curriculum.

c) To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

The action plan is adequate in addressing the critical needs of the school. AMES has a continuous improvement process that brings about a high level of commitment to its goals.

Student achievement is important to the entire staff, and staff members utilize various strategies to measure student achievement, including core CRT tests, GPA, daily attendance, senior portfolios, private-sector evaluations of internship experiences, parent evaluations, student self-assessments, etc.

d) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The self-study revealed that, each year, the AMES staff analyzes end-of-year test scores and other assessment data. This allows faculty members to fine tune their curriculum alignment for the coming year. The process is an essential part of the AMES' continuous improvement cycle, providing direction for many aspects of the school, including professional development, technical assistance, instructional

programs, allocation of resources, and other programs aimed at overall student achievement.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

The faculty meets twice a week to coordinate curricula, discuss student progress, and share teaching strategies, assessments, and school programs. The staff is an integral part of the decision-making process at AMES. The Visiting Team was impressed with the interaction of staff and students. An environment of mutual respect and acceptance was evident. Another strength of the school is the community that has been built among the staff and families of the school. Parents and students interviewed described teachers and staff as very approachable and caring.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

AMES enjoys a very positive and productive partnership with the University of Utah. Over one-fourth of AMES students are enrolled in university classes taught on the AMES campus by university instructors and professors. In addition to classes, the University of Utah sponsors several programs for AMES students, including an Honors Program for seniors, Ethnic Studies, LEAP Project Sponsorship, internships in the community to enhance the senior project, etc.

Community partnerships are one of the strengths at AMES. Partnerships include, but are not limited to, Jobs for the Future, Future Doctors, Science Olympiad, ITT Robotics, Coalition of Minorities Advisory Committee (CMAC) and MESA.

c) To what extent has the school engaged the school community in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

Every effort is made to ensure that the activities and services of AMES are the product of a collaborative effort. AMES has a very active PTSO, which serves the school in a variety of ways. The PTSO participates in a Parent Climate Conference during which 20 parents make classroom observations throughout an entire school day. The surveys from the observations provide important feedback to the faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees. The Visiting Team was impressed with the active presence of students, parents, board members, and staff during the accreditation site visit.

d) How are results of school improvement identified, documented, used, and communicated to **all** stakeholders?

AMES publishes a newsletter that includes a school calendar, reviews of events, responses to current events, articles by and for students, news of student achievement and honors, etc.

Students and parents have e-mail access to teachers and staff. Through a comprehensive AMES website, students, parents and the public can access applications, school information, calendar, partners, etc. Students and parents can access SIS for student grades, assignments, attendance, etc.

AMES hosts an annual meeting each spring to report the school's status and progress to the Trustees, parents, faculty, students and financial supporters. Students have the opportunity to host tours of the school and demonstrate their own projects at this time.

The Visiting Team observed a need for adding roles for board members, parents, and students to better facilitate the implementation of the action plan.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the members of the AMES staff as they demonstrate an exemplary level of care and concern for the students, and support them in developing a love for learning while creating high levels of achievement the expectation of all students, even to the point of teachers making personal sacrifices to meet the needs of students.
- The Visiting Team commends the AMES staff, as it appears to have internalized the self-study process and made it a part of the school's every day practice.
- The Visiting Team commends the school's leadership team and staff for constantly evolving their plan, procedures, and vision for the future to meet the current demands and needs of their students. Formative and summative assessments are used wisely in leading the plan.
- The Visiting Team commends AMES's efforts, through AP curricula, university courses, and quality instruction, to provide and make a rigorous curriculum accessible and relevant to all students.
- The Visiting Team commends how the school demonstrates an inspirational commitment to recruiting and serving a much underserved population. Many of

the students are the first members of their families to have a post-secondary educational experience.

- The Visiting Team commends the depth of the faculty and staff leadership, which is a great strength to the school and its future.
- The Visiting Team commends that the DRSLs have become a powerful guiding factor in the school's curriculum, as evidenced by the senior project and the teacher disclosure statement. (However, the DRSLs could be more in line with the school's beliefs.)
- The Visiting Team commends AMES for the excellent relationship between the school's administration, governing board, and their partnership with the University of Utah.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration, faculty, staff and students for the climate and culture of acceptance created at AMES.
- The Visiting Team commends AMES for the school's varied professional development efforts, which are driven by student needs.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that AMES continue to develop and implement strategies and action plans to improve students' reading achievement.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school more clearly articulate and align teacher expectations for assessments among the faculty, while using multiple assessments and data to improve instructional practice.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school as a whole (i.e., grade levels, the senior project, faculty members, content areas, etc.) would benefit from more formal cross-curricular discussions to better align efforts and expectations while meeting student needs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that low-achieving students be analyzed with more focused and pertinent assessment data in order to better understand and meet their needs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the DRSLs be aligned more closely with the belief statements in an effort to strengthen the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school's leadership could benefit immensely by diligently pursuing the acquisition of additional office space for administrative purposes to better meet the sometimes sensitive and private needs of students, staff, faculty, and parents.