The Report of the Accreditation Visiting Team

# Kearns Junior High School 4040 West 5305 South Kearns, Utah 84118

November 17-18, 2009



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

# Kearns Junior High School 4040 West 5305 South Kearns, Utah 84118

November 17-18, 2009

## **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

## DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Brenda Hales, Associate Superintendent

Lynne Greenwood, Director Curriculum and Instruction

Gerolynn Hargrove, Coordinator Curriculum and Instruction

Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist Curriculum and Instruction

Salt Lake City, Utah

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#### **FOREWORD**

The purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase the quality of instruction and 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 in a three-step 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 17-18, 2009, 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 Kearns Junior 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 Kandace Barber is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Kearns Junior High School and for their professional attitude, which made it possible for them to see weaknesses and strengths and to suggest procedures for 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 most 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 Kearns Junior High School.

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Meghan Holbrook\*

775 North Hilltop Road Salt Lake City, UT 84103 Phone: (801) 539-0622 Rosanita Cespedes\*

1470 S 400 E Salt Lake City, UT 84115 Phone: (801) 466-7371 Charlene Lui\*\*
766 N 900 W
Orem, UT 84057
Phone: (801)230-5109

Douglas J. Holmes\*\*\*

274 ½ 25<sup>th</sup> Street Ogden UT 84401 Phone: (801) 479-8163 **Larry K Shumway** Executive Officer

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## **KEARNS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

# **ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

# **School Administration**

Kandace Barber	Principal
Mark Ellermeier	Vice Principal
Terry Mckeown	Vice Principal

# **Counseling**

Karen Gunderson	Counselor
Tina Ploch	Counselor
Corianne Reynolds	Counselor

# **Support Staff**

Name Name

## **Faculty**

Toni Blattman	Jennifer Kellis	John Peterson
Rebecca Campbell	Brandon Kerby	Yevgeny Pevzner
Laura Chisholm	Catherine Lauterboarn	Valerie Reynolds
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Jerry Croasmun	Shirley Lems	Lisa Seipert
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John Hanncock	Susie Myers	Kami Willis
Amanda Hurd	Bonnie O'Brien	

#### KEARNS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

#### "SUCCESS IS OUR ONLY OPTION"

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

Our mission is to encourage and support students to become effective communicators, responsible citizens, and lifelong learners.

#### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

#### We believe that...

- A safe and physically comfortable environment promotes student learning.
- Teachers, administrators, students, parents, and the community share responsibility for advancing our educational mission.
- Students need to not only demonstrate their understanding of essential knowledge and skills, but also need to be actively involved in solving problems and producing quality work.
- Exceptional students (e.g. special education, limited English proficient, gifted and talented, etc.) require special services and resources.
- Student learning is the chief priority for the Kearns Junior High community.

#### DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

#### **Critical Thinker Effective Communicator** Students will generate new and creative Students will be able to read and comprehend on grade level. Students will acquire, organize, and Students will actively listen, respond, evaluate information to make informed appropriately, and acknowledge the ideas decisions. of others. Students will apply multiple strategies to Students will communicate through oral, solve problems. written, and technological means. Responsible Citizen **Lifelong Learner** Students will set priorities and achievable Students will respect themselves and the diversity of all people. Students will follow class and school rules Students will recognize, understand, and produce quality work. and take responsibility for their actions. Students will demonstrate self control, Students will use inquiry and technological skills to research and connect knowledge. moral behavior, ethical behavior and act with integrity

Date of visit: November 17-18, 2009

# MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Lori Gardner, Park City School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Catherine Davies, Mount Logan Middle School, Logan City School District

Valerie Dimas, Mueller Park Junior High School, Davis School District

Barbara Springer, Timberline Middle School, Alpine School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

#### **KEARNS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

Kearns Junior High School is a large suburban junior high school located in Kearns, Utah, serving students for seventh to ninth grade. The enrollment is 820 with an ethnically diverse student body: 51.9 percent Caucasian, 37.5 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Pacific Islander, 2.9 percent African American, 1.7 percent Asian, and 2 percent Native American. Kearns Junior High has seen a decline in enrollment over the past several years, from an enrollment of 1,020 students in 2003 to the current enrollment of 820 students. This decline is due to a realignment of school boundaries.

Kearns Junior High opened as a junior high in 1956. The building had originally been a theater remodeled to serve as an elementary school, and then remodeled again (with an addition constructed) for use as a junior high school. The school was again remodeled in 1960. Consequently, many limitations exist within the building. The physical layout of the building is not conductive to grade-level teaming or for many hands-on learning activities, creating many challenges to be overcome.

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

Kearns Junior High School has been using data to drive decision-making for the past five years. The school has focused on student achievement and has disaggregated data to determine who is learning and who is not. Individual teachers, working in department and grade level configurations, regularly review student achievement data. Teachers and administrators review grades and attendance and behavioral data, and conduct progress monitoring from a variety of computer-based programs and work completion. The result of this intensive effort to focus on student achievement is the significant gains made in language arts and science as measured by the CRTs. It is clear that the faculty can clearly identify who struggling students may be and the issues they face.

*What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?* 

While the Visiting Team commends the school for its use of data to drive instruction, the school profile needs to provide disaggregated data to more clearly inform stakeholders of the academic progress of students based on subgroup information. The profile mentions the academic achievement of Hispanic students in math and language arts; but there is no comparison between subgroup performance provided. Also, there is no information regarding ITBS scores, U-PASS, or AYP provided. As that information has an impact on the school's performance, it is important that it be provided as part of the profile.

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

Overall, the school's self-study accurately reflects the school's strengths, especially with regard to the extent to which the school community has forged itself to focus on the success of students. Department and focus group reports provide a comprehensive view of the many programs and practices implemented in the last six years. The demographic and profile data needs to be expanded to provide a historical perspective of demographic changes and to more fully inform stakeholders about student and school achievement.

## **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The school profile data should be expanded to include ITBS data along with data regarding the success of interventions such as computerized remediation and assessment programs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that as the "A, B, C, I Program" becomes institutionalized, consideration be given as to how to assess student understanding of core concepts in areas which are not subject to state testing.

# 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?
  - Teachers and administrators were deeply involved in revising the school's beliefs, mission and goals. Each of these was presented to the faculty for comment, revised, and then presented again. This process was repeated until consensus was reached. The final product was then presented to the PTSA and Community Council for their approval.
- b) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?
  - Kearns Junior High mission statement is a compilation of three of its four DRSLs. The motto "Success is our only option" further strengthens the schools lifelong mission of success for each of the school's students. The mission statement and motto describe the purpose and direction for the school and act as a call to action.

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

The "Effective Communicator" DRSL is currently being addressed in depth by the faculty at Kearns Junior High. They have been trained in the Six Traits of Writing and incorporated writing across the curriculum to further the students' skills in communicating through writing. Further instruction with written language is being done with My Access. Student access to computers, movie making, and digital photography are also providing skill in communicating with technological means.

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 school motto "Success is our only option" is the driving force behind the change to a block schedule and the ABC-I option. Trainings and programs are all focused directly and undeviatingly on this chosen belief. As a result, the decisions of the school are geared adamantly toward this end. There is great buy-in—not just by the teachers and administration, but also by the parents and students—to do what it takes to help each student reach his/her individual best. The underlying theme to what happens at Kearns Junior is, "How will this further our goal of success for every child?" This is the culture, expectation and belief for each student here.

## **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?

Kearns Junior High's curriculum development is a work in progress. The Utah Core is definitely the driving force in establishing alignment with Core standards. While some departments have established re-teaching activities, others are still immersed in the notion that merely distributing summary packets of missed or failed work is acceptable. The latter group has difficulty embracing the concept of the ABC-I program, which has been instituted to eliminate Ds and Fs.

The Professional Learning Community philosophy, in which teachers are asked to focus on Essential Questions, is predominantly supported by newer staff members, although many veterans have indicated that "best practices" in curriculum development never really change, so they have accepted the ABC-I Program with cautious optimism. Individual departments seem to address curriculum with varying degrees of buy-in. Those whose leadership reflects the school's motto, "Success is our only option," are establishing alignment to Core standards while effectively developing re-teaching strategies. Other departments face the challenge of dealing with some professionals whose continued agenda accepts the grading format, but who refuse to develop strategies to re-teach missed concepts. Instead, they give their struggling students and/or

"intentional non-learners" make-up packets that are a composite of worksheets. Documentation has not emerged that would represent a "collective vision" that will eventually determine whether curriculum and subsequent instruction are transcending individual courses and departments.

To reiterate, curriculum development is a work in progress, but the positive climate for student success can be neither ignored nor dismissed. This school has shown great courage in not only seeking to align with the Utah Core, but also to build a culture of educational excellence among the students, parents, and school community.

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

Kearns Junior High has provided a rich tapestry of opportunities in which students engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills. One of the most profoundly engaging and successful additions to regular curriculum is the GTI (Granite Technical Institute), where students are allowed to obtain certificates of achievement in science. Not only were students excited about what they have learned at Wheeler Farm, but parents expressed tremendous gratitude for their sons/daughters' new exposure and positive response to GTI curriculum.

In addition, the school has implemented the Colors Program in order to challenge the thinking of students who may be interested in or feel pressure to explore gang-related activity. Another impressive display of problem-solving challenges for students was in the Science Department, where one teacher ordered GPS units for her students, put the units in toy dinosaurs, and threw them into the courtyard for identification and observation. This resulted in Kearns Junior High taking second place in the district's "Amazing Race" competition, which was an unexpected but well-deserved honor for her students.

One of the classroom management skills that effectively focuses students on instruction is the "5-4-3-2-1, eyes on me" technique used successfully by many teachers as they begin their lesson plans for the period. While some have not yet mastered the technique, the Visiting Team was impressed with those students who not only responded instantly but knew that it was time for them to actively engage in thinking skills.

Over the course of the visit, concern was expressed by some teachers and parents that more time is spent with students whose performance is below average than in challenging those students who are advanced, gifted, or in honors programs. The Visiting Team recommends that the needs of all students be addressed equally.

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

The DRSLs at Kearns Junior High include an ongoing commitment to make each an integral part of the students' understanding of applying education to their lives. The

Visiting Team realizes the faculty and staff have made tremendous progress in reevaluating the necessity of revamping their previous DRSLs in favor of new, more relevant desired results for student learning. The new DRSLs are posted, and many are discussing their merits during Teacher Advisory after initial exposure during the school's establishment of focus groups and departmental analyses. This emphasis will continue and, as each program is developed, more opportunities will emerge for teachers to link instruction to the daily lives of themselves and their students. The DRSLs are Critical Thinker, Effective Communicator, Lifelong Learner, and Responsible Citizen. Programs that lend themselves to application are being strengthened, and more student focus is apparent.

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

The staff is currently working toward standardizing common assessments by department to ensure that all students understand what is expected of each during re-teaching opportunities. This will be necessary, of course, in order to develop mastery tests that are linked to the Core Curriculum. In addition, some new teachers expressed concern that there were not adequate mentors in some departments, nor common assessments to which they could attach their re-teaching strategies. This means that some teachers feel pressured to produce documentation about what they're doing to make sure students who are not doing well understand concepts, without feeling the camaraderie of sharing that responsibility among department members. The balance that Kearns Junior is striving to attain will take time and much more communication among participants. The validation of each staff member's contribution is in place, but needs more collegial support.

## **Instruction:**

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

The Visiting Team observed teachers throughout the school implementing a variety of teaching tools to present their lessons in engaging ways. The use of mounted projectors, overhead projectors, document cameras, whiteboards, videos (both commercially and personally prepared), clickers and audio enhancement were liberally used to further reach and teach the students. The Visiting Team also observed teacher modeling, lab work in science and FACS along with multiple computer labs being used for assessment, teaching and re-teaching. The team also observed student presentations and group work. The use of Success Maker allows students to work at their own pace and master skills in which they are deficient.

Many classes begin with the day's objective posted on the board, a warm up, and a review of previous lessons before instruction of the day's topic. Teachers provided instruction and background knowledge before students began independent work. Several

classes were conscientious in providing a variety of activities during the block period to provide optimal learning opportunities and prevent distraction.

Student-teacher interactions were positive and supportive, with a genuine feeling of caring and motivation on both parts to succeed. Students were observed actively engaged in direct instruction activities, review games, lab experiences and computer work. The questioning and learning skills taught in the AVID program are currently being implemented in classes around the school.

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?

Advisory period is held four times a week. Monday is used to check grades and remediate as needed. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are used for teaching social skills, life skills, the DRSLs and school specific topics. Kearns Junior High has developed a "Positive Behavior Support Matrix" to identify specific behavior expectations in various locations around the school. The behavior matrix explains appropriate behavior skills related to the DRSLs, though they are not visibly linked. Teachers stated that they may refer to the DRSLs in the course of their lessons at times.

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?

Kearns Junior High makes its decisions based on current data and the middle school philosophy that education should be developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering and equitably provided. The ABC-I program has provided students with multiple opportunities for success, and is teaching further responsibility for their work and actions. Four years ago, when the ABC-I program and the block schedule were implemented, there was also a major turnover in the faculty. Since that time there have been multiple opportunities for teachers to attend a variety of conferences and trainings to further learn best teaching practices. The administration provides and supports teachers in these efforts to learn and implement programs to better reach each student.

Departments work together to define "walk-aways" and to develop common assessments. Students are held accountable for their learning and provided with multiple avenues to exhibit competency. Teachers continue to explore new methods and teaching strategies that will enable all students to succeed.

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 teachers at Kearns Junior High are all teaching within their certified areas. Ongoing in-service on best practices assures that all teachers are trained in the areas that the data has identified as needed to best meet the needs of these students. With the implementation of the ABC-I program teachers have worked hard to identify their own

walk-aways. The walk-aways ensure that each student is learning the standards as identified by the USOE, and as such are prepared to move onto the next level. When a student receives an "I," the teachers work to identify new ways to re-teach the material. This also serves to motivate many teachers to re-visit their first method and consider new and innovative ways to present the material so as to avoid the need for remediation later.

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

Kearns Junior High has 10 computer labs available for students to regularly access. Several classes have labs specifically for their use, such as science, Resource, CTE and ESL. Other labs around the building are scheduled and used regularly by departments and individual classes. The majority of students said they use a computer on a daily basis. The administration has worked diligently and creatively to provide teachers and students with adequate access to computers.

Many teachers have web pages where students are able to access work, schedules and learning links. Parents were very appreciative of these tools to help them work with their children.

Success Maker and My Access are just two of the programs used to assess and remediate student work. The library computer lab is used before and after school for student work.

### **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?

The Visiting Team found evidence of many and varied types of assessments being used throughout the school, including CRT, YPP, and UALPA testing, as well as periodic reading assessments and computer-based feedback tools such as the My Access Writing Assessment and Success Maker programs. The last three years have been devoted to the implementation of walk-aways, standards-based assessments given at the end of each unit that are tied to the school's ABC-I grading system. Students who fail these tests are retaught and then given the opportunity to be re-assessed as many times as necessary to pass. While the walk-aways are not standardized from teacher to teacher in every department, there is emphasis placed on having valid assessments to test core concepts.

The school has also implemented the use of a school-wide writing rubric, and is encouraging more cross-curricular writing. Teachers have been trained in the Six Traits + 1 writing model, and core teachers are using the My Access program to improve writing across the curriculum. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty continue this focus, perhaps with the revision of the rubric to a more "student-friendly" vernacular, and

ongoing support for teachers who are not teaching core classes in order to ensure the institutionalization of the writing rubric.

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 process of equitably assessing individual student progress was observed to be the culmination of involvement by many different groups within the school, such as departmental and grade level teams, full faculty, and individual teachers. The faculty used information garnered from CRT scores and walk-aways in order to form instruction. Some teachers used information from other assessments such YPP, Success Maker, My Access, and the number of "I" grades received by individuals to guide instructional techniques and remediation strategies in individual subject areas.

It is the recommendation of the Visiting Team that department and grade level teams continue to use the data gleaned from the various data sources in order to foster support services and continued academic success for all students.

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

The data from the many assessment sources is used extensively by department and grade level teams, administration, counselors, and support personnel to assess the achievement of all students as well as the success of various programs introduced over the course of the last few years.

One innovation of the school is the implementation of the ABC-I grading system. While the stakeholders seem to feel that this is best practice for middle-level students, the Visiting Team encourages the faculty to promote close vertical articulation with the high school to investigate whether there needs to be more of a transition by the freshman class to the high school grading system, or whether the high school would be amenable to other options in its own grading systems.

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?

Faculty members indicated that several professional development opportunities have been offered over the last few years, with training from the district and state as well as the opportunity to attend middle-level and content-specific conferences, after which information is shared with fellow faculty members. While these opportunities for staff development have been phenomenal, the Visiting Team recommends that adequate time now be given for faculty members to implement fully what they have learned before pursuing any new programs.

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

Kearns Junior High has decided to focus on the Communication DRSL, specifically in the areas of reading and written communication. There has been an implementation of periodic reading assessments for all students. The assessments have been used for placement and remediation of students in reading classes. The school has also adopted a school-wide writing rubric and is encouraging teachers in all content areas to expand writing across the curriculum. It is the recommendation of the Visiting Team that the rubric be rewritten in more student-friendly terminology.

#### **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?

Kearns Junior High has established a climate in which teaching and learning are promoted and supported. The administration has clearly defined expectations for teachers, and has promoted structures such as teaming for all grade levels that support collaboration and a focus on student success. Teachers are responsible for submitting curriculum maps and an evaluation of their testing data on a regular basis.

The leadership is clearly focused on student success. Resources are made readily available to support the work of teachers. The instructional goals of the school are articulated to staff, students, and parents. Decisions such as staffing and room assignments are made with the students' needs in mind. The school motto, "Success is our only option," does not only apply to students, but to faculty and staff as well. Student accomplishments are celebrated, and the staff and faculty take pride in their work.

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

The school's leadership has carefully considered data in making decisions that are supported by research and best practice. The principal has spent hours disaggregating data both for the purpose of informing program development for assessing progress. All information is shared with stakeholders.

The programs and strategies employed to address the desired results for student learning are those validated by research and supported by current district initiatives. Teachers have regular opportunities to engage in professional learning and collaboration around

student work. While the administration provides the vision for change in the school, it is the work of the teachers and staff members that has shifted the reality for students.

c) To what extent does the school 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?

The Visiting Team found clear evidence that the management of the school and the allocation of resources are consistent with the school's mission and focused on maximizing opportunities for students. The school leadership has devoted considerable time and effort to creating a school environment that is welcoming, respectful, and responsive to the needs of students and the community.

Teachers report that if they need something to enhance their teaching or the learning of their students, the principal "makes it happen." The Visiting Team found considerable technology-enhanced learning in core areas and the arts; the building has had an aesthetic transformation, and the cleanliness of the building speaks to the pride the staff has in the work they are doing.

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?

The school leadership has undertaken monumental efforts to engage parents and the broader community. The principal has created partnerships with county agencies to provide support to students and their families at the school. There are dedicated staff members at the school who provide attendance and academic tracking along with outreach to parents through phone and e-mail communication, along with home visits. The school, joining forces with law enforcement, has two officers on-site not only to ensure student safety, but to provide a positive link to the sheriff's department in the neighborhood.

One of the hallmarks of the school is its Family Resource Center. Staffed by district personnel, the school leadership has designed an inviting environment for adult classes held during the school day. The center provides information and resources to the residents of Kearns and the classes in ESL and computer technology are growing in enrollment. One of the benefits is that many parents who were once hesitant or resistant to being at the school or advocating for their children are becoming much more confidant and willing to become involved.

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?

The faculty and staff of Kearns Junior High have responded to the developmental needs of young adolescents by creating learning communities that foster meaningful relationships among students, and between students and their teachers. The Visiting Team found that teachers were dedicated not only to their students' academic success, but also to meeting their social and emotional needs. Students and parents reported that teachers go out of their way to assist students and that they really "care about them."

The school has established an advisory period that meets Monday through Thursday for 35 minutes. The advisory period provides the means for teachers to connect with students and track their academic progress. As the school has embraced middle level philosophy, greater attention has been given to creating an environment that provides the means to make personal connections with students.

#### 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?

Kearns Junior High School has developed a culture of continuous improvement. Teams meet weekly to discuss student progress. The faculty utilizes weekly early release time to engage in professional development and in professional learning communities. Data drives the instructional decisions of teachers, teacher teams, and the school's leadership. The faculty and administration reported to the Visiting Team that there is great investment in their work. New hires are selected, in part, based on their understanding of, and commitment to, the expectation of collaboration for student success.

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?

The school leadership knows the importance of professional development. All educators set yearly professional growth goals, consistent with Granite standards for educators. Educators review the goals with administrators as they develop them, and upon completion. Professional development is built into the yearly calendar and is jobembedded, occurring within the contract day. Also, the principal provides teachers with numerous opportunities to attend conferences, workshops and continuing education classes. New teachers are provided with mentors, and master teachers lead learning in literacy, technology, and other relevant subjects.

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 Visiting Team finds that the action plan is adequate in providing the framework for the continuation of school improvement. The goals of the plan address the need of the school to make AYP in literacy and numeracy, and to create a middle-level school climate. Each goal has action steps that are realistic in light of what the school has been doing, but also provide the opportunity to stretch to reach higher expectations.

Components of the plan such as responsible parties, timelines, estimated resources and assessment are clearly defined and reasonable in scope.

The Visiting Team found that, overall, there is tremendous support for the plan from teachers and parents.

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

The principal has worked diligently to create the conditions that support change and continuous improvement. Teachers regard her as accessible and open to ideas and suggestions. Teachers are empowered to make curricular and instructional decisions based on data. The school has invested in numerous programs and support personnel to track student attendance, behavior, and academics.

While there are still some who question what is happening and are not willing to fully invest in the changes, for the most part they are overshadowed by the new staff and faculty that have been brought on within the last few years. The principal holds the same expectations for others that she has for herself, and she does not let detractors keep the group from moving forward.

e) What significant progress has been made in implementing the original action plan since the last full visit?

Kearns Junior High has undergone a radical transformation since the visit in 2004. In addition to significant student demographic changes, there has been a 50 percent change in the teaching staff and the appointment of a new administration. With the new leadership, the school has been organized into teams to provide smaller learning communities for students; a block schedule has been incorporated to allow for an advisory period and additional periods for enrichment or remediation; the ABC- I grading scale has been implemented in all classes, with the expectation that students are to demonstrate mastery; and the use of technology has dramatically expanded with the creation of six new labs.

Unlike in 2004, there is a high level of commitment on the part of teachers and staff members, which has served to cultivate student success and high regard for the school held by parents and community members.

f) What significant progress has the school made in addressing the **major** recommendations of the previous Visiting Team and/or review team?

The school has made concerted efforts to increase data collection. Not only does the school have more data at its disposal, but faculty and leadership are continuously using it to drive student placement in programs, to track student progress, and to make instructional decisions. The development of walk-aways by all teachers has provided an intensive school-wide focus on assessment. It is expected that all teachers know what students will need to know and be able to do each term, and how they will demonstrate their learning.

It was recommended that the staff collaboratively research and implement multiple teaching strategies. The staff has made this a focus of professional development and has utilized resources such attendance to the Utah Middle Level Association's annual conference, along with collaborative study during weekly early release time to learn new strategies. The adoption of the block schedule has also allowed teachers to use more active learning strategies. Professional development is continuing in this area.

School-wide rubrics for the DRSLs have been created. As the main focus has been on reading and writing, the emphasis has been on the creation and use of a writing rubric that is now used school-wide. Kearns Junior High is also emphasizing the DRSLs and the rubrics with students and parents.

The Visiting Team found that there has been considerable planning and resources directed towards adopting these changes. The school exemplifies continuous improvement.

## **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

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

Kearns Junior High has made extensive strides in the area of community building. Parents and students stated appreciation for the outreach and support given them through the various programs and caring staff at the school. The parent support center was observed to be full and busy, with GED classes, child care, English and computer classes. After-school programs engage approximately 50-80 students per night with homework help and enrichment activities and sports. Most teachers have useful websites and are available to students before and after school. The support staff assists with special needs

students, ELL students, and parent communication. Students are given many opportunities to succeed, and those who are successful are recognized and rewarded with such things as "Panther Paws" and positive phone calls home.

The administration has high expectations for both staff and students, offering both direction and support. The Visiting Team recommends that the administration continue to be sensitive to the need for mentoring and support for such a young and relatively inexperienced faculty in the building of collegiality among all staff members.

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

The school has used scheduling, support staff, and programs funded by grant moneys to actively engage parents and families in the learning process. The well-functioning parent center, Spanish speaking parent liaison, websites, online grades, business partnerships, and before- and after-school programs are good examples of this. The Visiting Team encourages Kearns Junior High to continue to use these programs to get more and more stakeholders involved in the support of the students.

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

According to information given to the Visiting Team, there have been invitations extended to the community at large to join in the self-study process via surveys or membership in the PTA or Community Council. The school is encouraged to continue to reach out to parents for support, perhaps making use of the parents involved in the parent center activities and newly reactivated PTSA to foster networking, especially in the area of focus group input for the future.

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

School improvement data is disseminated by various venues. The school sends out a newsletter to parents as well as posting data in a prominent place near the office. Teachers are given data from all testing areas via department and grade level teams and faculty meetings, and the data is then used to assess placement and instruction. It is the recommendation of the Visiting Team that data from all subgroups be placed in the school profile and referred to often in instructional and program decision-making processes.

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

## **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the faculty, staff, and administration for their belief in themselves as truly change agents for the success of all students. They clearly recognize and accept their responsibility to provide their students with an education that will lead to a successful life.
- The Visiting Team commends the school and its partner agencies and businesses for their dedication to building the assets of their students by providing opportunities for students to be engaged in learning and recreation during and outside of school hours, providing outreach to parents, and developing comprehensive services to address the education, health, and welfare of students and families.
- The Visiting Team commends the tenacity of the principal in making things happen for teachers and students. Principal Barber has worked tirelessly to support teachers in order for them to provide the powerful teaching and learning experiences for students. Her high expectations for her staff are balanced with a great deal of support.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for focusing on what really matters for student learning.

## **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the Kearns Network begin the process of vertical articulation to ensure that the progress made in student achievement is not lost as students move to the high school.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty and leadership continue to study effective instructional strategies and monitor instruction to match instruction to the core standards and objectives.
- Kearns Junior High School has undergone a great deal of change in the last six years. The changes have had significant impact on student achievement and success, which generates the excitement and energy to do more. The Visiting Team recommends that the leadership be judicious in adding more in terms of programs and practices too soon. Teachers need time and support to make sure that what they are doing "sticks."