# The Report of the Accreditation Visiting Team

## Syracuse Junior High School 1450 South 2000 West Syracuse, Utah 84075

**April 19-20, 2012** 



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

## **Syracuse Junior High School**

## 1450 South 2000 West Syracuse, Utah 84075

**April 19-20, 2012** 

## **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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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 19-20, 2012, 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 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 Chris Keime is also commended.

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

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

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Gary R. Payne, AIA	Administrator, Facilities
Muriel Mann	Director, Career and Technical Education

## SYRACUSE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

## **School Administration**

Chris Keime	Principal
Neesha Rutledge	1
Richard Miller	Assistant Principal

## Counseling

Rachael Goode	Department Chair
Debbie Knecht	Counselor
Karen Russell	Counselor

## **Support Staff**

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Dawn Dean	Terrie Nielson	Shelly Stoddard
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Sandy Balling	Jan'Jy Duke	Lance Lasater
Erica Birch	Ralph Edwards	Trisha Martinez
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Abigail Bolton	Daryl Francom	Dave Nielson
Jessica Bowen	Gwen Gordan	Kyri O'Malley
Kerry Bullard	Lois Green	Andrew Owens
John Calvin	Diana Hirschi	Zach Poulter
Gwen Cannell	Randy Houtz	Scott Price
Nancy Champi	Sandra Jensen	Tyler Putnam
Chris Christensen	John Johnson	Rebecca Reed
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Nicole Clements	Ashley Kaiser	Kathleen Ryan

Jill Smedley Steve Smith Ronimarie Stoker Michele Swenson

Danielle Tanner Alan Watts Darci Weaver Jared Weight Dawnene Young Khurshid Zaidi

#### SYRACUSE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Our mission is to prepare students for a complex, changing world by helping them to grow in **mind**, **body**, and **character**.

## DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

Mind: Mastering Essential Skills and Knowledge

**Body:** Building Healthy Lifestyles **Character:** Developing Good Citizenship

Syracuse Junior High Code of Character and Conduct: I will assume responsibility for my education and do my best to develop in mind, body, and character.

Mind:

- 1. I will try my best to perform well on assessments.
- 2. I will show that I can communicate well by demonstrating that I can read, write, speak, and comprehend text well.
- 3. I will show that I have a good academic work ethic by completing assignments, turning them in on time, and by striving for quality work.

**Body:** 

- 4. I will show that I promote a healthy life style by setting personal health goals for myself, by tracking my own progress, and striving for improvement.
- 5. I will show that I am being safe by choosing my actions thoughtfully and by avoiding actions that are impulsive or unsafe.

**Character:** 

- 6. I will show that I am prepared to learn by being on time to class and by bringing all necessary assignments and materials.
- 7. I will show that I participate in my own education by actively engaging in class activities and discussions and by staying on task.
- 8. I will show respect and caring for myself, other students, and staff.
- 9. I will show positive behavior by following classroom and school rules.

Date of visit: April 19-20, 2012

## MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Glo Merrill, USOE Accreditation Consultant, Visiting Team Chairperson

Joanne Fraser, Scott M. Matheson Junior High School, Granite School District

Willa Jamieson, Eisenhower Junior High School, Granite School District

Trudy Sportsman, Rocky Mountain Junior High School, Weber School District

## VISITING TEAM REPORT

## SYRACUSE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

Syracuse Junior High School is located in Syracuse, Utah and is one of sixteen junior high schools in Davis School District. When the school was built in 1986 the community was largely rural, and since that time has shifted to become a more urban area. In the last ten years two additional junior high schools were built to accommodate growth. The school had almost 1,600 students enrolled in 2008-09 and after the opening of Legacy Junior High School; the school now enrolls 1,408 students in grades 7-9. The school has had new principals for three years in a row.

Since the last visit, the school has launched the Middle Years Program, International Baccalaureate (MYP/IB), which has resulted in faculty members receiving specialized MYP/IB training, and the school's high-stakes testing results exceed district and state averages. The school is 87 percent Caucasian, and Hispanics are the largest ethnic minority group, at 4.7 percent. The number of students living in poverty has also increased to 14 percent. Ethnic minority and special education students are not achieving at the same rate as the general population of the school.

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

The profile included CRT, enrollment, citizenship and ISQ Survey information. The school has focused on improving student behavior, and the data provided in the profile demonstrates that more students are achieving honors and good citizenship and fewer students are receiving unsatisfactory citizenship grades. However, students with poor citizenship grades were not identified by name, so the school does not have the data to know whether the students struggling with citizenship have improved their behavior.

There is little change in the ISQ information. However, the school has experienced several changes in administration, and goals were not set to improve in specific areas. The greatest concern for the Visiting Team was the students' ISQ response regarding building academic skills and rewards and recognition. The administration may consider meeting with all stakeholders to determine a variety of ways to recognize students in classrooms, departments, and the whole school. In addition, the MYP/IB parents expressed concerns that their students were not being challenged.

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

As the school begins to collect course, department, and school-level data, it should be disaggregated and included in the profile. The school may want to consider keeping annual GPA data, by term, and disaggregating the information by ethnicity, gender, grade level, special education and free/reduced-price lunch.

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

Syracuse Junior High School's self-study accurately reflects the strengths of the school. However, the school did not include sufficient information to clearly define who is not learning.

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

- The Visiting Team recommends that Syracuse Junior High School continue to collect, disaggregate, and analyze data from high-stakes and department testing. By keeping longitudinal data, the school will recognize trends, areas of strength, and areas that may need special attention.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school leadership team identify struggling learners by name. As school-level data (classroom, department, and whole school) is collected each term, the school will be able to be proactive in its approach to helping struggling learners.
- The school should share individual student CRT data with each student and his/her parents, and encourage each student to set academic, college, and career goals.
   Content teachers should be aware of which students in their classes scored below 160 on CRTs. This will allow the teachers to implement individualized classroom interventions to help all students become proficient.

## 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?
  - The school's mission statement has been a part of the school for more than a decade and defines a compelling purpose and vision for the school. The mission statement truly reflects all stakeholders' belief in educating the whole child. This belief is further reflected in the goals for student learning, which emphasize growth of mind, body, and character.
- b) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?

The mission and beliefs are tightly aligned to the DRSLs. The citizenship indicator "I will show positive behavior by following classroom and school rules" has become institutionalized since the last visit and is a recognized part of the daily life of the students.

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

The faculty and students have worked to improve behavior during class, and a citizenship grade rubric has been developed. Each student and his/her teachers complete the rubric at mid-term and end of term to determine the student's citizenship grade. The Visiting Team commends the school for having students actively participate in the determination of their citizenship grade. However, data was not collected on the various components of the rubric, and the Visiting Team recommends that the school collect rubric data to determine the areas of strength and the areas that need improvement.

The administration developed a Student Statement form that is used each time a student is referred to the office. The students write a short report explaining why they were referred, and have the opportunity to circle the rule(s) that they did not follow. The rules correlate with the Mind, Body, Character DRSL indicators. The Visiting Team recommends that data be collected and disaggregated by grade level, gender, and ethnicity to identify students who are struggling with behavior.

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's mission statement closely matches the beliefs of the all stakeholders and guides the procedures, policies and decisions of 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 school has an early-out day every Friday to allow time for professional development and collaboration. Also, the master schedule was arranged to allow teachers who teach the same course to have a common prep time. However, there is little evidence that the faculty members understand the Professional Learning Community model. The Visiting Team recommends that a Professional Development Committee be developed and a plan put in place to improve student learning through the PLC model and the use of research-based best practice. The school may consider reviewing *Classroom Instruction That Works* or *The Art and Science of Teaching* by Robert J. Marzano.

Some faculty members are meeting regularly with other teachers who teach the same course to discuss curriculum and design end-of-term tests. At this time, faculty members are administering common assessments, but are not collecting or using data from the assessments to determine which students need additional help to master specific concepts. Also, there is little evidence that departments meet to discuss horizontal and vertical alignment of curriculum or study research-based best practices for curriculum development.

New teachers would benefit from collaborative discussion at regular department meetings. In addition, each department should actively mentor the new teachers and include peer observation in that process.

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

The Visiting Team found some evidence in the MYP/IB program that student are involved in high-order thinking skills, inquiry, and problem-solving activities. The Visiting Team observed student presentations, teachers' explanations of skills to be learned, and the real-world application of the skills."

The Visiting Team recommends that professional development on Bloom's Taxonomy be provided to all faculty members. Faculty members would then be able to review and reflect on their current instructional practice and begin revising lessons to increase the level of rigor through designing questions and/or projects that would move students from the knowledge level to being engaged in critical thinking, problem solving and application.

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

At the present time, some faculty members are collaborating on common summative assessments for specific courses. Currently, data is not collected and struggling learners to not have the opportunity to review concepts and re-test to demonstrate proficiency.

As the school begins to implement the PLC collaboration model, faculty members will collaborate on curriculum standards, research-based instructional strategies, and common formative assessments. Direct instruction and fill-in-the-blank worksheets will be used less frequently, and students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and application of core standards. Data collection and analysis will become a critical component of school improvement, and students mastering essential skills and knowledge will become a part of the school culture.

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

The Visiting Team recommends that the accelerated students be challenged and given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways. The faculty is commended for beginning to use summative common assessments. However, at this time assessment results are being used to determine a student's grade. Students who do not understand a concept should have the opportunity to review that concept and re-test so that **all** students can reach the intended learning outcomes.

The Visiting Team commends the efforts that have been made to collaborate on common assessments, and encourages each department to dig deeper in identifying the strengths and limitations in its presentation of the core concepts to the students.

## **Instruction**;

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

The Visiting Team observed direct instruction in many of the classrooms. However, some teachers were using a variety of teaching strategies and technology to engage students. Faculty members are encouraged to provide students and parents with website information (e.g., Teachertube, Davis-tube, math sites, etc) so that their students may review curriculum information at home or research a topic in greater depth. Also, the parents requested that teachers update their web pages so that students and parents have access to assignments after school hours. It may save time to have students e-mail assignments and homework to their teachers.

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?

There is ample evidence that the faculty and administration have institutionalized the Citizenship/behavior DRSL. As the school determines achievement goals, the PLC model will enable all faculty members to explicitly teach core concepts using research-based instructional strategies.

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

The Visiting Team recognizes that a large portion of the professional development time has been spent on the self-study process. This year, professional development has focused on how to effectively teach on the block schedule. The Visiting Team recommends that a small professional development committee be created to determine short-range and long-range professional development goals. Even though teachers have common prep periods and an early-out Friday, the majority of collaboration time is currently being used for individual preparation.

The Visiting Team recommends that the administration regularly visit department meetings to ensure that there is consistent implementation of the PLC model. The administrative team may also want to meet with each department before school starts to collaborate with the department on specific, measureable achievement goals. An

administrative/department follow-up meeting (including data collected) in May is recommended.

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?

There was some evidence that some departments and teams of teachers discuss and reflect upon their own practice as they develop and review the common assessments. The Visiting Team found significant evidence that the faculty is highly qualified and dedicated to the students. In addition, the MYP/IB teachers have received additional training in curriculum development, effective instruction, and preparing students for the MYP/IB tests.

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

Faculty members and students have increased access to Smart Boards, document cameras, student response systems, etc. Several faculty members expressed a desire to learn how to effectively use the new technologies to improve student engagement and understanding of core concepts.

### **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?

Teachers who teach the same course are developing end-of-term common assessments. However, the school is still in the early stages of developing a clear understanding and utilization of student achievement data. The Special Education Department is commended for creating powerful assessment tools to track individual student performance in academic courses.

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

Students currently receive an academic grade based on points, and often extra credit. The school does not have a school-wide grading scale. The Visiting Team recommends that the school move to a standards-based grading system so that individual progress is measured by knowledge and understanding of core standards. **All** students should have the opportunity to re-test on essential outcomes.

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

Syracuse Junior High School's high-stakes testing results demonstrate that the school is above the district and state average. However, the departments have not drilled down to determine which learners are struggling. Once identified, individual teachers can adapt their lessons to ensure that **all** students are challenged and gaining at least one year's growth each year.

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 new administration has not had the opportunity to design a professional development plan. The Visiting Team is confident that Bloom's Taxonomy will be the basis for future discussions regarding student assessment. As teachers bring student work to the table and discuss expected outcomes, the natural result is improved, focused curriculum, greater use of research-based instructional strategies, and valid, higher-order thinking questions adopted for class discussion and assessments.

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

A school-wide scoring tool for classroom behavior was developed and used by individual teachers. The school did not collect or analyze data by teacher, course, department or school-wide. In addition, the school developed a tool to categorize referrals to the administration, but neglected to collect or analyze data.

#### **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?
  - There is ample evidence that the administration and faculty are united in creating an inviting, safe, positive learning climate. The principal honors the work of the teachers and provides them with the tools they need to be effective.
- b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?

The new administrative team works extremely well together and makes effective decisions. The administrative team understands the need to use school-level as well as high-stakes testing data to monitor whole school and individual student achievement.

Through the development of successful PLCs, each department will have the opportunity to study best practices and implement its own effective instructional strategies.

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 students, teachers, staff and parents have enormous respect and admiration for the principal. The principal provides very skillful stewardship in providing a safe, effective, and efficient learning environment. As the school revisits its academic goals and action plan, the Visiting Team is confident that the school will design a strategic goal-oriented school improvement plan that will lead to improved student learning for **all** students.

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 administration empowers the entire school community to be actively involved in the decision-making process of the school. The SCC president expressed her appreciation for the school's regular, open communication. The SCC is included in many of the decisions regarding student programs and achievement.

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 developed an advisory period so that students would have the same faculty advisor for the three years they are at Syracuse Junior High School. Originally, the students met daily in advisory, and now meet only on Friday. The SCC, administration and faculty are considering other models for next year.

#### CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

## **<u>Culture of Continual Improvement:</u>**

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 Syracuse Junior High faculty has maintained focus groups and annual goal setting, even though there have been three new principals in three years. The Visiting

Team commends the staff members for their dedication to each other and to their students, as well as to the mission of the school.

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?

Some departments and grade-level groups have worked together to make inroads into implementation of the school goals, but have struggled due to numerous upheavals such as boundary changes, decreasing enrollment, changes in the administration, and the introduction of the block schedule.

The Visiting Team recommends that the administration create a small professional development committee that would create a focused professional development plan to study research-based best practice and monitor the implementation of Professional Learning Communities in each department.

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 school's action plan is focused on what the administration and faculty members will do. These goals could become the goals of the professional development committee. The action plan should be revised to list specific goals regarding what students will do to improve individual, department and school-wide achievement. The mission, beliefs and goals are focused on student learning, and the new action plan will align with the goals.

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

The Visiting Team has noted that Syracuse Junior High has many high-achieving students whose parents are satisfied with their education. The faculty and staff are to be commended for their dedication to their students, each other, and the school community.

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

Due to administrative changes, the action plan was revised several times in the past six years, and the school has improved most CRT scores each year.

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

The school's self-study adequately reported on the response to the previous Visiting Team's major recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

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

A cordial, collegial culture exists among the students, parents, staff, faculty and administration of Syracuse Junior High School. The PTA, SCC, and MYP/IB Committee are actively involved in the school's improvement plan. In addition, there are many local businesses that support the school's programs.

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

The school has a very supportive community, and formal and informal networks support student learning. The ISQ survey suggests that students would appreciate more individual student recognition. The principal sends a weekly e-mail to all parents, and the parents appreciate the timely information that is provided.

The Visiting Team recommends that the administrative team meet with students, parents and the business community to develop additional recognition for students. Each teacher could post superior student work in his/her classroom; students who improve their GPA by .5 over the previous term may be recognized at an ice cream party 15 minutes before school ends; local business partners or parents could mentor struggling learners or students who have dysfunctional homes, etc.

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

The Visiting Team commends the school for involving all stakeholders in the self-study process. The school's self-study was honest and concise, and clearly outlined the school's goals and academic strengths.

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

The parents had not seen a final copy of the self-study report. The Visiting Team would suggest that the school post the achievement data and ISQ results on the school's web page, and that the information be updated annually.

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

## **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends all stakeholders for a thorough, honest self-study process. The school's report was insightful and included detailed information and data regarding the school's strengths as well as the school's response to the previous team's recommendations. The School Community Council is commended for being actively involved in implementing new procedures to help struggling learners. The parent MYP/IB Committee is commended for its dedication to improving opportunities for the accelerated students.
- The Visiting Team commends the Syracuse Junior High School administration for having an open-door policy and gaining the trust, support and respect of the parents, students, faculty, and staff. The administrative team works well together and has a clear vision of the school's next steps to improve student learning for **all** students.
- The faculty is commended for its resiliency as the school experienced boundary changes, three new principals in three years, a decrease in enrollment, and other organizational changes. Students feel comfortable talking with their teachers and know their teachers care about them. The counselors are commended for formulating a personal SEOP with every student each year, as well as regularly meeting with parents and students who are dealing with personal problems.
- The Visiting Team commends the ISS supervisor for helping individual students find success and set personal goals. The Visiting Team commends the secretarial staff for their cheerful attitudes and the smooth operation of day-to-day tasks. The custodial staff is commended for maintaining a clean, safe building and responding quickly to the needs of the school.

## **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that Syracuse Junior High School analyze highstakes and school-level achievement and intervention data to determine, by name, the struggling learners. Once the struggling learners have been identified, longitudinal data should be collected to track progress and verify that individual students are achieving growth each year.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school persist in working to meet the academic needs of **all** students. As the new core is implemented, each faculty member should revise his/her curriculum and adapt instructional strategies to increase the level of rigor and challenge **all** students. Classroom discussions and assessments should include questions representing all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school's action plan be revised to focus on what students will need to do to improve student learning. The Visiting Team recommends that the school create a small professional development committee to determine what faculty members need to do to improve student learning and set short-and long-range goals in the implementation of Professional Learning Communities at Syracuse Junior High School. The faculty and administration should review educational best-practice research as they collaborate in departments to update curriculum, improve instruction, and assess students' knowledge of the core standards.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Syracuse Junior High School establish a policy regarding updating grades on my.DSD. Faculty members should regularly update their web pages so parents and students will have access to assignments, projects, and test dates. In addition, faculty members are encouraged to use e-mail to communicate with parents.