

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Wasatch Junior High School  
3750 South 3100 East  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84109**

**March 28-29, 2012**



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

# **Wasatch Junior High School**

**3750 South 3100 East  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84109**

**March 28-29, 2012**

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

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**Salt Lake City, Utah**

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## FOREWORD

The purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase the quality of instruction and student achievement. In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes in a three-step evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 28-29, 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 Wasatch 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 Christine Rydalch is also commended.

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

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

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P. O. Box 144200  
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Phone: (801) 377-0790

**District 14**

Dixie Allen  
218 West 5250 North  
Vernal, UT 84078  
Phone: (435) 789-0534

**District 15**

Debra G. Roberts  
Box 1780  
Beaver, UT 84713  
Phone: (435) 438-5843

**Isaiah "Ike" Spencer\*\*\*\***

1029 East 11780 South  
Sandy, UT 84094  
Phone: (385) 646-5360

**Tim Beagley\*\*\*\*\***

3974 South 3550 West  
West Valley City, UT 84119  
Phone: (801) 969-6454

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# WASATCH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

### School Administration

Christine Rydalch..... Principal  
Shauna Mackintosh..... Assistant Principal  
Sheri A. Sorensen..... Administrative Intern

### Counseling

Tamra Arnesen..... Counselor  
Robyn Bechthold ..... Counselor  
Karen Taylor ..... Counselor  
Darci Dixon.....Counselor Intern

### Support Staff

Ruth Leavitt ..... Attendance Secretary  
Janet Mendenhall ..... Principal's Secretary  
Linda Quinn ..... Bookkeeper  
Linda Thompson ..... Comprehensive Guidance Clerk  
Linda Lamoreaux .....Library Aide  
Marcy Dellos.....Special Ed Aide  
Amy Zenger ..... BH Aide  
Jay Dipo ..... Head Custodian  
Travis Burton ..... Assistant Custodian  
Ray McNeil.....Associate Custodian  
Rockne Sholz ..... Associate Custodian

### Faculty

Ann Aagard	Denise Ebenal	Sam McBride
Tom Allen	Emily Fletcher	Anna Morris
Pierre Baigue	Ann Florence	Mike Niederhauser
Althea Bennett	Lisa Foster	Erin Patrick
Tim Brown	Charity Gleason	Patricia Pedersen
Tony Byrom	Heather Green	Jodelle Peterson
Eric Carlson	LaDonna Gustafson	Kathy Potter
Melanie Clay	Toni Hull	Rachel Reese
Don Dalton	Malee Jergensen	Diane Stubbs
Karen Dodge	Gary Kroll	Kim Stucki

Kathy Thompson  
Vicki Turner

Mindy Wallace  
Paul Watson

Jamie Werner  
Chris Wightman

# **WASATCH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

**The Wasatch Junior High School community is dedicated to providing engaging academics and enriching experiences while encouraging individual creativity in a safe environment.**

## **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- Students are actively involved in the learning process, demonstrating their understanding and mastery of essential knowledge and skills.
- Students' unique talents and skills are acknowledged and encouraged.
- Students are responsible for their own choices.
- Instruction and assessment practices incorporate a variety of activities that accommodate different learning styles.
- Education is a partnership based on effective communication involving the school, parents, students and the community.

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

1. Responsible Citizen
  - Assumes responsibility for personal actions and acts ethically
  - Demonstrates an appreciation of and respect for the diversity of all people
2. Critical Thinker
  - Organization: Collects and organizes all relevant information necessary to complete the talk
  - Evaluation: Evaluates and analyzes new information and draws inferences and conclusions
  - Creative Thinking: Integrates existing knowledge and generates new and creative ideas

Date of visit: March 28-29, 2012

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Lori Gardner, Park City School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Steven Geisler, Centerville Junior High School, Davis School District

Vicki Hatch, Mt. Nebo Junior High School, Nebo School District

**VISITING TEAM REPORT**  
**WASATCH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

Wasatch Jr. High School has approximately 882 students and 35 teachers as of 2012. The original school building opened in 1959, but tragically burned down in 2005. The faculty, staff, and students combined with Churchill Jr. High School for three subsequent years of schooling. In 2008 the present building opened, where the rich traditions that began in 1959 still continue today.

These traditions include a very strong academic focus, with CRT scores far exceeding all district and state standards; a strong visual and performing arts program that attracts students from across the valley; a variety of course offerings where students learn new skills in an engaging environment; and a dedicated and qualified faculty and staff that care deeply for the students at Wasatch. Currently, 646 out of 882 students have a GPA of 3.5 or above, with 426 of these having a 3.85 or above. Due to the strong academic focus and successful programs at Wasatch, approximately 60 percent of the student body travels from outside of the school boundaries to attend the school yearly.

Students are successful at Wasatch for many reasons, including support and assistance in many ways outside the regular school day. Community and parental support and assistance are also key factors that contribute to the success experienced at Wasatch Jr. High School.

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

The school faculty and administration did a comprehensive review of student data. The faculty was divided into seven groups, and each group was given data and the *Guiding Questions for the School Profile*. The school profile confirms that the school has fairly static characteristics: It is a school of choice, with more than 65 percent of students residing out of school boundaries. Its student body is mostly Caucasian, with only 17 percent students coming from ethnic minority backgrounds.

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

While the Visiting Team applauds the effort put forth by the administration to make the school profile a collaborative work, for the purpose of informing the public it needs to be organized in a more concise manner to be easily understood. In some cases, the narrative repeated information several times throughout the profile.

Demographic information needs to be presented in a way that conveys the information more clearly. Some of the information was presented in charts that were difficult to read and relied on numbers instead of percentages.

The school did a thorough job of disaggregating student achievement; in some cases, the information was too revealing for a public document. While the Visiting Team commends the school for drilling down to the individual student level, the Visiting Team recommends that care be taken to ensure that any data included in the school profile is not so disaggregated as to reveal information about individual students. Subgroups of ten or fewer students might be labeled as “other” for the purpose of reporting, although it is still very important that teachers and administrators consider their achievements as individuals.

Other data, such as information on behavior, attendance, and tardiness, should also be included. As the school tracks the success of mentoring programs, AVID, and the institutionalization of the desired results for student learning (DRSLs), this information should also be included in the school profile.

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

The self-study accurately reflects students’ academic achievement; however, it was based on the work of committees during the 2010-11 school year. It was interesting to see what evidence each committee that worked on the profile included as being pertinent to the question it was addressing. The approach taken, to involve the entire faculty in the development of the school profile, served to create a shared understanding of the school’s strengths and limitations. The Visiting Team recommends the continuation of this process, but perhaps a starting point might be brainstorming by the leadership team as to what different types of data might be used and what additional questions should drive the work. This could then be provided to the committees as a foundation. It is important that the work of the committees in revising the profile be done yearly, and that it be compiled in such a manner as to make the profile easy to understand and less redundant.

The Visiting Team also recommends that a yearly review be done by the some semblance of the accreditation focus groups to ensure that the school is meeting the objectives of the action plan. The work will add accountability to school improvement efforts and will serve to enhance the shared understanding of the faculty and administration.

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

Update the data in the profile yearly so that it serves as a constant contributor to the school improvement efforts.

## 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 Visiting Team commends the school community for the degree to which it involved all stakeholders in the revision of the mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs. Efforts were made to create a mission statement that could truly illustrate the purpose of the school and guide its actions. Using data, the faculty and administration discussed the relevancy of the previous mission statement and beliefs and then spent considerable time in small and whole groups revising them to make them reflective of what the school is doing.

After considering data, the faculty decided to focus on the DRSLs of Critical Thinking and Responsible Citizen. Faculty members then met in committees to develop the indicators and rubrics, to design posters, and to develop curricula for the teaching of the DRSLs. Students volunteered to be part of the rubric committee. Each committee presented its ideas to the whole faculty.

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

There is clear alignment between the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs. The attention given to alignment is commendable and, provided that the leadership maintains the vision for the school, the Visiting Team is confident that programs and practices will be reflective of the mission and beliefs and that the DRSLs will be directly connected to teaching and learning.

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

Principal Rydalch provided the format by which teams of teachers and students defined the indicators. Specific attention was given to having these indicators written to illustrate what abilities a student should have if he/she has internalized the skill.

The defined indicators were used to develop rubrics. A committee of teachers and students worked to develop the rubrics. The rubrics are worded in student-friendly language, and have started to be used in professional learning with teachers and classroom activities with students.

- 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 commends the administration and faculty of Wasatch Junior High School for the degree to which they have engaged in the meaningful work of developing a mission statement, a set of defined beliefs, and results for student learning that are reflective of the school's identity and the achievements and needs of students. While the DRSLs have not become "institutionalized," the school has done considerable work in a short amount of time to build common understanding and consensus. The Visiting Team observed the posters in the classrooms and in common areas of the school, as well as prominent information is in the student planner, and a plan has been designed and implemented for the formal teaching of the DRSLs.

**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 staff works very hard to exceed the standards laid out in the Utah Core Curriculum and the District Curriculum Maps and Standards. The curriculum at Wasatch Junior High is clearly defined and challenging. Students are challenged and work to a very high standard, pushing instructors to be innovative and knowledgeable in their content areas. Students perform very well on the District Benchmark Tests and the Criterion-Referenced Tests, demonstrating how well the State and District Core Standards are covered. The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to develop the integration required by the new Common Core, and encourages departments to work collaboratively to integrate curriculum.

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

The Visiting Team observed a variety in teaching practices and methods. Assignments and lessons are differentiated to allow students with a wide range of learning styles to be challenged and active in the learning process. There is a large offering of courses and activities that challenge and involve a wide range of students, as well. Upper-level math classes, the gifted and talented program, Robotics Club, Art Gallery, music and theater, Academic Team, and sports are some of the very successful programs at the school that include a great number of students, allowing each to be involved and challenged in a meaningful manner.

- 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 school leadership team developed the plan and, in collaboration with the faculty, developed the lessons and activities that drive the school's institutionalization of the DRSLs. These lessons and activities are used in every classroom. The entire faculty supports the quarterly writing assignments and the bi-weekly mini-lessons, and each class participates in developing these DRSLs. The DRSLs are prominently displayed

in all classrooms and public areas, and are on the cover of the student planner as a constant reminder of expectations for students.

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

The Criterion-Referenced Test results are closely scrutinized, looking for areas where teachers can improve. The mentoring program, as well as the Friday tutoring, is aimed specifically at those students not performing well on assessments and who struggle with grades. The District Benchmark test results are used as well to determine which students are struggling. The Visiting Team recommends that departments develop common assessments to further identify struggling students and ensure that all are reaching the desired level of proficiency.

**Instruction:**

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

The Visiting Team observed a variety of instructional strategies that engaged students with different learning styles. Direct instruction, demonstration or modeling teaching, collaborative learning activities, laboratory work, and independent student work were all observed by the Visiting Team. Students reported high satisfaction with the types of activities in their classes. Parents also reported high satisfaction with the activities and learning opportunities their students have at Wasatch Junior High.

- 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?*

The critical thinking quarterly writing project is implemented in each classroom throughout the school. The plan the staff has developed gives teachers specific guidelines, but freedom to develop the writing project to meet their needs. The bi-weekly activities aimed at the responsible citizen DRSL have well thought out lessons developed so each teacher is focusing on the same area each session. The activities are varied and involve students in activities that are engaging and relevant.

The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty actively move toward the integration of DRSLs through the development of a plan to explicitly teach the indicators, the creation of assessment tools to measure effectiveness, and professional development to enhance the teachers' instructional capacity.

- 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 school's professional development has included training to implement the new Common Core Standards. An effort has been made to ensure that teachers are

prepared for the new curriculum and implement the new standards to ensure a seamless transition. Numerous teachers are enrolled in the ELL training taught through the district. Marsha Tate trained the faculty during the staff development time as well.

The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and faculty develop a deeper level of staff development that is more institutionalized. This should include a greater opportunity for self-reflection, internalization, feedback, and accountability. Goals and expectations for implementation need to be articulated. The intent of the professional development should be to improve the instruction of all teachers and increase student learning. Measurement tools to assess the effectiveness of the professional learning should be used.

- 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 staff at Wasatch Junior High is full of experienced, quality teachers. Parents and students expressed their appreciation for the quality teachers that teach at Wasatch Junior High. Many teachers have developed quality programs that attract students from all across the Salt Lake valley. The quality of the staff members and the instruction they provide draws more than half of the student body from outside the school boundaries. The Visiting Team observed a wide range of instructional approaches that demonstrate knowledge of effective teaching practices and an effort to continually improve 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?*

The school has recently trained on the Canvas Learning Management System, which allows parents and students greater access to teachers' materials and content. As this is implemented further, it will be a valuable asset to assist student learning. The school has a well-developed plan to continue to provide technology training as well as resources to teachers to facilitate instruction.

**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 Wasatch Junior High faculty and staff have examined data to help them determine assessments for various classes. Expectations for student achievement are high, and this is reflected in consistently high CRT scores. Assessments and learning activities in most classes are rigorous and challenging to students. The inclusion of the Critical Thinking and Responsible Citizen rubrics in all classes has provided

school-wide writing activities for all content areas. Continued implementation of the new Common Core will also allow for progression in assessment improvement. The Visiting Team noticed the wide variety of learning activities provided in classes. The staff should continue to develop assessments that clearly measure student learning and achievement.

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

Teachers and staff members meet periodically to discuss improvement of student learning by grade level. Teachers strive to assess and grade fairly using a variety of assessments. Students themselves understand the purpose of the various assessments and feel confident about their academic achievement as a whole. Students reported engaging in active and meaningful learning activities several times a day. Parents indicated an appreciation for the willingness of teachers to work with students on an individual basis, creating a more equitable grading process.

The Visiting Team recommends that the staff continue assessing school-wide and individual progress by comparing student samples and developing cross-curricular learning activities.

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

Data is derived from CRT scores, district benchmark tests, MyAccess, SRI, Utah Writes, and other sources. Some data, such as CRT scores, is shared with all teachers. The Visiting Team commends the school on consistently high achievement on these tests. Most departments within the school have set goals to identify and give additional support to students with lower scores. Many of the assessment tools provide data that can then be used diagnostically to help improve student performance. In individual classrooms, a wide variety of assessments are used to enhance student learning.

Additionally, data is used to determine need for supplemental programs such as the mentoring program, tutoring program, or AVID. These programs specifically target students who may be struggling, and they have been effective in helping students be more successful in school.

The Visiting Team recommends that additional data be gathered and used, including data from 2011 and behavioral data. Also, it would be helpful to look at attendance data, particularly at the number of students who have excused absences, and using this information to improve student achievement.

- 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?*

Teachers at Wasatch Junior High are highly qualified and very knowledgeable in their areas of expertise. They are beginning to incorporate more professional development, but much of this has been in the form of short-term trainings and workshops. Staff members would like ESL training for more teachers to facilitate possible changing student populations in the future. Some training with WIDA has taken place.

The collaboration process is not yet fully defined. While time is allotted weekly for school improvement, collaboration itself is somewhat infrequent. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff continue seeking professional development, especially in the area of collaboration and PLCs.

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

In the past year, members of the Wasatch Junior High staff have worked together to develop lessons instructing students about the DRSLs. They have also developed rubrics for each DRSL and taught the students how to use them. Students were given writing assignments in every class, using the rubrics at least once per term. Good progress has been made in making staff and students aware of the selected DRSLs.

Continued work using the rubrics will allow the collection of quantitative, longitudinal data on student performance over time. Common assessments focusing on the DRSL indicators can be designed and refined as progression continues.

### **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 school leadership has established a very positive learning climate. High expectations are held for the students and staff. The staff and faculty are appreciated for what they do, and the administration works to support them in all that they do. Student and faculty achievements are recognized and celebrated.

The administration is very visible within the school. Teachers, students, and parents expressed their appreciation that the administration has an open door policy and is quick to respond to issues. The principal is extremely organized and manages to coordinate the work of school improvement in a way that makes it manageable for teachers.

- 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?*

Principal Rydalch has orchestrated the process of self-study and school improvement in an exemplary fashion. It is reflective of her interest in creating opportunities for all stakeholders to own the process and product of school improvement. The result is a high level of commitment from staff, faculty, and parents, because they understand why certain things need to happen and how to get the work done.

Principal Rydalch started the effort toward accreditation with an in-depth analysis of current practices and programs. She then created a leadership team and guided them in the work of collecting and analyzing data and using the information to develop a comprehensive plan for school improvement. Throughout the process, considerable attention was given to communicating with all stakeholders regarding the process and the product.

- 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?*

School-wide policies and procedures are consistent with the school's mission and beliefs and are focused on maximizing student learning and success. Careful thought and studied planning have been done to develop and implement the DRSLs and make them something that will truly enhance student achievement. In a school that already has such high achievement, it is commendable that the administration and faculty are still focused on improvement and actively work to ensure that all students are provided opportunities for relevant learning and success.

- 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?*

All stakeholders are routinely invited to participate in the creation of school programs. Students and parents are frequently consulted for their feedback on school practices. The student government and other student organizations are often given the responsibility for creating a response to situations, such as bullying. Their suggestions are then put into action.

The School Community Council and PTSA are very active. They are given the license to do their jobs, and in turn, both bodies have considerable respect for the administration and faculty and are dedicated to supporting their efforts.

The administration works to share responsibility for the school with the staff and faculty. Principal Rydalch is a strong leader who sets the course for the work, but clearly communicates that everyone has a responsibility to do his/her part in improving the school.

- 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?*

Every staff member, teacher, counselor, and administrator has been asked to mentor a student. Counselors and administrators identify students, and all mentoring candidates have an individual interview with the principal where they are asked to make a commitment to the goals of the program. Students, with their mentors' and parents' assistance, make goals for each term. The mentors meet with regularly with their mentees to monitor their progress. Students and parents spoke about how effective this program has been when the mentor has been dedicated and consistent. However, they spoke of how ineffective mentoring is when the mentor does not fully embrace the program.

Other than mentoring, there is no formal system through which each staff member knows a student well, although teachers do get to know students through the many activities that the school sponsors. The school has also established the means by which students can anonymously report problems.

One of the challenging issues the school faces is inherent in the fact that it draws so many out-of-boundary students. Some students and parents expressed the concern that it is hard to create a sense of community. Additionally, while students stated that the school is safe, they did share the fact that sometimes there are divisions based on academic achievement and ethnicity. These students would not be ones who would be connected to mentors.

The importance of forming positive relationships between young adolescents and adults is central to effective middle-level practice. The Visiting Team recommends that the school study the best way to create a formal system to lend to individual support and to facilitate the teaching of the DRSLs.

#### **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 administration and staff of Wasatch Junior High have done considerable work to develop an action plan that is based on the school's self-study and its intent to construct a plan that will actually be followed. It was clear to the Visiting Team through interviews and observation that the plan has buy-in from stakeholders willing to put it into motion.

- 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?*

One of the areas of focus defined in the plan is to increase the quality and frequency of collaboration through the development of professional learning communities. Work will begin the fall of 2012 with the training of the staff. It is assumed that this structure will provide the means by which professional learning can take place. It is clear that teachers have attended to their professional learning needs on their own, and the Visiting Team commends them for the degree to which many demonstrate a desire for lifelong learning.

As the school moves forward, it is recommended that professional learning become embedded into the course of the school year. Professional development should be ongoing, and should engage the learner in practice, reflection, collaboration, and accountability for the learning. Consideration will need to be given to how the school will keep moving forward while bringing new teachers up to speed.

- 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 improvement plan has defined comprehensive action steps for achieving the school's goals. The school has determined the resources, timelines and responsibilities for implementing the action steps.

It is important that, as the school moves forward, the timeline that accompanies the plan be fleshed out yearly to include professional learning to support the changes in curriculum and instruction that will be inherit with the new state core. Measures of accountability also need to be written and clearly communicated.

The Visiting Team recommends that, as the school moves forward, the action plan be reviewed yearly, and that specific dates, accountability measures, and persons responsible be clearly defined.

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

The administration has clearly brought the staff and faculty along to an understanding that the school cannot afford to rest upon past accomplishments, but must change and progress as its student body becomes more diverse both ethnically and culturally and addresses the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Principal Rydalch has adopted a measured approach, placing value on what is working well and using data to drive decisions. She has created a leadership team and has empowered them to make decisions. This has served to increase the buy-in from the staff and faculty.

Principal Rydalch also works closely with parents. She listens closely and is quick to act on suggestions. She is open and transparent, and parents feel that she is receptive to their interests.

The Visiting Team found the school community to be energized about the future and ready to really work on school improvement.

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

In essence, the school has done little toward implementing the original action plan since the last full visit. Its first goal was to establish a middle-level committee to research and create established practices consistent with the needs of young adolescents. As the school reports, this committee was established and “quickly determined that the middle school concept would not be easily incorporated in the current model.” The school did implement a program for remediation that lasted for five years without an evaluation into its effectiveness. With the change in administration, a different model for remediation and support has been implemented with data that suggests it is making a positive impact.

A second part of the plan was to create a comprehensive professional development program based on the school’s mission and DRSLs. Nothing that was defined as part of the plan was accomplished.

A fire in 2005 stymied school improvement and resulted in the need for the school to relocate and share a building with another junior high for three years. Considerable work has been done since the appointment of Ms. Rydalch as principal in 2010. The Visiting Team is confident that the current action plan will be a driving force in the work of the school for the next few years.

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

The major recommendation of the investigation of best practices, grade teaming, and balanced collaboration has not been acted upon. Collaboration has been sporadic since 2004. The lack of intent was originally blamed upon the fire, but even after several years, nothing of substance took place until 2010. Given that the intervening time between 2010 and 2012 has been spent in the process of self-study and the work of accreditation, it will be important that there be a focus on capturing the time set aside for collaboration to build a shared understanding of purposes and processes, and to hold individuals accountable for the work of PLCs.

The school has made progress on the recommendation of increasing the use of hands-on activities in mathematics. The Visiting Team saw evidence of this on the visit. As the department implements the Utah Core Standards, this will be increasingly a part of the regular learning experience. The recommendation to “write across the curriculum” will also be a natural extension of the Utah Core, so it will be necessary

that teachers collaborate within grades and across curriculum to create integrated learning experiences.

Finally, the school has acted upon the recommendation of including staff members as leaders in the process of school improvement. The members of the leadership team have been given the responsibility to help lead formal meetings and small groups. It is clear that the administration is working to establish and support shared leadership.

## CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The school community exhibits positive working relationships between teachers, administrators, support staff, and students. Many programs are in place to foster community building. Students have opportunities to participate in extended art, music, sports, or drama programs. There are clubs and organizations such as Academic Team, Math Counts, SBOs and Cheer. Additionally, reward programs like Student of the Month and Warrior Way celebrate student achievement in non-academic areas. The wide variety of programs available helps provide a place where students can feel they belong. None of the stakeholders reported gang activity or drug use as being problems at the school. While bullying is an occasional issue, students and parents both felt that bullying incidents were dealt with fairly and in a timely manner. Using the Buddy Box, holding assemblies, and having short school-wide lessons are all measures that create awareness of bullying and help keep incidents down. All of these things create a safe environment, as reflected in the school's mission statement.

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

Parents are engaged in the school's activities through monthly newsletters, personal phone calls from teachers and administrators, the school website and individual teacher websites. Great effort is made to communicate clearly with members of the community. The PTA and Community Council are very active. Parents feel comfortable being at the school, and they feel supported in efforts to improve their students' learning.

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

In preparing the self-study, the school utilized input from PTSA, the Community Council, and parent surveys. Several focus groups had parent and student members to get more input. In light of the fact that many parents had to travel great distances to

participate, this is particularly impressive. The Visiting Team commends the school for the degree to which members of the community were represented in the process.

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

Monthly newsletters and information on the school website were helpful in making parents aware of all aspects of the accreditation process. DRSL lessons communicated information about the process to students through faculty teaching. While keeping websites up to date can be challenging, the school works hard to ensure timely communication to students and parents.

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

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the degree to which the entire faculty and administration went through the self-study process together. The process provided the means for all stakeholders, including parents, and students to provide input to the interpretation of the data and to the development of a school improvement plan. To have developed such a depth of understanding of the process and the outcomes in such a short amount of time took considerable effort, and this is apparent in the school's self-study.
- The Visiting Team commends Wasatch Junior High for the degree to which it has created a sense of community, even though it is not necessarily a community school. The faculty works to create community through class and extra-curricular activities in which students report there is something for everyone. It is clear that stakeholders invest a lot in the school and take great pride in it.
- The Visiting Team commends Wasatch Junior High for its high quality programs and instructional practice. Teachers work very hard to engage their students in powerful learning activities that promote higher-level thinking and quality products.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for its mentoring and targeted programs for students who struggle. Teachers, counselors, and administrators are taking proactive steps to provide the opportunity for all students to succeed.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that Wasatch Junior High establish the means by which data can be routinely gathered and utilized in ways that inform instruction. A

standing data committee should be formed for this purpose in order to ensure that all significant data is used to inform decision-makers and be included in the school profile.

- The Visiting Team recommends that since teachers and administrators have identified students who are struggling, the next step should be to reflectively consider what needs to be incorporated into the regular instruction. Consideration needs to be given to differentiation in instruction and an examination of homework policies. As the student body becomes more socially and ethnically diverse, it will be important that teachers pay particular attention to what students are expected to provide for their learning and what Tier I interventions can be provided during class time.
- The Visiting Team recommends that a professional plan be designed to support the school plan. While the Visiting Team commends teachers for the degree to which they are dedicated to their own professional growth, there has been insufficient attention to what the faculty needs collectively to meet its goals. The school should utilize early release time for the purpose of initial learning, the incorporation of the learning through collaborative planning, and then accountability that involves opportunities for observation and reflection.
- Finally, the Visiting Team recommends that the faculty engage in greater collaboration to ensure that student learning is connected across disciplines. The Utah Core Standards have applicability in all disciplines, and the opportunity is ripe to use them as a means of integrated cross-curricular learning.