

# American Fork High School 510 North 600 East American Fork, Utah 84003

**November 1-2, 2006** 





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

# American Fork High School 510 North 600 East American Fork, Utah 84003

November 1-2, 2006

#### **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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Salt Lake City, Utah

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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, November 1-2, 2006, 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 American Fork High School 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 Carolyn Merrill is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at American Fork High School, 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 American Fork High School.

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

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Robert Smith	

# AMERICAN FORK HIGH SCHOOL

# **ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

# **School Administration**

Chad L. Wilson	Principal Assistant Principal Assistant Principal				
Jeff E. Schoonover					
Counseling					
Vicki Davis					
Bruce Hoggard					
Sandra Johnston	Counselor				
Doug Meacham					
Support Staff					
Monica Budge	ESL Track				
	Student Financial Secretary				
	Registrar				
	Special Education Para-educator				
	Special Education Para-educator				
C	Tracker				
	Special Education Para-educator				
	Financial Secretary				
	Administrative Secretary				
	Receptionist				
-					
S	Book Depository, Parking Attendant, Assistant Computer Tech				
$\varepsilon$	Track				
	Special Education Para-educator				
Patty Smith					
Lani Snow	Special Education Secretary				
Kerrilyn Southard					
	Tracker				
Dawn Wright	Special Education Para-educator				

Gary Rackman	Head Custodian
Quin Evans	
Alex Hewlett	
Craig Jonsson	
Wesley Johnson	
Kevin Myers	
Thomas Reay	Custodian
Irene Wayman	

# **Faculty**

Christian Adkinson Jay Allen Lynn Andersen Nicole Andersen Jacob Anderson Joseph Atwood Becky Bailey Don Bastian Sam Beeson Marisa Bellini Kristi Belliston Elsie Bird Jennifer Bjornstad Kenley Brown Steve Brown Karen Burningham Russel Caldwell Tara Carlson Brenda Casper Holly Clayton Kathy Coletti Lisa Collier Janice Comer-Miller Raquel Cook Curtis Craig Nolan Devor Matthew Dietz

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Mike Mower Rebecca Murdock Christine Nehrer Darla Nelson Brenda Norris Wynter Ogilvie Michelle Ormond Geary Page Chad Seely Shelley Selytina Leilani Sheen Laurel Shelley Shauna Smith Auraleen Sprecken Julie Ssejinja Randy Stoddard Jolene Succo Art Taylor Tracy Warby Mary Westover Larkin Weyand Joshua Whiteley Wendy Wilson Roland Woodland Lynne Yocom

# **AMERICAN FORK HIGH SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

At American Fork High School, learning provides inspiration, shapes values, and empowers individuals. Students will be critical thinkers, responsible citizens, and effective communicators.

# **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

(Belief statements were not developed for the self-study.)

# MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Paul O. Hansen, Olympus High School, Granite School District, Visiting Team Co-Chairperson

Christine Huley, Granite School District, Visiting Team Co-Chairperson

Kathy Clark, Skyline High School, Granite School District

Roberto Jimenez, Midvale Middle School, Jordan School District

Michele Kersey, Roy High School, Davis School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

#### AMERICAN FORK HIGH SCHOOL

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

American Fork High School has a total population of 1,681 students who reside in American Fork, Cedar Hills, Highland, Alpine, and Pleasant Grove. Thirty-one percent of the students receive free and reduced-price lunch benefits. The school has experienced an effective and successful transition with a new administrative team for the past two years. Reading and writing skills are a major concern for student achievement, and the faculty and staff are requiring students to demonstrate mastery of concepts and skills before moving into more advanced courses.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The American Fork High School profile revealed that a strong sense of history and tradition exists. There has also been a significant improvement in student daily attendance. The Visiting Team noticed an absence of a detailed analysis of student demographics and performance, which affected the degree to which it could be determined who was learning and who was not learning.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team recommends the student demographic section be further developed. The CRT data also need to be disaggregated by proficiency level, ethnicity, and special education status. In addition, information about student achievement that compares the school with district and state should be included. School data on student performance by grade level is needed. Finally, organizing the profile into categories such as community information, demographic information, and student performance information would be helpful.

# **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

 The Visiting Team suggests that the school continue to study data by more closely by analyzing and disaggregating student performance with state standardized testing and school assessment tools.

#### **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

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

The Visiting Team found evidence of an attempt to engage parents, students, and teachers the self-study process. For instance, various departments initiated their own surveys in an effort to obtain meaningful data from students and, in some cases, parents. Their perceptions were reflected in their self-report. While the intent of the surveys and focus groups was to obtain data, the lack of clearly identified rubrics to help in the evaluation of data and school-wide improvement left the school with a somewhat fragmented and incomplete view of school-wide effectiveness. The Visiting Team recommends that American Fork use the NSSE survey to gain a perspective of students', teachers', and parents' views of school effectiveness. This data can be used in formulating further action plans and goals for student improvement.

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

The Visiting Team found that the self-study that was presented contained old and out-of-date information, and that the school's current strengths, while emerging, were more significant that the self-study indicated. The self-study report contained information generated during the 2004-2005 school year, reflecting data from 2003-2004. The Visiting Team found, through interviews with department heads and focus group leadership, that there has been significant progress in working toward school improvement. The Visiting Team also found there was a lack of clearly disaggregated data in the self-report. The Visiting Team recommends that American Fork High School and its stakeholders continue to collect and study data to better identify who is learning and who is not learning, and why.

# CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

American Fork High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

- 1. Critical Thinkers
- 2. Responsible Citizens
- 3. Effective Communicators

## **Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:**

- a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?
  - American Fork High School made a concerted effort to bring stakeholders together to revisit the mission and develop the desired results for student learning. There were opportunities for the parents and students and staff to give voice to these documents. The beliefs about student learning were not developed.
- b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?
  - Belief statements were not developed in this process.
- c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?
  - American Fork High School's mission statement is closely tied to its DRSLs. In January 2005 the school began the process of trying to answer the following question: What essential qualities and skills will allow our students to graduate and serve them best beyond graduation? This question emerged as a result of the process of reviewing the mission statement and current data regarding student learning.

#### **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

The new Monday "early out" time for faculty to collaborate is a tremendous opportunity for the American Fork learning community to focus on refining and strengthening the school's curriculum. Work has begun, as evidenced by a focus in the English Department on coming to a consensus on the skills to be taught in the different grade levels, and their common work on grammar tests for the tenth and eleventh grades. The Math Department has created common semester assessments for their classes, and focuses on mentoring new teachers to the department to help with both horizontal and vertical articulation. Now that the staff has worked through the accreditation process, teachers are requesting that the "early out" time be utilized for curriculum development.

The staff expressed a desire to have teachers of similar classes coordinate curricula so that the same concepts will be covered in all sections of that class.

This coordination would also allow and encourage sharing strategies of how to best teach these concepts. Teachers also request time to allow inter and intra collaboration. This process will help with vertical articulation and a seamless curriculum.

As improved data emerges, curriculum teams need to closely analyze and clarify the disaggregated data to learn who is learning and who needs more help learning. With this knowledge, modifications in the curriculum can be made. For example, the staff is already calling for increased learning time and/or classes for those students who score low on CRTs, the DRP, and the UBSCT.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning

According to American Fork's action plan, departmental teams will be formulating individual department rubrics that focus on reading and writing. These rubrics are scheduled to be implemented in 2007- 2008 school year. The Visiting Team applauds the school's focus on reading and writing skills, and strongly suggests that data for a baseline report be gathered this year for comparison with future data on reading and writing skills.

In classroom visits, evidence of integrating the DRSLs was somewhat evident. Critical thinking skills were taught in some science, English, and history classes, but the focus in other classes still centered on lower-level skills, such as fill-in-the-blank, true/false, multiple-choice, and "one right response" questions. Responsible citizenship is stressed in the new attendance policy and in the English classes' community service component. Driver education classes certainly focused on responsible citizenship. The Curriculum Focus group suggests, and the Visiting Team agrees, that teachers in every discipline should have graded writing requirements in all classes.

### **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

The Visiting Team observed a wide variety of instructional strategies. It appeared that the appropriate strategies are in place, depending on the area of instruction. Hands-on activities, small group work, discussion and inquiry, scaffolding, teacher-led instruction, positive reinforcement, laboratory experiences, and student presentations were observed. The activities and instructions observed were in the context of excellent teaching. It is also evident that the design and selection of instructional strategies and learning is aligned with the curriculum goals, including the State Core Curriculum. The Visiting Team observed the

experienced, well qualified faculty to be dedicated, hardworking, and committed to student success at American Fork High School.

Department chairs stated that they meet on a regular basis to coordinate curricular and activities within their departments. Emergence of cross-curricular development is evident among some departments, and should continue across all curriculum areas to provide students with an integrated learning experience.

The Visiting Team encourages teachers to develop methods that challenge students in all classes, using a hierarchy of higher level thinking skills and Bloom's Taxonomy to improve the critical thinking skills of students.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

The Visiting Team commends the staff members for their high degree of expertise and dedication to quality teaching. The instructional strategies used by teachers have resulted in quality learning for students. The accelerated learners are obviously challenged.

The Visiting Team commends the efforts of the staff to employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure that the needs of different learners are met at American Fork High School. The results of assessments of student learning are partially reviewed and implemented, and lead to adjustments or modification of the instructional process to help students improve their learning. Geometry and Algebra I classes are co-taught to provide students with assistance to strengthen their knowledge of core concepts. BSCT and ACT preparation classes help students improve and strengthen their learning.

Students are provided on a consistent basis with a variety of opportunities to receive additional assistance to improve their learning. Teachers are in their classrooms before and after school to provide extra help in each curriculum area. Classroom aides, peer tutors, cooperative learning groups, and instructional resources are provided to improve student achievement and learning.

The Visiting Team recommends further inquiry and analysis of disaggregated data to improve student learning and achievement.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

The Visiting Team commends American Fork High School for its willingness of the faculty to provide additional opportunities that support student learning. Many students felt that teachers were available and willing to assist on a one-on-one basis throughout the day. Interviews with students indicated that their teachers have established a rapport and genuine concern for student learning. The Visiting

Team recommends that the staff continue to provide additional opportunities for all students to succeed.

# **Quality Assessment Systems:**

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

Based on the survey results given by the Assessment Focus Group, a majority of teachers explain and model correct methods on upcoming assessments. The Visiting Team recommends that all teachers be very clear about the type of achievement to be assessed and the performance standards for evaluating the level of the quality of students' achievement.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

According to the Assessment Focus Group, there is a need for some more teacher training focused on analyzing both classroom assessments and standardized assessments to improve methods to effectively measure what is taught. Also, there is a need for training on multiple assessment techniques based upon the type of learning to be assessed and the type of learners to be assessed.

Many teachers are creating Student Learning Files as a means for students to reflect on their assessment results. The Visiting Team commends American Fork High for having students process and reflect upon their learning and be responsible for learning outcomes.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

According to survey results, the majority of students and teachers believe that assessment at American Fork High is given and graded in an unbiased and equitable manner. The Visiting Team believes that, as teachers are trained in creating better and more varied forms of assessment and there is more focus on using rubrics for assessing achievement, even more students will be able to effectively exhibit their learning. This will be even more equitable and fair.

#### **Leadership for School Improvement:**

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

The Visiting Team believes that important steps have been taken toward a more academic focus in all school areas. The English Department has placed an emphasis on the reading and writing process, and it is a major area emphasis of the school goals. Students are required in their sophomore year to spend a great deal of time studying English grammar. However, the school leadership team should be careful to consider not only the needs of struggling students, but also of those who have already achieved a higher level of proficiency.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision-making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The school leadership team has initiated a process of self-evaluation of the organizational and instructional effectiveness of the school with regard to the desired results for student learning.

The profile needs to better reflect the individual populations of students in the school by further disaggregating available data. Decisions need to be made regarding which data is the most useful for understanding the organizational and instructional needs of American Fork High School.

The collection of data must be done by using both formal and informal observation tools. Many times we overlook the value of teacher observations in the classroom of indicators such as the number of students on task, the number of higher-order questions used in a given lesson, or the use of operational objectives in the classroom to guide the teaching and learning experience.

There is still a need to more frequently and effectively share data among departments and individual teachers. This will improve collegiality among faculty members and facilitate a more informed decision-making process for student achievement.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

The Visiting Team believes that the administration has taken initial steps to monitor student achievement. However, there is a need to have a set of common rubrics and common assessment tools that would facilitate the self-study process. An effective method to do this is to adopt and implement the NSSE benchmarks, protocols, rubrics, and assessment tools to have a sharper view of the teaching and learning process. The faculty is able to dedicate time to the continuous reflection of the school improvement process by having an early out day every Monday of the school year. When the faculty and staff can spend time together looking at data, measuring progress, and adapting instructional and organizational practices to the needs of the students, student learning occurs.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The students, parents, faculty, and staff of American Fork High School agree that the new administration has been able to foster a more positive atmosphere conducive to a more safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

The administrative team is working on a balance between the stakeholders who drive the school improvement process and the administration to provide strong leadership, a sense of direction, security, and clear expectations.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

The new administration has made an effort to allocate resources to the most critical areas of need, such as technology, providing mobile computer labs, and LCD projectors for the classrooms. The Visiting Team observed the prompt response of the administration to requests from students, patrons, and faculty members to improve the allocation of resources. Students will have access to a writing lab in the career center that will be open daily until four o'clock.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

The school leadership team has become more proactive in encouraging all stakeholders to be part of a unified effort to improve student achievement.

Inviting the different stakeholders to be involved in a discussion of instructional and organizational effectiveness at American Fork High School will provide additional opportunities for stakeholders to gain ownership of the student learning process.

### **Community Building:**

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

The Visiting Team has found that American Fork High School has made great strides in developing a collaborative process of ongoing school improvement. The early out days, which are supported by the Alpine Board of Education, have been very valuable in allowing time for collaborative community building. Parents noted that they would like more opportunities to be involved in the school. The

Visiting Team recommends that American Fork High School continue to look for ways to provide meaningful collaboration among teachers, students, and parents.

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

The school is organized into departments. Departmental meetings are held regularly and allow time for teachers to discuss items of business pertinent to the individual departments. There are many opportunities for students who are not successful to take advantage of after school tutoring and individual assessment. The Visiting Team suggests that school-wide rubrics and articulated school-wide belief statements may provide a more congruent effort aimed at overall school improvement and enhanced student learning.

# **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

The administration and teachers have begun to use the early out time for professional learning. They are looking more deeply at student data to determine the learning needs of the students, which will affect the type of professional learning the staff needs. Currently the staff is focusing on aligning the curriculum so that gaps and repetitions in the curriculum can be identified. The result of this effort will ensure that students are prepared for the next grade level. In addition, departments are beginning to integrate the disciplines so students experience relevancy in their studies.

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

The administrative team is very supportive of the work and expertise of the teaching staff. They have provided time for authentic collaboration around student learning and use data to drive the programs and professional learning of the school community. The administrative team, teachers, and staff are dedicated and committed to the learning needs of all students.

# CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

#### Standard I – Educational Program

This standard is met. American Fork High School's instructional and organizational practices, as well as its policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning and prepare students to succeed in a culturally diverse, democratic society.

#### Standard II - Student Personnel Services

This standard is not met. Student personnel services are designed to give systematic assistance to students. The assigned personnel for guidance exceeds the minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students enrolled. The student-to-counselor ratio at American Fork High School is 421:1.

# Standard III - School Plant and Equipment

This standard is met. The school plant provides for a variety of instructional activities and programs and incorporates aesthetic features that contribute to a positive educational atmosphere.

### Standard IV – Library Media Program

This standard is met. The school library media program is a primary resource for literacy, information, and curriculum support. A certified library media teacher provides instruction, resources, and activities to promote independent use of ideas and information.

## Standard V - Records

This standard is met. Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interests of students and parents. Students and parents have the right to access personal student records and are ensured the privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation.

### Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)

This standard is met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school.

## Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel

This standard is mostly met. Of the professional personnel, six educators are not in compliance with the licensing requirements of the state of Utah and are teaching on letters of authorization for the subjects they are assigned.

#### Standard VIII - Administration

This standard is met. The administration of American Fork High School provides educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out the necessary administrative procedures.

#### Standard IX - Teacher Load

This standard is mostly met. Six teachers exceed number of students assigned in any one grading period set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or Northwest.

#### Standard X – Activities

This standard is met. American Fork High School supports a range of activities that supplement the basic instructional program by providing additional experiences and opportunities for learning to take place.

## Standard XI – Business Practices

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for all school funds. The school's advertising and promotional literature are completely truthful and ethical.

## **CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN**

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

The action plan addresses the critical needs of the students at American Fork High School. These include literacy, technology, and student responsibility. The plan is specific and clear about the action steps, resources, and who will carry out the implementation of the work.

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

The faculty and staff are committed to carrying out the action plan. These are areas that have been a concern for the students, and there is buy-in to work on these areas. The staff realizes that the self-study is the beginning of the process to implement the plan. The plan will be present in the work of the school and parents and students will be informed of the progress the school is making.

c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

The leadership of the school has demonstrated a commitment to work on the school-wide plan and implement the NSSE survey to gather perceptual data from students, parents, and staff members as they proceed with implementing the action plan. They are committed to further disaggregate student data and make adjustments to the plan as needed.

# CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

# **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the staff for the apparent enjoyment they experience with one another and the pleasure they demonstrate in coming to work
- The Visiting Team commends the students, who were well behaved and exhibited a sense of belonging to the school. Students feel that the school is a safe learning place
- The Visiting Team commends the administration for an environment of support for teachers and students and a timely response to the needs of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends the culture of school improvement. There is evidence of a determined effort to enhance school effectiveness in a culture of continuous school improvement.
- The Visiting Team commends American Fork High School's commitment to its long tradition and its strong sense of community spirit and support.
- The Visiting Team commends the attention to the building and grounds. The physical facilities are well maintained and reflect the traditions and historical achievements of American Fork High School.

• The Visiting Team commends American Fork High School for making significant improvement in daily student attendance.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that American Fork use the NSSE survey to gain a perspective on student, teacher, and parent views of school effectiveness.
- The Visiting Team recommends that American Fork High School and its stakeholders continue to collect and study data to better identify who is and is not learning, and why.
- The Visiting Team recommends that stakeholders articulate and develop a strong, driving set of belief statements.
- The school administration needs to guide the school's self-improvement process through empowerment and facilitation to ensure continuity and congruence with the rubrics established by the NSSE.
- The counseling center needs to provide both leadership and support in the disaggregation of school data related to student achievement.
- The Counseling Department needs to be represented in the departmental self-study report.
- The Visiting Team recommends that all teachers be accountable to the new attendance policy that is resulting in improvement in daily student attendance.
- The Visiting Team recommends that American Fork High School continue to identify ways in which parents can be meaningfully involved in the school.
- The Visiting Team recommends that American Fork High School continue to stress rigor and relevance and promote effective student engagement in the learning process.