

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Syracuse High School
665 South 2000 West
Syracuse, Utah 84075**

April 21-22, 2011



**Utah State Office of Education
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P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

Syracuse High School

**665 South 2000 West
Syracuse, Utah 84075**

April 21-22, 2011

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF
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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, April 21-22, 2011, 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 Syracuse 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 Steven Davis is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Syracuse 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 Syracuse High School.

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
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*Board of Regents Appointments

*** CMAC Representative Appointment

*****Charter School Representative Appointment

**UCAT Representative

****USBA Advisory Representative Appointment

12/28/2010

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SYRACUSE HIGH SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

Administration

Steven Davis Principal
Russ Zaugg..... Assistant Principal
Shawn Johnson..... Assistant Principal
Wendy Nelson..... Assistant Principal

Counseling

Diana Johanson Department Chair
Amber Faerber Counselor
Shari Leder..... Counselor
Sandy Rich Counselor
Eileen Santella Counselor
Robin Collins Counseling Secretary

Support Staff

Administrative

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Mel Nelson
Courtney Fresh
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Patti Stanger
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Timothy Ward
James Nielson
Jamie Escuriexr
Joy Reid

CTE

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Kathryn Olsen
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Ryan Kay, Assistant
Head
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Curtis McNally
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Karin Tschaggeny

Nutrition Services

Joy Dawson, Manager

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Timothy Ward
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Tony Wilson
Sue Winkler
Brad Wojciechowski
Mike Wojciechowski
Sara Woodbury
Kristi Yamada
Amy Young
Todd Young
Russ Zaugg

SYRACUSE HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

Syracuse High School partners with students, parents, and community to provide a safe, caring environment promoting opportunities for life-long success

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- All students gain knowledge in different ways, have the right to learn, and can progress.
- A safe, supportive environment fosters and facilitates life-long learning for every student.
- Open communication is essential.
- The Syracuse High community, united by common goals, promotes student success.
- A commitment to improvement guides the design of curriculum and the process of community building.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Cultivate
2. Collaborate
3. Celebrate

Date of visit: April 21-22, 2011

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Rob Stillwell, USOE/Northwest Accreditation Consultant, Team Chairperson

Gary Allen, Bear River High School, Box Elder School District

Elizabeth Bass, Springville Junior High School, Nebo School District

Rita Brock, Utah State Office of Education

Dolph Church, Murray High School, Murray School District

Janice Combe, USOE/Northwest Accreditation Consultant

Trent Mikesell, Springville Junior High School, Nebo School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

SYRACUSE HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Syracuse High School is the largest high school in Davis School District. In 2004, work began on a brand new building resting on fifty-two acres of once-rural land, and Syracuse High School opened its doors to students from Syracuse, Clinton and Clearfield on August 27, 2008. The school is set up in Small Learning Communities. Students have found success in math, language arts, debate, musical and theatrical performances, state and national competitions and other scholastic pursuits. The school has established a tradition of giving service. Students can choose from a wide array of clubs, athletics, and other extracurricular activities. This new school has pulled together and, as students and teachers often say, this is “Titan Pride in Progress.”

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

The leadership team identified several findings in the leadership profile. First, student population is steadily increasing and will reach 2,000 students for the 2011-2012 school year. CRT scores were provided, data was disaggregated, and scores and information were made available to staff members. CRT data showed that all testing results are below the district average. Elementary Algebra and Geometry were the lowest scores, below 50 percent. The school identified that 29 percent of students involved in concurrent enrollment and AP classes. Information was provided about student success and recognition in many programs at the school, such as Titan Treasures.

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

DRSL indicators must be identified. The teachers need to clearly decide what will be measured to show student progress. For the “Cultivate” DRSL they will want to show more than CRT data on specific indicators. For “Collaborate” they need to list student outcomes that will be measured. For “Celebrate” they will want to identify the many ways they will recognize student achievement.

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

The self-study accurately reflects the school’s strengths and limitations. Data was presented that covered many areas of the school in terms of both testing and climate. The self-study revealed areas of deficiency, since data for student learning and interventions in the identified DRSLs was not shared in the profile. Information was

provided to assist teachers but evidence of recognition for students' academic achievement was not presented.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- The profile should include data centered around student performance and learning.
- Begin data collection that leads to implementation of action plan.
- The next profile should include interventions for mid- to low-achieving students.
- Show more steps in the intervention process for low test scores.

**CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION (NORTHWEST)
TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS**

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

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

As a new school, Syracuse High School created its own mission, beliefs and DRSLs using an inclusive and collaborative method that defines the school as a unique educational institution.

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

There is full alignment between the school's mission, beliefs and DRSLs. Student success at Syracuse High School is in partnership with parental support for students and the school.

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

The Visiting Team recommends that more work be done on defining the indicators that will serve as measures of student progress on achieving DRSLs. For the "Cultivate" DRSL, skills for lifelong learning and academic achievement will be listed. For "Collaborate," measures of student achievement will be communicated in an effort to strengthen parental awareness and involvement. For "Celebrate," school-

wide standards will be identified that will recognize excellence in a wide variety of student endeavors.

- 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 culture of the school is one of purpose and teamwork. The Visiting Team commends the school for making such a large work space into a school of personalized education.

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 found the faculty, staff and administration at Syracuse High doing a good job with collaboration in most areas. The school has a late start time when the faculty and staff collaborate in both PLCs and SLCs. This collaboration is used to better align curriculum and improve student learning. As a new school, Syracuse High continues to reflect on and evaluate its collaborative process. The school recognizes that it has room for improvement with inter-disciplinary collaboration. The school is in the process of evaluating and restructuring some areas, but overall it does an excellent job and is motivated to continue to improve.

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

The Visiting Team found students of all abilities, interests, and grades engaged in the learning process. Syracuse High offers opportunities for every student. The structure of small learning communities gives the students the freedom to select areas of interest and then explore and study in those areas. In several classes the Visiting Team observed the faculty using a variety of instructional strategies along with direct instruction. Syracuse High has acquired some excellent technology, which is integrated into the curriculum and instructional strategies. This has helped engage learners in the process of using inquiry and problem solving.

- 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 Visiting Team found that the members of Syracuse High School's teaching staff collaborate and communicate well within their small learning communities to examine and develop their curricula. In conversations with the faculty, we found their willingness to collaborate and focus on student achievement admirable. As they collaborated in PLCs and SLCs, they were able to focus on the three DRSLs and their

individual role for increasing student achievement. The faculty and administration realize that improved collaboration between PLCs, SLCs and advisory teachers will further promote continual improvement in student achievement.

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

The Visiting Team found that during the PLC and SLC process, the use of assessments to evaluate curriculum and student achievement was essential. By asking the four PLC questions, the school is able to discern who is learning and who is not learning. This has enabled the school to develop a plan to address and improve student outcomes. Teachers have the technology to analyze assessments, which in turn leads to adjustment of curriculum and instructional techniques. It appears to the Visiting Team that administration and faculty are using assessments to improve student achievement. This is done by analyzing both curriculum and instructional strategies. For example, Syracuse High School's math CRT scores are low. The entire faculty is addressing these math needs by linking math strategies to the curriculum, as well as to the Cultivate and Communicate DRSLs.

Instruction:

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

Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning. During observations, some of the instructional strategies noted included vocabulary building, frontloading, conversation, direct instruction, media presentations, student presentations, real-world applications, writing, charts and graphs, etc.

Each department works together to ensure that all teachers are progressing toward the same aligned curriculum. Cross-curricular strategies are a current focus and goal within the Small Learning Communities. Teachers do their best to analyze where their students currently are in terms of knowledge of concepts and content, and strive to address areas where students are lacking.

One of the school's major focuses to enhance student learning is the data correlating with CRT math scores. Instructional strategies and methods are being put in place to improve these scores.

- 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?*

Due to the ambiguity of the school's indicators, the meaning of each DRSL and what it indicates is left up to each department. Teachers and counselors use advisory time to address explicit teaching for the identified DRSLs. During advisory, each student is

given the opportunity to have a conversation with a teacher about the DRSLs and what they mean to the student.

- 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?*

With math improvement as a major focus for Syracuse High School, there is evidence in Action Plan #1 that the math team will specifically look for ways to improve student achievement. Teachers and administrators will analyze the current CRT data and create a five-year plan to increase end-of-level scores by two percent each year. Staff development will be provided to the teachers who teach math or special ed. In addition, all departments would like to create a curriculum map to make connections between departments. This plan not only includes the Math Department, but gives ownership to the entire school to make improvements.

- 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?*

According to the self-assessment manual, visits with stakeholders, and classroom observations, teachers are proficient in their content areas. There is evidence of collecting and using data to make improvements. According to the teacher profiles, there are currently several teachers who have finished an ESL endorsement or received a master's degree in education. This is an indicator that these teachers are aware of current research and effective teaching practices.

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

Syracuse High School is equipped with some of the most current technology devices. Each classroom has a projector. About half of the classrooms have document cameras, Smart Boards and the applicable programs. There are also computer and mobile labs. In addition, there is software for engineer and drafting students, remediation and credit recovery programs, state-of-the-art multi-media software, and on-site technology training for teachers. Teachers at SHS make great use of technology to teach and assess their students.

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 school uses a variety of state-mandated assessments to administer school-wide tests, including CRTs (and, in the past, UBSCT) and CTE vocational tests such as computer program assessments. Some departments are in the process of developing common assessments to enhance the testing that is done in regular classroom environments, and they are beginning to introduce formative assessments to guide the preparation of summative tests.

- 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 has made a strong effort to review and use data to guide individual progress in achieving academic expectations. Data is reviewed by teachers and departments, as well as during faculty collaboration periods.

Evidence shows that the leadership and staff are committed to fair and equitable assessment of student performance. This is consistent with the school's efforts to create an integrated and inclusive professional learning community. The staff is encouraged to continue to identify and refine a broad range of assessment mechanisms to further guarantee equity and fairness.

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

The leadership has made an explicit commitment to tracking and using data, both in assessing the success of the school's programs and in informing decisions to make adjustments to the school's action plan when the feedback indicates a need for adaptation or course correction. The staff is encouraged to continue its efforts to disaggregate and analyze this data to inform decision-making.

- 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 leadership has demonstrated a strong commitment to providing professional development opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing student assessment strategies. In particular, the Visiting Team commends the school for its creation of purpose groups that continue to meet to develop, implement and assess the school improvement plan. The staff is encouraged to continue its efforts to identify and develop a broad range of assessment instruments to provide feedback on the success of the implementation of the school's DRSLs.

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

DRSL indicators will have to be developed and agreed upon by staff before a school-wide assessment for DRSL assessment can be implemented. Math scores are the

initial focus for the Cultivate DRSL. More indicators are needed for Cultivate. Clear expectations for Collaborate need to be developed with a focus on student outcomes. Celebrate is being developed as a school-wide recognition of exemplary achievements.

CHAPTER 3: NORTHWEST 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 Syracuse High School leadership recognizes the importance of promoting quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning. From the time Syracuse High School opened four years ago, the school has been organized around SLCs (small learning communities). Teachers work collaboratively in SLCs to develop curriculum and address student needs. The SLC committee acknowledges that SLCs are not currently fully functional, and is in the process of developing a plan with the support of the administration to make changes to SLCs in order to better meet the needs of the student and faculty.

In order to provide more time to collaborate, the school administration and teacher leaders are considering changes in the schedule. The school would like to have collaboration time built into the schedule weekly.

- 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?*

Syracuse High School has done a very good job disaggregating achievement data. The data has been used to identify areas of concern and to set goals in the action plan. For example, CRT scores were used to identify an academic deficiency in algebra and geometry. Based on the data, the school has set a goal to increase the CRT proficiency rate by 10 percent in the next five years. Also, The ISQ survey indicated that staff and students don't believe that student achievement is adequately recognized at Syracuse High School. As a result, the faculty intends to implement more student recognition programs. After the programs are implemented, Syracuse High School will need to collect data to demonstrate that the recognition programs are instrumental in improving student achievement.

- 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?

Based on anecdotal data collected during the accreditation visit, it is clearly evident that the leadership provides skillful stewardship. Teacher leaders and the administrative team work well together. An example of effective collaboration is the work being done by the SLC committee to revise the structure of the SLCs and advisory class. Several members of the SLC committee commented that the school administration is very open to suggestions for school improvement and willing to allocate resources and time to move the work forward.

- 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 Community Council, PTA, teacher leaders (SLC Committee and department chairs) and the student body government all stated they feel included in the decision-making process. Members of the SCC and PTA stated that the administration listens to and addresses concerns in a timely manner. The SLC committee feels empowered to work with the administration on school improvement goals. The student government maintains a very good working relationship with the administration and is able to take a leadership role with school activities.

- 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?*

Syracuse High School has two formal systems in place to assist students and provide an adult advocate for each student—the SLCs and the advisory class. Anecdotal data collected during the visit suggests that, although these formal systems are in place, they are not currently meeting the needs of all students.

The SLCs and advisory class currently are not coordinated and aligned as well as they could be. The SLC committee has taken the lead in reviewing the program's current structure. The committee developed a new SLC/advisory plan and hopes to be able to implement the plan for the 2011-2012 school year. The faculty and administration are committed to assuring that every student at Syracuse High School has an adult advocate who knows him/her well.

School Services:

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

Facilities and Finances:

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

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST 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?*

The school has created a model self-study for writing a comprehensive school improvement plan. It is evident that they followed the guidelines in *Collaborating for Student Achievement*.

- 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?*

Syracuse High School is a relatively new school, and since its inception it has used Professional Learning Communities as the focus of professional development. The goals are the result of an inclusive look by all stakeholders, and are uniquely their own.

- 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 organizational structures are in place for the action plans to be implemented and revisited. There is enormous buy-in to the idea that the action plans can be followed and will lead to much student success.

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

It is evident from the process the school went through to produce its first self-study that there is wide support for productive change and continuous improvement. The

school's first showing of its DRLs consists of creative outlines of what will continue to be an integral part of a thriving, student-centered school.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The school works with the community as a whole, pursuant to the philosophy that parents need to be involved in their children's education as much as possible. The school keeps parents aware of situations that involve their children using a phone system that automatically calls parents to notify them of parent-teacher conferences, grade send-outs and other important events. The school also believes that the administration and teachers are here to represent students and their families. Many attempts are made to involve parents.

More importantly, the faculty and staff also attempt to create communities within the school. The system of Small Learning Communities consists of "individualized learning units within a larger school setting," and allows students to choose a smaller school-within-a-school in which to participate: business; health and human services; science and technology; communication, education and law; or performing and visual arts. Teachers attempt to integrate curricula to provide relevance for that subject area. The system also allows students to have many of the same teacher and student groups, which increases their visibility to teachers and the administration. Although teachers and staff admit there are currently some problems with this program, they are attempting to make changes for next year.

Beyond this, there are many other attempts to create a community. Special education students are made to feel involved and included in all of the activities. There are many elective and extracurricular classes offered that appeal to diverse student interests. There are also many other community-building activities common to area high schools and public schools.

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

Teachers admit that interdisciplinary teams still need some work. That goes along with the work to build their Small Learning Communities. They do have collaboration once a week, with time divided between department and inter-department collaboration; however, it does seem that the school should be commended for its work as departments. They share materials and ideas freely. They also spend as much time as possible talking about individual students and how they can reach them. There are some problems with this that will be fixed when the issues

with the Small Learning Communities are addressed. The administration and faculty are aware of these problems and have already taken steps to correct them and improve this program to help students.

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

Teachers are becoming more aware of the need to do this, and community collaboration has improved this year. The school has made a big push to send as many teachers as possible to a conference on collaboration and intervention. It had a focus on teaching students with different learning styles, and teachers have shared the information with the school and their departments. There are also seems to be evidence that teachers are reflective as individuals and departments on what best practice is. There are committees and teams that address problems in the school on behalf of students. This is one area in which more evidence is needed by the school to adequately answer the question.

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

The school has a website, and information about school improvement is sent out via the website. However, this may not be accessible to all stakeholders because of technology and language concerns. There is also a journalism class that publishes stories about the school in the local paper. It is unknown whether many of these articles address school improvement.

Teachers work together with the administration to identify problems within the school community and population. They conduct departmental and interdepartmental collaboration where these issues are discussed. The advisory also helps to identify students who may need extra help or resources. Working to identify students and departments with issues is perhaps something on which the school can work, but it does seem like the school is aware of this and is making changes. Some of these problems will be addressed as the school works to build its Small Learning Communities program.

Data from tests is available to teachers, and they analyze it individually. They also discuss it as departments to see how they can teach concepts differently. They do not spend much time addressing test data school-wide.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Syracuse High School for the thoroughness of its accreditation process. The school has included all stakeholders—teachers, parents and students. The collecting and reporting of data in the school profile is excellent.
- The Visiting Team commends Syracuse High School for the positive learning environment provided for students. The school is clean, safe and has a sense of purpose.
- The Visiting Team commends Syracuse High School for establishing Small Learning Communities and advisory. This provides the students the opportunity to be known to an adult in the school.
- The Visiting Team commends Syracuse High School for its open and honest commitment to continuous improvement.
- The Visiting Team commends Syracuse High School for providing state-of-the-art technology and encouraging its use throughout the school by teachers.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that Syracuse High School define DRSL indicators and show what will be measured in determining student progress in achieving DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that more interdepartmental and vertical collaboration take place. This will address placement issues as well as help identify achievement gaps.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Syracuse High School work to align and coordinate Small Learning Communities and advisory so that they work hand in hand to support student learning.