

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Sunset Ridge Middle School  
6881 West 8200 South  
West Jordan, Utah 84088**

**April 27-28, 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**

**Sunset Ridge Middle School  
6881 West 8200 South  
West Jordan, Utah 84088**

**April 27-28, 2009**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

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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 27-28, 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 Sunset Ridge Middle 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 Catherine Jensen is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Sunset Ridge Middle 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 Sunset Ridge Middle School.

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

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12/30/2008

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J. Calvin Evans ..... Compliance and Special Programs  
Larry Urry ..... Staff Assistant  
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June LeMaster, Ph.D. .... Human Resources  
Susan Callister ..... Elementary  
Steve Dimond ..... Secondary  
Brent Burge ..... Classified  
Becky Hess ..... Benefits

**SUNSET RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

**School Administration**

Catherine Jensen ..... Principal  
Brian Larsen..... Assistant Principal  
Tim Heumann ..... Assistant Principal

**Counseling**

Randy Tree..... Counselor  
Becky Stephens..... Counselor  
Emily Norton ..... 17 hr Counselor  
Clinton Thurgood..... Psychologist  
Wendy Hansen..... Speech Pathologist

**Support Staff**

Jenny Johnson .....Financial Secretary  
Terry Powell..... Attendance Secretary  
Cyndi Pellegrino ..... Registrar  
Kandi Derrick.....Hall Monitor  
Dave Hawkins.....Head Custodian  
Barbara Bishop.....Nutrition Manager

**Faculty**

Daniel Aguirre	Lisa Hale	Linda Richmond
Buckley Barratt	Patricia Hendricks	Robert Robertson
Tyler Blain	Kodi Jeffery	Susan Robinson
Luckie Bogenschutz	Christine Johnson	Natalie Rudel
Melissa Carlyon	Bill Keil	Kelly Russell
Tiffany Cooke	Patricia Lambdin	Mark Schiszler
Sherrie Cornia	Christie Larson	Eva Serr
Joey Davis	Mallory Meyer	Vanessa Smith
Colleen Edgley	Edith Mitko	Lanny Sorenson
Mathew Emerson	Jennifer Nudd	Richard Statler
Lisbeth Ericksen	Kameron Oldroyd	Kimberly Thatcher
Mark Escossio	Rita Osborne	Steven Thatcher
Julie Fahlsing	Monique	Christy Tohara
Carla Forbush	Otufangavalu	Vicki Trevisanut
Julie Gambles	Alison Provenza	Paula Williams

## **SUNSET RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

**The mission of Sunset Ridge Middle School is to ensure academic excellence, developmental responsiveness and social equity in order to educate our students to be productive citizens in their changing world.**

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- We believe each and every student has the desire and ability to be successful.
- We believe school must create an engaging, relevant and rigorous environment where students feel safe to take appropriate risks.
- We believe in opening doors of opportunity for each and every student.
- We believe implementation of middle level best practices will improve the performance of our students.
- We believe in learning as the constant as with time and support the variables.
- We believe literacy is best learned and best taught across the curriculum.
- We believe the spirit of collaboration improves student achievement.
- We believe families must be included as an integral part of the school community.

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

1. Students will be critical thinkers and problem solvers.
2. Students will communicate effectively through reading, writing, listening, creating and speaking.
3. Students will demonstrate positive character development that leads to responsible citizenship.
4. Students will demonstrate basic knowledge and learn individual skills that support future learning.
5. Students will develop skills to work effectively with others.

Date of visit: April 27-28, 2009

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Shane Farnsworth, American Fork Junior High School, Alpine School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Erin Harrison, John F. Kennedy Junior High School, Granite School District

Sharon Jenks, Hurricane Middle School, Washington School District

Thane Hutchinson, Mount Logan Middle School, Logan School District

Travis Lemon, American Fork Junior High School, Alpine School District

**VISITING TEAM REPORT**  
**SUNSET RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

Sunset Ridge Middle School is located in West Jordan, Utah and currently serves a population of 1,190 of seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students. The building opened for students in the 2005-2006 school year with an enrollment of 750. The enrollment has grown each year, with a projected enrollment of 1,260 for the 2009-2010 school year.

The student population is about 30 percent ethnic minority, with the largest of those groups being the Hispanic group (23 percent). In addition, about 30 percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch. The percentages of minority students and economically disadvantaged have remained relatively constant the past three years.

The facility is one of the newest middle schools in Jordan School District. The building's architectural design promotes teaming and collaboration. The school opened with a desire to create an "ideal middle school." The administration and staff have deliberately, purposefully, and successfully worked to achieve that desire. They make use of the facility with interdisciplinary teaming and collaborative teacher teams meeting regularly.

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

The school provided a significant amount of comprehensive data in its profile. In addition, the data has been disaggregated well. However, Sunset Ridge Middle School would benefit from a more thorough analysis of its profile data. Individual analyses follow specific assessment data information, but a comprehensive summary analysis is lacking. The school needs to determine who is learning and who is not and develop a plan to respond.

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

As mentioned in the prior question, the school should consider undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the profile to determine areas of emphasis or focus and their greatest academic need. This comprehensive analysis would inform and shape the action plan and comprehensive school improvement plan.

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

The school's self-study sufficiently reflects the school's current strengths and limitations. The school would benefit from data which validates and measures the impact of its middle school philosophy emphasis. Sunset Ridge Middle School has a high level of commitment and puts a great deal of work into supporting student achievement through middle level philosophies. The self-study should surface and reflect that strength more than it does.

**Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Sunset Ridge Middle School should further disaggregate its science assessment data to determine what may be done to increase achievement in this area.
- Sunset Ridge Middle School should further disaggregate subgroup (Hispanic, ELL, students with disabilities) assessment data to determine what may be done to increase achievement for these subgroups.

**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?*

The mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs were developed prior to the opening of the school. The faculty and some parents were involved in the creation and refining of these items. There has been great work done in effort to promote and communicate the vision, mission, and DRSLs to the faculty and students. Sunset Ridge Middle School should be commended for the visibility of the mission statement and DRSLs throughout the school. The effort to communicate the educational agenda to the faculty and remind them of it on a consistent basis is also acknowledged. As noted in the school's portfolio by the focus group assigned to examine the educational agenda, work needs to be done to facilitate students' understanding of the mission. The Visiting Team concurs that the use of student-friendly language may assist the school in providing students with greater access to the school's

mission. Sunset Ridge Middle School may also consider revisiting the mission, beliefs and DRSL with all stakeholders present in order to identify the most essential items of focus and refine the current items. Throughout this process a distinction between values, beliefs and DRSLs may facilitate the work of refinement.

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

The Visiting Team found a great deal of alignment between the mission, beliefs and DRSL. The school has worked deliberately to align its work with the research and literature in the area of middle level philosophy. As the school moves forward, it would be well for it to maintain this focus on best practice for the students served.

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

Indicators have been created for the DRSLs. Students have an awareness of the DRSLs and have received explicit instruction from the faculty as to how the DRSLs connect to the content areas. Sunset Ridge Middle School has only begun the work with indicators and assessment of the DRSLs. The Visiting Team recommends that the indicators be further refined and that quality, school-wide assessments be created for the DRSLs. The assessment items listed in the profile are very general and activity oriented rather than specific, measurable, and time-bound items that will provide substantive data to direct the work of staff members as they seek to embed the 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 Visiting Team found evidence of great leadership in this area by the administrative team. The work of the principal to move the school forward in alignment with quality practices that meet the needs of the students they serve is evident. The faculty is aware of the mission and DRSLs and referenced the work done by the administration to keep those items out in front and guiding their work at the school.

### **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 Visiting Team commends the staff for the exemplary level of collaboration that takes place at Sunset Ridge Middle School. It is evident that teachers have a high degree of commitment and desire to collaborate at many different levels, including small teams, department teams, and grade level teams, to ensure that the curriculum is dynamic and viable.

Teachers collaborate with teachers of the small teams defined at each school pod. Each small team regularly holds formal pod meetings where students are reminded of important assignments, tests, projects, and student recognitions. Several pod teams are making collaborative efforts to communicate upcoming assignments and feedback to home via e-mail and progress reports.

Teachers collaborate as departments to identify standards and intended learning outcomes, create assessments, and share best practice strategies. Departments also work together to realize the school-wide goals such as reading across the curriculum.

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

Students at Sunset Ridge Middle School seem to be engaged in the learning process. They are aware of their progress and level of learning. The Visiting Team saw evidences of student engagement and higher-order thinking. First of all, students seem to be aware of what they need to know and be able to do in each class. Teachers utilize multiple methods of communicating learning objectives to the students, and reinforce the work that takes place in other content areas. Secondly, teachers provide opportunities for students to apply what they learn in a cross-curricular manner. Teachers of small teams and grade level teams work together to provide cross-curricular assignments that help students recognize the application of learning to various subjects. Furthermore, teachers at Sunset Ridge Middle School participate in staff development aimed at best practice integration. The students at Sunset Ridge Middle School experience a school-wide culture of high expectations. All students are encouraged to master the content. The Visiting Team commends the staff for providing additional opportunities such as RISE, Pod Tutors, Math Lab, Pyramid of Interventions, and other interventions when students do not meet the high 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?*

The teaching staff at Sunset Ridge Middle School is on an upward and forward trajectory of working together to develop a curriculum that integrates the school's DRSLs. The Visiting Team commends the staff for recognizing DRSL implementation as a process to be refined and defined over years of implementation. The school-wide DRSLs have been developed

collaboratively. These DRSLs were present and in place at the very beginning of this school's existence and have served as a guide for the school. As new teachers are brought on board, they are mentored and become aware of the importance of their participation in accomplishing the initiatives set forth in the DRSLs, mission, and beliefs of the school. The veteran teachers, administration, and leadership team are actively involved in the mentoring.

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

The staff is committed to middle level philosophies of teaching the whole child. The Visiting Team commends the staff at Sunset Ridge Middle School for being a national School to Watch that is socially equitable, academically excellent and developmentally responsive and for adopting those middle level philosophies into the school culture. The culture at this school ensures that all students can learn. The Visiting Team recommends that staff continue to utilize multiple lines of assessment to drive school improvement initiatives and classroom instruction.

On a school-wide basis, data from standardized tests and common assessments among various levels of teaming are used to identify and address gaps in student learning. The staff at Sunset Ridge Middle School is concerned about these gaps and has it in the school's action plans to address them. The staff is extremely committed to providing extra help and time for kids to master content. This is a part of the school culture. School-wide interventions, include ZAP (zeros are not permitted), RISE (enrichment for mastery students and remediation for non-mastery students), Math Lab, school tutoring classes and aids within the pods. Furthermore, all students at Sunset Ridge Middle School participate and take the active role in student-led conferences, which allow the students to identify artifacts that demonstrate their particular level of learning in each content area. This particular process allows the student to be in control, to know his/her own level of learning, and to communicate this with parents and teachers in a non-confrontational manner. Currently, the school has approximately a 95 percent participation rate. The Visiting Team commends the staff at Sunset Ridge Middle School for its efforts in helping facilitate this process.

**Instruction:**

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

The Visiting Team observed use of a variety of instructional strategies. Short written assignments were supplemented by oral activities, artistic creations and dramatizations to enhance student understanding. An immediate feedback

interactive assessment seemed to be very effective for gauging student understanding. Oral recitation was also used to review vocabulary and to have fun with poetry. Interestingly, the students seemed very involved with the poetry recitation and were then ready to move as a group to another part of the lesson. Computer labs, wireless tablets, Internet-based tutoring through Carnegie Learning Systems, and district-supported web sites are used to supplement other effective learning strategies.

- 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?*

Teacher advisory time each day has been designated for one of the main venues for study and implementation of the DRSLs; however, implementation is certainly not sequestered to any specific teaching situation. Teachers are encouraged to use the DRSLs as they feel appropriate during presentation of their lessons, and there are specific days and activities that are used for school-wide discussion of DRSLs. Copies of the DRSLs are found in classrooms and in other important areas of the school in an attempt to keep the concepts in focus.

- 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?*

At Sunset Ridge, students' learning needs are identified through formal and informal assessments and are then discussed with individual teams. The teaming at Sunset Ridge is multi-tiered; it includes small group teams, departmental teams and grade level teams. In fact, the school is constructed specifically to facilitate the teaming concept. Consequently, both formal and informal teaming discussions take place daily. Specific professional development time at Sunset Ridge has been scheduled for Wednesdays. The students leave the school by 1:30 p.m. Teachers then use their time, until 3:30 p.m., to plan teaching strategies, align curricula, and analyze data from common assessments to plan interventions and new strategies. The Visiting Team was very impressed with the pervading attitude of support for the teaming/ collaborative model the school is implementing.

- 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 faculty of Sunset Ridge demonstrates a widely shared and understood middle-level philosophy. Although this is a fairly young staff, there are numerous advanced degrees represented. Several teachers have participated in

the Impact Plus program. Many teachers seem motivated to increase their productivity and knowledge by attending professional conferences (NCTM, UMLA, UCTM) to stay current on learning trends and effective instructional approaches. Reflection on learning outcomes is accomplished through the teaming effort that is so well accepted in this learning community. CRT scores, as well as departmental common assessments, are used to check for proficiency. This provides a basis for self and departmental analysis and reflection.

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

At Sunset Ridge, each classroom is equipped with a laptop computer and projector for use in lesson presentation. Audio enhancement is also available in classrooms throughout the school. Grades and progress reports can be accessed through PowerSchool, but many teachers have begun to use e-mailing to share daily assignments with parents. The Visiting Team observed use of video clips, immediate response “clickers,” and PowerPoint presentations. The student body views character-building presentations, student-generated programs and school-wide announcement on a television feed that originates in the front office. UTIPS assessments have been used to produce student data to help in the planning of curricular activities.

**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 work in this area is emerging. Common assessments in many of the curricular areas are in place and being given. The work produced in this area is focused on the Core Curriculum set by the State Office of Education. The Visiting Team commends the work that has been started and encourages Sunset Ridge Middle School to continue in its work of creating, administering and revising common assessments. The work to unpack core standards and make learning targets that are clearly articulated and student/parent friendly should continue.

- 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 school uses a review of end-of-level assessment data at the beginning of the year to measure school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations. The Visiting Team recommends that the school

develop additional processes to fairly and equitably assess both school-wide and individual progress. The work of developing common assessments should be furthered.

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

The staff at Sunset Ridge Middle School currently utilizes CRT results as one means of measuring academic success. The faculty referenced discussions that take place at the beginning of each school year around the CRT data of the previous year. The data collected from common assessments given on departmental levels, at this point, seems to be used anecdotally and effects practice directly for some teachers. As the work to fully implement common assessments moves forward, the staff should also seek to find ways and means through which results can be collected formally and used to modify and drive instructional practices.

- 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?*

The members of the faculty are well aware of middle level philosophy and the needs of the students they serve. Attendance at the UMLA conference is valued by the staff, and staff members shared with the Visiting Team the insight gained there with regard to assessment strategies and sharing results. Where the use of common assessments is emerging and being implemented at the school, it would be prudent for additional time and resources to be used to provide professional development concerning assessment so that traditional and alternative assessments can be created and refined.

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

In discussing the school-wide scoring tools to assess the DRSLs, the Visiting Team discovered that such tools are not in place. The recommendation of the Visiting Team would be for Sunset Ridge Middle School to revisit the indicators for the DRSLs and then begin to work on the creation of school-wide scoring tools that can be used to effectively gather data and measure the efforts of the staff as they embed the DRSLs. The Visiting Team cautions the staff at Sunset Ridge Middle School not to exhaust themselves, but to be deliberate in their work, moving forward in a well-planned and all-inclusive way, such that all staff members are able to maintain excellence and enthusiasm in the work.

## 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 school leadership team promotes quality instruction by promoting an academic learning climate based upon academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity. The school leadership team has a mission and a vision for the school. The mission is evident in the school's two-pronged approach of middle level philosophy and professional learning communities. The school focuses on student achievement. Academic time is protected. Students have support and resources to assist them in their learning. Teachers are supported in professional development and, through their collaborative culture, share best teaching practices.

- 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?*

Effective decision making is highly research-based and collaborative at Sunset Ridge Middle School. The focus on middle level philosophy best practices is evidenced in the advisory period, interdisciplinary teaming, student-led conferences, and collaborative teams. In addition, Sunset Ridge has a shared leadership approach that involves multiple stakeholders in the process. This collaborative approach is evidenced in the feel among teachers, parents, and students that they have a say in the important decisions that are made.

Sunset Ridge Middle School would benefit from collecting measurable data on interventions and other school-wide approaches to assist students and assess the impact those strategies and interventions are having on teaching and learning.

- 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 organization, operations, and allocation of resources at the school are skillfully used to provide a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. The school staff makes effective use of the facility to collaborate and team. The use of hourly aides supports the teachers in their efforts and students who

need additional support. Land Trust monies are also used wisely to support critical academic needs. The teachers feel the administration supports teaching and learning. The school is operated and administrated so as to promote and further the school goals, DRSLs, and improvement efforts.

- 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 team has done an exemplary job of empowering all stakeholders to meaningfully participate in the decision-making process. The school leadership regularly meets with the administration. The leadership team consists of department chairs, grade-level leaders, and interdisciplinary team leaders. The PTSA and School Community Council feel a sense of ownership and pride in the school. They are involved in a significant way and trust the school leadership team.

- 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 school is to be commended for its efforts in establishing a teacher advisory period in which each student has an adult mentor. In addition, the interdisciplinary teams and grade level teams provide additional advocacy and support for students. Sunset Ridge has provided a thorough net to catch students at risk or who might otherwise be neglected within the system. When asked, students overwhelmingly indicated they felt they had an adult staff member to assist them in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.

#### **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?*

Faculty and community members met prior to the opening of the school to create the school improvement plan. Each year the plan is reviewed as a staff. Changes are made to create a better more effective plan that reflects the climate and culture of the school. A consensus using the “fist to five” practice is used to achieve a majority who agree with the changes made or with new

ideas presented. The plan is revised with the faculty, leadership team, and Community Council. If new items are added, they are worked on again as the year progresses. Many items may be looked at on a smaller scale in departments, and such collaboration time is used to implement any strategies to make those changes fluent into the school as a whole.

- 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?*

Each year begins with school-wide professional development that applies to any aspect new to the school or focus that the school would like to take—such as literacy, which it is part of the school’s goal to improve. Literacy training has been ongoing to incorporate more reading strategies into each curriculum. Oftentimes the professional development is what the leadership team decides the school as a whole needs to work on. Then throughout the year smaller groups may work on professional development that is necessary to their individual needs or departmental needs. All teachers are asked and usually attend UMLA. The Visiting Team heard from staff members said to have enjoyed the conference and look forward to it. They enjoy learning more about how to be a better middle level school. Teachers within the Math Department are very aligned with each other. They do smaller professional development on their collaboration days when they meet a department, and use IMPACT training from the district in their classes.

- 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 heard numerous times about the practice of “Keepers and Polishers.” At the end of each year the faculty meets together in a “Keepers and Polishers” meeting. It is used to determine how the year went. This information that is generated in this meeting that needs further attention is then revisited throughout the summer by focus groups. These groups work on solutions to problems or questions that have been raised by the staff. They may look at whether a practice will need to continue on into the next year or whether it needs to be revamped or dumped entirely. Then, at the opening school meeting for the next year, the focus groups present their solutions or ideas or strategies of how these issues have been addressed. An example of an issue that has resurfaced here at Sunset Ridge Middle School is being a “no-gum” school. A few years ago, the staff had decided to be a no-gum school; however, at the end of last school year they decided as a staff that this decision would be based on an individual teacher rather than a school-wide system. Departments work on issues that come up in the year or as an individual basis. They help one another with ideas to make it a better year and to commit to any changes that have been made to the action plan. Veteran

faculty members work closely with new faculty members to reinforce the school plan and to help with any concerns or uncertainties they may have. Departments and teams work very well together to ensure success all around. The Visiting Team felt that their collaboration is a definite help to keep their action plan going and to continue to make continuous improvement.

The Community Council members look at the data to determine what should be in their school improvement plan and where the trust land money should go. They looked at scores from years past and decided that science needed more money to improve their scores and to see more students succeed.

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

Sunset Ridge Middle School faculty believes in being new and innovative. They want to be the best and always be progressing forward. The staff wanted to improve interventions with students and student recognition. They as a faculty set the goal to use the intervention pyramid they had created more. Teachers use it as a checklist—"I have done this, I have not tried this." They do not just use it for behavior but for academics. They have also created an online tracking form for interventions. The teachers can print out and show the other team members or parents what has been done with the student. Also, the staff felt that more students should be recognized for good things they have done. They have many incentive programs to help reward students for good grades, behavior and other accomplishments.

All stakeholders feel that the administration is approachable and that any ideas they feel are valid will be heard. The students feel that the administration really listens to them and takes care of problems that have come about. Some of the faculty members feel like they are doing too much and would like to make some of their projects exceptional and let others sit for awhile. Collaboration of small teams, grade levels, and departments has helped each teacher feel that he/she can make the necessary improvements to make Sunset Ridge Middle School better and modern. The key to continuous improvement and productive change is the practice of "Keepers and Polishers" at the end of each school year.

## **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

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

Sunset Ridge has an active PTSA as well as a Community Council to encourage community involvement. Invitations to participate are sent out at the beginning of the year to establish an atmosphere of involvement for parents and community leaders. The core of the group seems committed and strong. They were successful in their implementation of the Peace Project that encouraged students to reflect on inner peace, extended out into the community peace and suggested possible worldwide impact.

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

Community support has been noted in conjunction with artistic presentations and theatrical productions. Community members have been involved in projects such as costuming, and set design to allow students to present performance based assessments. The Peace Project was fully supported by community members as well. Many members of local businesses participated in Reality Town, which is a very effective tool to help students move into the “real world.” Community support was also significant for the “We the People” competition.

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

The Community Council and PTSA were actively involved in the establishment of Sunset Ridge from the very beginning. The principal has obviously established a comfortable working relationship with those who serve on either team. Parents are invited into the school bi-annually for a student-led conference where students take a leadership role to inform parents as to their educational experiences at Sunset Ridge. The atmosphere of the school seems inviting to anyone who is interested in learning more or helping.

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

School improvement goals were established by a collaborative effort of faculty and staff members as the school was beginning its new life. Parental involvement began strong in the beginning year or two and continues to show a strong presence. Newsletters, e-mails, and flyers are used to keep parents involved in any newly implemented programs. Surveys of all stakeholders were taken and recorded in the accreditation binder, documenting opinions of what works and what doesn't. The administration is very open to discussion of questions or concerns.

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

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends Sunset Ridge Middle School for being named a School to Watch and for its continued commitment toward providing an academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable learning environment for all students. Students feel safe, connected, positive, and proud of their school.
- The Visiting Team commends Sunset Ridge Middle School for its commitment to collaboration. The school's collaborative work creates a better environment for teaching and learning.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration, staff, and stakeholders of Sunset Ridge Middle School for their unity, cohesiveness, and commitment to working together, supporting each other, and focusing on students and their success.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that Sunset Ridge Middle School develop a systemic, school-wide means of measuring the implementation and student achievement of their DRSL.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Sunset Ridge Middle School develop means of measuring and assessing the effectiveness of their strategies, interventions, and experiments. Take the time to determine what effect your efforts and work are having on students or issues.
- The Visiting Team recommends Sunset Ridge Middle School continue its exemplary work of establishing professional learning communities in an environment supported through best middle level practices and philosophies.