

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Benchmark School
592 West 1350 South
Woods Cross, Utah 84087**

November 3, 2010



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

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Benchmark School
592 West 1350 South
Woods Cross, Utah 84087**

November 3, 2010

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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

**DIVISION OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

Brenda Hales, Associate Superintendent

**Sydnee Dickson, Director
Teaching and Learning**

**Linda Alder, Coordinator
Teaching and Learning**

**Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist
Teaching and Learning**

Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

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

The evaluation, November 3, 2010, 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 Benchmark 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 Michelle Brown is also commended.

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

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

UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

250 East 500 South
P. O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200

District 1

Tami W. Pyfer
52 Ballard Way
Logan, UT 84321
Phone: (435) 753-7529

District 6

Michael G. Jensen
4139 S Aubrey Ln.
West Valley City, UT 84128
Phone: (801) 968-5960

District 11

David L. Crandall
13464 Saddle Ridge Drive
Draper, UT 84020
Phone: (801) 501-9095

District 2

Greg W. Haws
5841 West 4600 South
Hooper, UT 84315
Phone: (801) 985-7980

District 7

Leslie B. Castle
2465 St. Mary's Drive
Salt Lake City, UT 84108
Phone: (801) 581-9752

District 12

Carol Murphy
463 West 140 North
Midway, UT 84049
Phone: (435) 729-0941

District 3

Craig E Coleman
621 South Main St.
Genola, UT 84655
Phone: (801) 754-3655

District 8

Janet A. Cannon
5256 Holladay Blvd.
Salt Lake City, UT 84117
Phone: (801) 272-3516

District 13

C. Mark Openshaw
3329 Piute Drive
Provo, UT 84604
Phone: (801) 377-0790

District 4

David L. Thomas
7875 South 2250 East
South Weber, UT 84405
Phone: (801) 479-7479

District 9

Denis R. Morrill
6016 South 2200 West
Taylorsville, UT 84118
Phone: (801) 969-2334

District 14

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

District 5

Kim R. Burningham
932 Canyon Crest Drive
Bountiful, UT 84010
Phone: (801) 292-9261

District 10

Laurel Brown
5311 South Lucky Clover Ln.
Murray, UT 84123
Phone: (801) 261-4221

District 15

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

Meghan Holbrook*

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

Rosanita Cespedes*

1470 S 400 E
Salt Lake City, UT 84115
Phone: (801) 466-7371

Charlene Lui**

766 N 900 W
Orem, UT 84057
Phone: (801) 230-5109

Douglas J. Holmes***

274½ 25th Street
Ogden UT 84401
Phone: (801) 479-8163

Larry K. Shumway

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Twila B. Affleck

Secretary

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***UCAT Representative

7/22/2009

BENCHMARK SCHOOL

OWNERSHIP

Owner of Record.....Psychiatric Solutions, Inc.
Joey Jacobs.....President

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Barry Woodward.....CEO
Craig Scholnick..... COO
Michelle Brown Principal
Kirk Rawson CFO
Terry Locher Human Resources

Medical Administration

Bret Marsha, M.D. Medical Director
Michael Connolly, M.D.
Jerome Vance, M.D.
Tori Weight..... Director of Nursing

Support Staff

Related Services Staff

David Gambles, Psychologist
Tom Gurrister, Speech Therapy
Michelle Asay, Librarian Consultant

Keith Louw, LMFT
Scott Roper, LMFT
Chris Tippets, CSW

Therapy

Larry Jeffs, LMFT, Program
Administrator
Leeanne Hess, LCSW, Program
Administrator
David Asay, LCSW
Mary Barker, LCSW
Nelson Clayton, CPC-1
Ben Farmer, LMFT

Nursing

Cathie Myer
Elaine Champagne

Recreation Therapy

Anna Nash, TRS/CTRS, Program Director
Hillary Black, TRT
William Lindsey, TRT
Dennis Springsteed, TRT, Vocational
Coordinator

Faculty

Allan BetzMusic, Special Education
Clay BrekoHistory
Michelle Brown Reading, Special Education
John ChmielHistory, Special Education
Steve McCormickMath, Science
Anna Nash.....Physical Education
Lance Pecht.....Political Science, Special Education
Dolores Rowley English
Nancy Ryan.....Education Assistant

BENCHMARK SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Benchmark School is to assist students in overcoming life's adversities, in order to improve their quality of life, and become productive member of society.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- All Students can learn when high standards and clearly defined expectations for student learning are visible through-out the school and stated often by staff and students.
- Teachers are positive role models who strive to establish and maintain positive relationships with students based on mutual respect, which heightens student motivation and provides a firm foundation for learning.
- Positive learning environments, differentiated instructional strategies, and quality instruction that allows for many response opportunities produces life-long learners who have skills necessary to be responsible citizens.
- Positive reinforcement and timely feedback that recognizes individual student success builds confidence and encourages appropriate behavior responses in multiple settings and fosters positive long-term outcomes,
- Collaboration among teachers, staff, parents, and all other stakeholders creates a school culture that values good behavior, quality education, and effective transition planning.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Personal/social Responsibility
2. Learning to Learn
3. Collaborative Worker

Date of visit: November 3, 2010

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Robert Stillwell, Accreditation Consultant, Utah State Office of Education/Northwest Accreditation Commission, Visiting Team Chairperson

Judith Jacques, Education Director, Island View RTC, Syracuse, UT

Jennifer Capellen, Teacher, Island View RTC, Syracuse, UT

VISITING TEAM REPORT

BENCHMARK SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Benchmark School is a small, male residential school located in Bountiful, Utah that was established in July 1986. Benchmark School was established at the same time that Benchmark Behavioral Health Systems was created; it works to comply with state laws in providing education for adolescent clients who were absent from their regular schools for more than 10 days. The school serves approximately 80 male students, ages 13 to 18. The intent of the program is to provide a highly structured educational program that addresses remediation curriculum to increase the academic skills of students who are performing below grade level, provide academic courses based on the Utah State Core Curriculum, and help improve student's social interaction. The school also offers General Education Development (GED) instruction for adult students who are preparing to take the GED exam as well as online college courses through Weber State College for students who have graduated from high school.

Benchmark School operates year round, and students come from a variety of states around the U.S. Students have varied academic backgrounds, and it is very evident that the Academic Program works to fit the needs of each individual student. Most students lack the necessary skills to be successful in public school settings; therefore, they require specialized instruction and support to reach their full academic potential. It is worth noting that approximately 60 percent of the students at Benchmark have an Individual Education Plan.

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

The overall perceptions of teachers, students and faculty members at Benchmark are very positive. It is also apparent from this report that the students feel that the academic staff is genuinely interested and concerned about their progress, learning, and well-being as students. A positive correlation has been made between the implementation of the Personally and Socially Responsible DRSL; this has led to an improvement in overall academic performance as well as decreased office referrals. The school also noted patterns in growth over approximately one year in reading, spelling, and mathematics. Test results in reading comprehension have undergone nearly two years' growth in one year.

It was evident from the findings of the profile and from the visit that Benchmark School truly used the process of accreditation to improve the overall functioning and learning of its students.

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

Benchmark School's profile was extremely comprehensive and truly reflected the school's limitations and strengths. No modifications are suggested for the profile at this time.

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

Benchmark School's self-study appears to reflect the school's current limitations and strengths quite accurately. The school appears to understand its specific limitations, and appears very invested in making changes happen. It was evident to members of the Visiting Team that all staff and faculty members at Benchmark were very aware of their strengths as well. The staff is vibrant, dedicated, and invested not only in providing a great educational opportunity to its students, but providing a family-like environment that is conducive to student change.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

As Benchmark begins to "roll out" subsequent DRSLs, Learning to Learn and Collaborative Worker, it will be necessary to measure progress on all three DRSLs. The school has accumulated data on the Personally and Socially Responsible DRSL; however, analysis and plans for improvements regarding the DRSLs should be explored.

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?*

Benchmark school serves a very unique and diverse student population. The school's mission statement, belief statements, and DRSLs are a unifying force by which all members of the school community align their instructional and professional practices. These were developed collaboratively with members both within and outside of the academic services area. They identify the school's vision and the manner in which they want to achieve their identified goals for the students in an excellent manner.

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

The mission and belief statements systematically support the DRSLs. They identify the overriding philosophical principles which drive both the implementation and assessment of the DRSLs.

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

Benchmark School has identified three DRSLs: Personal/Social Responsibility, Learning to Learn, and Collaborative Worker. All three DRSLs have rubrics associated with them for assessment purposes that were developed collaboratively. As of the time of the self-study, the first DRSL, Personal/Social Responsibility, has been systematically implemented and assessed. The rubric is used to assess student growth as it relates to Personal/Social Responsibility throughout each student's time at Benchmark. Student scores are averaged to assess school-wide effectiveness at implementing and teaching this DRSL. In addition, Benchmark has used other qualitative measures to assess the effectiveness of implementing Personal/Social Responsibility. The school has collected data on student office referrals that indicate success at this DRSL's implementation.

- 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 mission and belief statements are an apparent reflection of the manners in which Benchmark School operates on all levels. There is no incongruence evident between the mission and belief statements and the day-to-day operations of the school. The DRSLs are evident in the culture of the school among both the students and the staff. Both speak readily of the DRSLs and their use at the school. In addition, the DRSLs are significantly connected to the residential and therapeutic piece of Benchmark 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?*

Teamwork is clearly evident among the staff members. The school has effectively designed DRSL rubrics. The curriculum is aligned to the Utah Core and Utah Life Skills.

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

The Benchmark teachers probed for understanding from all students. There was a high degree of problem solving evident. Application of knowledge was being taught and learned.

- 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 fully implemented its first DRSL, Personal/Social Responsibility, and has developed and used the rubric to report the results.

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

Benchmark teachers use formal and informal assessments on all students. School-wide, the Wide Range Achievement Test is administered to each student at least twice. Teachers also use in-class assessments to ensure that all students are showing progress on achieving DRSLs.

Instruction:

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

Benchmark teachers used a wide variety of strategies to meet the needs of all students. Special education services are provided when appropriate. During the visit, some students were in college prep curriculum, and one student was taking online courses from Weber State University. The range of student needs was quite wide, and the responses from teachers were comprehensive.

- 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 school has developed rubrics for assessing student progress on all three DRSLs. The school has implemented the scoring and reporting for one DRSL and is beginning to use the rubric for the other two DRSLs

- 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 Benchmark administration provides release time for teachers to visit other centers to learn best practices, sends staff to accreditation training and assists with payment of tuition to help teachers obtain special education certification.

- 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 degree of education and credentialing of the teachers at Benchmark contributes to the high quality of instruction delivered to students. The students notice the high competency level of the staff compared to schools they have previously attended.

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

Due to the nature of the Benchmark program, student Internet use is highly restricted. Computer classes are offered, and computer use is allowed when appropriate. Teachers make use of technology in their classrooms.

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?*

Classroom assessments are clearly tied to the performance-based standards identified by teachers. Students know the expected level of performance and how to meet it. There is a systematic approach to assessing student learning.

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

Instruction and assessment is adequately differentiated for ability levels. Standardized tests with widely accepted norm bases are used to note student progress as well. Teachers differentiate instruction and assessment based on individual needs, which can include not only ability levels but cultural and social differences as well.

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

Benchmark School has made an outstanding effort at systematically using data to guide its self-study and make decisions regarding improvement efforts. The school has a unique challenge in its ever-changing student population, which makes longitudinal studies difficult. However, Benchmark has made significant attempts to conduct such studies, and made good use of the data collected. The school has identified significant and applicable indicators to measure student growth in all areas relating to school improvement, including student achievement as it applies to both core standards as well as DRSLs.

- 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?*

Professional development for teachers at Benchmark has been primarily and appropriately focused on DRSL development and teacher licensure. In the future, the students will benefit from teacher professional development in the area of assessment.

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

The rubric to assess all three identified DRSL's was developed collaboratively. Teachers have a clear understanding of its intent and use. However, the teaching staff could benefit from collaborating on scoring students together to achieve greater consistency in the skills and behaviors identified on the rubrics.

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 leadership team at Benchmark School is extremely invested in quality instruction that promotes a positive learning climate for both teachers and students. Barry Woodward and Michelle Brown have assembled an academic team that is committed to promoting professional development among the staff as well as being committed to individualized curriculum and scaffolding of instruction to meet individual students' needs.

- 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?*

Decisions appear to be made using data, research, and progress oriented information. Decisions are made based on data derived from student work samples and teacher observation. Each student's individual needs are taken into account in terms of assessment and designing curriculum for remediation. Extensive survey data, pre- and post-DRSL data and WRAT results are all examined in order to determine the best decisions for the school, and ultimately the students.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?*

The school goals, DRSLs and school improvement plan appear to be put at the forefront of the priority list at Benchmark School. All three of the aforementioned components appear to contribute to a safe, efficient and effective learning environment. It was through the implementation of the first DRSL (Personally and Socially Responsible) that the entire school community saw and documented changes in behavior and overall achievement. The first DRSL was implemented to address bullying and encourage pro-social behaviors through the use of positive behavior supports and interventions.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?*

The school leadership team empowers the entire school community and encourages commitment, participation and collaboration for student learning through direct teaching of the DRSLs. The entire school community, as well as other stakeholder input, helped to design DRSLs that all students should understand and be able to do once they complete high school. High academic standards, clear expectations, and respect for all people empowers students with the knowledge and life skills needed to be productive citizens of society. Teachers are also positive role models who strive to establish and maintain positive relationships with students based on mutual respect. Collaboration among teachers, parents, staff, and all other stakeholders helps to create a positive school culture in which everyone's perspectives are considered before implementing decisions.

- 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?*

There is an extremely tight-knit educational community present at Benchmark School that knows individual students well and accommodates their learning needs. As was mentioned before, approximately 60 percent of all students currently have Individual Education Plans. Teachers must be familiar with each student's individual needs in order to accommodate and plan curriculum instruction that complies with federal laws. The diverse learning needs of students are addressed without compromising the essential knowledge and skills that students are expected to achieve throughout the Utah Core Curriculum.

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?*

Benchmark School should be commended for its commitment to self-evaluation and continuous self-improvement. The self-study presented to the Visiting Team was an honest reflection of its strengths and needs. It was evident that the teachers and administration had taken the recommendations from the previous visit and acted upon them, as well as making the additional progress expected in the school improvement process. The self-study was the result of the efforts made in the cumulative years since the last visit, not simply in preparation for the current visit.

- 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?*

There is a commitment from facility administration to the school improvement process. Both money and time resources have been historically evident to systematically support professional development needs as they are identified by the school improvement plan.

- 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?*

Benchmark School has strong leadership that is committed to honest self-reflection. The school has systematically used both quantitative and qualitative data to determine an action plan that provides a blueprint for its future improvement efforts. There is more than sufficient commitment from the school and facility leadership as well as the teachers to carry out the action plan.

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

Benchmark School students are enrolled there for the primary purpose of self-improvement. Self-improvement is the underlying philosophical foundation of the school's processes and systems. This is true as it applies to both the students and the school improvement process. There was no resistance to self-evaluation or improvement evident from the self-study or the visit. The staff seems to have embraced this culture of self-improvement.

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

The development of DRSL rubrics that allow measurement of student progress on achieving school-wide goals is a significant accomplishment. The teachers have used the rubric for Personal/Civic Responsibility for more than a year. The current action plans calls for implementing the rubric for Learning to Learn this year and Collaborative Worker next year. Given the school's success with implementing the first DRSL, the action plans for the next two years are very appropriate and achievable.

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

The school has experienced a change in student demographics that has decreased the percentage of Native American students served. Consequently, the school's library and reading offering offerings are more than adequate to meet the needs of the student population.

There has been a refinement of the DRSLs, and the degree to which the school has demonstrated its ability to measure progress is impressive.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

A high degree of teamwork among the staff is clearly evident. Teachers contribute records of student progress to Treatment Plans.

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

The residential units participate in off campus field trips. There is transition planning for all students in preparation for graduating from the program.

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

It is clearly evident that the self-study was done for the purpose of improving the school. The process included all staff members.

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

The school has done a commendable job of collecting and reporting data for the school profile. It will be positively received by parents and educational consultants.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark School and the leadership of Barry Woodward and Michelle Brown for their passion for the vision and for their skills in moving the school toward completion of its mission.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark School for its small class sizes and high degree of direct instruction.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark School for the full cooperation and teamwork evident among teachers for the betterment of the students.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark School for integrating academics into each student's Master Treatment Plan.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark School for providing the high level of special education staffing to meet student needs.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark School for providing resources for professional development, including off-site visits, training and endorsement classes.
- The Visiting Team commends Benchmark School for embracing the accreditation process for school improvement.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that Benchmark School follow through with the use of rubrics and gather data for the Learning to Learn and Collaborative Worker DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Benchmark School explore ways to use students who are near or past academic graduation as mentors/tutors for other students.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Benchmark School explore ways to group students in classes according to academic skills.

- The Visiting Team recommends that Benchmark School expand course offerings so that successful students are not required to repeat coursework.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Benchmark School allow students more opportunities to explore additional applications of their learning once they have achieved the essential knowledge and skills.