**The Report of the**
**Accreditation Visiting Team**

# Bennion Junior High School

## 6055 South 2700 West
## Taylorsville, Utah 84118

**March 16-17, 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**

# Bennion Junior High School

## 6055 South 2700 West
## Taylorsville, Utah 84118

**March 16-17, 2010**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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

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**STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

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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 16-17, 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 Bennion 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 the principal, Dr. Mary Rhodes, is also commended.

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

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
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**BENNION JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

**ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

## School Administration

Dr. Mary Rhodes ..... Principal
Merla Bybee ..... Assistant Principal

## Counseling

Roger Ashton ..... Counselor
Christi Reed ..... Counselor
Beth Pasker ..... Counselor

## Support Staff

Denise Ayers ..... Prevention Specialist
Sandy Baker ..... Lunch Worker
Shela Black ..... Behavioral Health Assistant
Laretta Clark ..... Lunch Clerk
Sharon Clark ..... Comprehensive Guidance Clerk
Paul Macfarlane ..... District Speech Specialist
Barbi Gonzales ..... Tracker
Shirlene Handy ..... Assistant Custodian
Marsha Hatch ..... Lunch Worker
Becky Holtz ..... TCM
Terry Jackson ..... District Hearing Specialist
Deann Jensen ..... Bookkeeper
Bonnie Jones ..... Kitchen Manager
Laura Kessel ..... Social Worker
Allyson Lesuma ..... Youth In Custody Aide
Ann Mcvey ..... Assistant Custodian
Gay Lynn Osness ..... Principal's Secretary
Melissa Pahl ..... Special Ed Aide
Peggy Park ..... Library Aide
Lave Purcell ..... Counseling Secretary
Rocky Rhodes ..... Head Custodian
Brian Royce ..... Assistant Custodian
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Diane Thomas-Timper
Cathy Thompson
Medlinda Tomeo
Rebecca Travis
Le Vuong
Karen Walbridge
Debra Willes
Nancy Wing
Rebecca Winter
Yan Zhang

## VISITING TEAM REPORT

## BENNION JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

### MISSION STATEMENT

Bennion Junior High School is dedicated to *Caring about Each Other, Inspiring Achievement, and Living to Learn.*

### BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe that…

1. Teachers, administrators, parents, staff, students, and community share the responsibility for advancing the school's mission.

2. Students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process and are provided with appropriate opportunities for success.

3. Core curriculum and instructional practices incorporate a variety of learning activities, instructional approaches, and technology to accommodate differences among students.

4. An emotionally and physically safe environment promotes student learning.

5. Clear and high expectations from teachers and parents result in improved student achievement.

6. Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs.

7. Continuous improvement is possible and pursued at Bennion Junior High.

### DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Character Education

   - Students identify behavioral characteristics of respect for self, family, peers, and faculty staff.

- Students demonstrate the Community of Caring values of Respect, Responsibility, Trust, Caring, Family and Community.

2. Complex/Critical Thinking

   - Students effectively gather and use information to gain, classify, organize and apply new knowledge, support inferences, and justify conclusions.

   - Students use technology to access, analyze, and synthesize information and increase knowledge.

3. Communication Skills

   - Students demonstrate grade level proficiency with basic literacy skills – reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

   - Students communicate with clarity, purpose, audience, awareness, and coherence.

   - Students use a variety of communication forms (oral, written, artistic, and graphic) and demonstrate proficiency with a wide range of communication and technology tools.

   - Students use reflection skills through journal entries, essays, and other means to assess and monitor their learning.

4. Life Skills

   - Students demonstrate knowledge of the relationship between education, employment, and income.

Date of visit: March 16-17, 2010

## MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ben Lems, Canyons School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Juanita Benioni, Quail Run Primary School, Private School

Annette Harmon, Rocky Mountain Junior High School, Weber School District

Scott Sumner, Oak Canyon Junior High School, Alpine School District

Jill Landes-Lee, Canyons School District

Deb van Gorder, Canyons School District

# VISITING TEAM REPORT

# BENNION JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Bennion Junior High School is located in Taylorsville, Utah. The school first opened its doors in August of 1980. The school has a current enrollment of 996 students in grades seven through nine. A boundary change in 2007 resulted in an increase of two percent in the minority population, from 24 percent to 26 percent. Free and reduced-price lunch percentages have also seen an increase over the last couple of years from 25 percent to 32 percent.

The staff of Bennion Junior High School consists of a principal, an assistant principal, 45 teachers, 2½ counselors, and 26 support staff members. All teachers are highly qualified and receive regular professional development and in-service in research-based best practices and teaching strategies including writing across the curriculum and the use of technology in the classroom.

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

Over the past few years Bennion Junior High School has seen an increase in minority students, leading to a more diverse student population. This increase in diversity is seen as a positive development by all stakeholders. The Visiting Team does have a concern, however, that the minority population seems to be overrepresented in lower-level classes.

The school has made a huge investment in technology. Every classroom has a Smart Board, overhead projector, and document reader. There are several computer labs in the building to accommodate the various needs of the students. Due to the heavy demand for computer time, the school is looking for a way to create an additional computer lab.

The faculty of Bennion Junior High School is experienced. The majority of faculty members have been at the school for more than three years. Many have advanced degrees or are working on obtaining advanced degrees or endorsements.

The Visiting Team found, from its review of the school’s profile, that there is considerable data at the disposal of staff members. However, the data does not appear to be an important tool in the decision-making process.

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

The Visiting Team recommends the school collect and analyze longitudinal data on individual students to better identify and address the needs of all students.

Including actual numbers along with percentages on graphs and other reports would be helpful in better understanding and interpreting the data. In addition, narratives should contain more interpretive information about the data that is being presented.

There were some inconsistencies among the questions in the parent, student, and staff surveys. This made it difficult to discern common strengths and concerns. A common Likert scale for all questions would be helpful.

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

The school community has done a good job of identifying its strengths and weaknesses through the gathering and disaggregation of data, and departmental and focus group analysis of the instructional and institutional effectiveness of the school. The Visiting Team recommends that the school focus on using the data and its analysis of instructional and institutional effectiveness to drive decisions.

**Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The school has several interventions in place to assist students who have failed or are in danger of failing one or more classes. In addition to assisting students who are failing, the Visiting Team recommends the school use data to determine why students are failing and what programs, interventions, and student supports can be put in place to prevent students from failing in the first place.

## CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

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

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

In 2009, Bennion Junior High School's leadership team began the process of revisiting the school's mission statement after opinions from the staff was ascertained. The team developed a draft for a new mission statement from criteria provided from the state. This draft was then presented to the staff for input. After some changes based on the provided recommendations, the leadership team approved another draft to present. The revised draft was approved by the staff. The School Community Council and student leaders were then given the opportunity to approve the new mission statement. The school's

leadership team developed classroom presentations to share the new mission statement with the student body.

While we recognize that great efforts were taken by the school to adopt a new mission statement, the Visiting Team recommends that in the future students, teachers, staff, the School Community Council, PTA and other patrons be involved in the development process. This input from all stakeholders could ideally be assembled in the early stages if a new or revised mission statement is being considered for the future. When input from all stakeholders is considered, it allows for a wider range of feedback addressing the needs of the school by those who will benefit from the school's mission statement.

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

The school's mission statement and DRSLs are well known by both the student body and faculty, and are posted in the building and classrooms. The Visiting Team recognizes that the mission statement aligns with the DRSLs in the following manner:

1. Caring About Each Other – Character Education
2. Inspiring Achievement – Complex/ Critical Thinking & Communication Skills & Life Skills
3. Living To Learn – Communication Skills & Life Skills

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

The DRSL that has been very fully implemented within the school, as evidenced through observation, conversation with stakeholders, and data, is Communication Skills. The focus has been the implementation of a school-wide writing program. Data is gathered to show trends in student work and progress in writing.

Increased communication among all stakeholders was also evident. The Visiting Team commends the school for implementing methods to keep patrons informed about what is happening at school. Information is communicated to the home in both English and Spanish.

*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 observed evidence of the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs in the culture of the school in several areas. The school-wide writing efforts correlate to the first part of the mission statement ("Caring about Each Other") and the DRSL of Communication.

Another area of note is the benefit of having technology in the classrooms. This aligns with the DRSL Complex/Critical Thinking.

**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*?*

There is ample evidence of the staff's collaborative efforts to ensure that the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, and the Utah *Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success*. The eleven members of the curriculum development focus group, made up of faculty, support staff, parents and students, meet regularly—even weekly—during the process. There is agreement that the standards for learning are clearly defined, rigorous, and appropriately challenging. Essential knowledge and skills are identified and given priority. The curriculum reflects a commitment to equity and the belief that all students can learn. There is a comprehensive plan in place to support the effective implementation of the curriculum that facilitates the alignment of teaching practices, instructional support and resources, and assessment of student learning.

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

The majority of the 996 students at Bennion Junior High School are engaged in the learning process, specifically in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills. There is concern that some students, specifically those who are English language learners (ELLs), are sporadically engaged in these aspects of the curriculum. ELLs who have been identified as LEP (limited English proficient) are served in ESL classes by ESL-endorsed teachers. Of the 300+ ELL students, about 160 have been identified as LEP.

A review of the professional backgrounds of the 45 faculty members at the school shows that fourteen have completed their ESL endorsements. The school principal is also ESL endorsed. This demonstrates a commitment by these teachers to serve the diverse learning needs of ELL students. This group of ESL-endorsed teachers is a valuable resource to the faculty and needs of students. The Visiting Team recommends that the skills and training of these fourteen faculty members be used to provide professional development, specifically in sheltered instruction, to meet the diverse learning needs of students. This will support the recommendation on page 62 of the school's self-study report that the teachers need additional in-service instruction on ways to differentiate their lessons.

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

It is evident that there has been a great deal of collaboration in the Friday weekly meetings to sustain the development of a curriculum supportive of the school's DRSLs.

The faculty is commended for its commitment to these regular meetings and the openness of its collaborative efforts.

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

The Visiting Team commends the staff for the considerable amount of data presented in its self-study report, and for its commitment to using district-required student assessments to drive curriculum decisions.

It is recommended that efforts be made to use the data in its current and/or revised formats to provide appropriate accommodations and/or modifications to the curriculum in order to meet the instructional needs of special populations of students (i.e., high-performing, ELL students, and other groups). For example, there appears to be a large population of native speakers who are fluent in conversational Spanish, but who may be limited in reading and writing in Spanish. They would experience benefits from a course in Spanish for Spanish-Speakers focusing on reading and writing. Also, there may be a group of high-performing students who would benefit from expanded honors or gifted/talented services.

**Instruction:**

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

The Visiting Team observed many students engaged and participating in a variety of instructional activities. Examples of strategies observed by the Visiting Team include hands-on activities, individual work, use of computers, presentations, debate, and direct instruction.

The Visiting Team recommends that teachers continue efforts and give attention to additional teaching strategies that involve more diverse learners. This would include students with an IEP, as well as ELL students who struggle and gifted students who already know the material.

*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?*

Through observation in classrooms, teacher conversations, and student conversations, the Visiting Team identified that there is a focus on the school's DRSLs. The DRSLs are also posted in each classroom to emphasize their importance.

It is recommended by the Visiting Team that continued focus be placed on establishing the capacity to ensure the DRSLs become systematic in the teaching process. It is also

recommended that continued efforts be made to collect data to show evidence of the progress of the DRSL and methods to evaluate student understanding of the DRSL.

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 commends Bennion Junior High School for the opportunity provided to teachers to meet on Fridays and discuss the needs of the school and students.

It is recommended by the Visiting Team that the time used in these meetings and other professional development opportunities be focused on creating common assessments, and interpreting the data provided to drive future instruction for student achievement.

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 Visiting Team observed that teachers are knowledgeable about their subject areas and are focused on the State Core. It is noted that in the school's self-study report, a strong emphasis was placed by the staff on the desire for continuous improvement in their practice. The Visiting Team also noted the willingness of the staff to work together for improvement.

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 Visiting Team observed that each classroom was well equipped with up-to-date technology. Projectors, sounds systems, and Smart Boards are the norm for each classroom.

One area of recommendation set by the school's instruction focus group and echoed by the Visiting Team is that continued emphasis be placed on training in adapting lesson plans and teaching strategies to utilize the capabilities of the technology they have.

**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 Visiting Team commends the faculty for its use of a variety of assessments, including CRTs, Iowa, YPP, DWA, My Access, Carnegie Cognitive Tutor, AIMS, AIMS MAZE, and recently instituted district benchmarks. In addition, the teachers were observed using authentic assessments such as quizzes/test, oral projects, and writing rubrics.

The Visiting Team acknowledges that the staff has begun the process of looking at student data, specifically formative data. The Visiting Team recommends that this process of evaluating classroom instruction in terms of achievement become formalized and evaluated in team meetings.

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

The faculty relies on state testing for its school-wide assessments to evaluate individual progress and program viability. Most student progress is measured by the classroom teacher with authentic testing. It is unclear how the data ties to the DRSLs. The Visiting Team recommends that data be disaggregated from national and state assessments, as well as school and teacher generated data, to determine who is learning and who is not. The Visiting Team recommends a school-wide assessment plan to provide a means for collecting data on student performance. This plan should provide a systematic method for evaluating the data to consider for determining school, grade, and classroom trends. It should lead directly to answering the question of which students are proficient and which are not. This should lead to instructional modifications as needed to ensure that all students achieve mastery level.

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

It was noted by the Visiting Team that Bennion Junior High School has many data sources. The tie to academic expectations was less clear.

*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?*

Currently, professional development programs have been heavily focused on improving teaching through expanding expertise with technology and developing the skills of all faculty members to teach writing across the curriculum. The Visiting Team observed the implementation of these teaching skills in many classrooms. The Visiting Team recommends that professional development be redirected from improving teaching (teacher focus) to assuring student learning (student focus). This process of assuring student learning is driven by systematic review and accurate interpretation of the data. All data should be readily accessible to the faculty.

*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 has not been implemented to assess the DRSLs (the exception to this being DRSL #3, which focuses on communication skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing). The writing skill has been measured using My Access,

an online writing assessment tool. While the use of this tool has increased over a two-year period, it is noted that the number of students reaching benchmark, as measured by this tool, has decreased from the 2007-2008 school year to the 2008-2009 school year. While this is not problematic in and of itself, the Visiting Team was unable to gather evidence to show whether the data was guiding decision making. The Visiting Team recognizes that stating the DRSLs in measurable terms will help the faculty formulate a data-driven cycle of implementation and reflection.

## CHAPTER 3: NAAS SUPPORT STANDARDS

**Leadership and Organization:**

*a)* *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?*

The Visiting Team commends Bennion Junior High School on a supportive administration, faculty and staff. The school leadership has allowed each teacher to have two periods per day for consultation and teaming. The teams discuss the needs of the students as well as curriculum coordination. Through interviews and observation, the Visiting Team noted that the faculty is genuinely interested in students and collaborate to improve the educational process of the school.

*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?*

Teachers have teaming time and collaboration time set aside each Friday to discuss student progress. Teachers report that they discuss student progress with the goal of improving student learning. Teachers use data from CRT, ITBS, DWA and common assessments to align curriculum. Collaboration has allowed for curriculum mapping and vertical teaming. Writing across the curriculum has been an implemented goal of each department.

Student recognition includes the Honor Roll, and one student per grade is nominated as Bobcat of the Month each month. The school profile mentions the need for staff recognition programs.

Student progress is currently monitored through the school's online grading system, automated phone calls home, and My Access. The teachers are collecting data, and they are aware of students who may be at risk and what needs must be addressed. The Visiting Team recommends that teachers be trained in how to accurately interpret the data, which can then be used for making consistent collaborative decisions.

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 members of the teaching staff at Bennion Junior High School are highly qualified and certified in the areas they teach. Students and parents shared the same appreciation for teachers being available for remediation before and after school. All members of the school community believe that the school is a safe and productive place where students are valued. Staff members agree that the administration has created a climate of caring in the school.

The Visiting Team commends Bennion Junior High School on its acquisition of Smart Boards for each classroom. Students, parents and teachers feel this is a great benefit to enhance student learning. Stakeholders commented on the value of teaching students real-world applications by using the latest technology. Students mentioned that they are more engaged in a lesson when teachers utilize the technology effectively.

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?*

Focus group members, parents, students, and faculty members all report that the administration is very supportive and take an active role in the collaborative process. There is evidence of a mutual respect of all stakeholders in the school. Teachers have a half-day early out each Friday to allow for in-service and collaboration. They have made great strides in working together to improve their use of technology and their understanding of writing across the curriculum.

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?*

Students stated that they feel safe talking to counselors or teachers if they need someone to talk to about academic or personal issues. They stated that they know their counselors and they believe their counselors know them. They acknowledged their teachers as caring and understanding persons worthy of trust.

## CHAPTER 4: NAAS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

**Culture of Continual Improvement:**

*a)* *To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using* Collaborating for Student Achievement*, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process, that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?*

The Visiting Team found evidence of a school improvement action plan focusing on character education, complex and critical thinking, communication, and life skills. It is evident that the previous plan was reviewed and revised in this process. We recognize that Bennion Junior High School focused on the DRSL of communication and collected data as a means to indicate improvement in student writing. The Visiting Team commends the school on the development of a common writing rubric and the data showing increased student achievement in 2008-09 on the writing prompt.

The Visiting Team recommends that data collected from writing, reading, and other content-area common assessments be reviewed and the data utilized to guide decisions in instruction. This discussion may take place in the context of collaborative teacher teams. For example, writing scores decreased from 2007-08 to 2008-09, and 2009-10 reading scores indicate that approximately one-third of students at Bennion Junior High School are reading below grade level. Proof of continuous improvement must address these challenges in ensuring that every student achieves proficiency and excellence in reading and writing.

*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?*

Bennion Junior High School has engaged in a very systematic three-year plan for professional development focusing on technology, reading, writing, and best practices in teaching. Time is provided to collaborate as teams, where teachers share lesson plans and teaching methods. The Visiting Team recommends that the school utilize time to learn how to effectively utilize data collected through common assessments, and how data is a tool to make informed decisions on what to teach and how to teach it.

*c)* *To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

The Visiting Team has observed adequate commitment to the school-wide writing goal. We understand that Bennion Junior High School has worked only two years toward this goal. With this in mind, some teachers are still learning how to utilize writing as a meaningful way to communicate understanding of their content area. Dialogue and

support for this should continue to find meaningful modes of writing within diverse content areas.

The Visiting Team noted a high level of staff commitment to technology and life skills. Teachers are very engaged and invested in character education, and show genuine care for the well-being of their students.

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

Time and resources have been systematically provided for staff toward school improvement goals. The Visiting Team recommends that the school begin to nurture a culture of collaborative problem-solving where school-wide structures are put in place to begin problem-solving regarding student achievement. Conditions in the school must support the identification and support of every student performing below grade level or below proficiency level. Continuous improvement should include building capacity for utilizing data to inform decision making in teaching.

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

The school staff has implemented several steps outlined in the communication action plan. The first part of the plan focused on improved teacher, parent, and student communication. Regular newsletters, a new electronic message center, web page, and a calling system have all been put in place since the last full team visit. Department chair meetings, faculty meetings, writing groups, grade level teams, and elective teams have all had a positive impact in teacher to teacher communication.

The school also focused on its collaboration action plan. Emphasis for the past three years has been on the Core Curriculum and curriculum mapping. Grade-level core teams at Bennion Junior High School have common consultations. With writing as a focus, this opportunity to collaborate has provided a forum for teachers to share ideas and implement strategies that have improved writing across the curriculum.

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

It was the recommendation of the previous Visiting Team to clarify the usefulness of their desired results for student learning. The school chose to focus on communication to address this recommendation. One of the school's goals for the past four years has centered on writing. The recommendation also suggested the school develop a school-wide tool for assessment of students writing progress. The English Department developed a school-wide tool for assessment of student's writing skills. The My Access tool has also proven to be a valuable tool for students and teachers.

A recommendation by the previous Visiting Team for a comprehensive assessment program has been partially addressed. Student profile data is available to every teacher through the counseling office. A Student Support Team is in place to collect data and share it with staff. The staff will soon have access to student data through their individual web portals. However, more needs to be done in this area particularly in the area of using data to drive daily instruction. The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue their efforts to collect, analyze, and use data in the decision-making process.

## CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The Visiting Team recognized that positive working relationships exist among students, teachers, support staff and administrators. Students are excused early each Friday, giving staff members an opportunity for professional development, committee meetings, and collaboration. Students are given opportunities before and after school and during the day to visit with counselors or staff members to receive additional help or guidance. The student body officers and PLT groups are active in maintaining a safe and comfortable environment at the school. Each new student who enrolls throughout the year is accompanied around the school on his/her first day by a member of the PLT. The PLT member introduces him/her to his/her teachers and other students, eats lunch with him/her, and generally helps the student get acquainted with his/her new school.

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

The school has a supportive and collaborative relationship with the PTA and School Community Council. The School Community Council is included in the decision-making process. Business partners also play an important role in the support of student programs and activities.

The school offers a variety of programs and activities that are supported by the PTA, School Community Council and the community at large. These include remedial and tutoring programs, enrichment programs, sports, clubs, and evening student performances.

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

Administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents were all involved in the evaluation of the school’s institutional effectiveness through the collaborative work of the focus groups. Other than focus groups, there was little involvement from stakeholders

outside the school staff. The Visiting Team recommends that all stakeholders, including support staff, students, parents, and business partners, be included in all aspects of the self-study process and informed of findings and of progress being made on the action plan.

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

Summative data, such as the Iowa and CRT assessments, is shared with the staff during in-service and professional development meetings. This information is shared with other stakeholders through newsletters and PTA meetings. Individual student scores are shared with parents through printed test results and parent meetings with counselors.

Each department, including the Counseling Department, collects its own formative assessment data. This data is generally not shared with others and not used to drive day-to-day instruction. The Visiting Team recommends that both summative and formative data be collected and shared among all stakeholders and used in the decision-making process to drive instructional decisions.

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

**Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the school for the progress it has made in implementing the recommendations of the last Visiting Team in 2003.

- The Visiting Team commends the staff and leadership team for creating a safe and comfortable learning environment for all students. Students are comfortable approaching any member of the staff with a question or concern. Students feel teachers care about them and want them to be academically successful. Counselors know each student by name and are aware of their academic standing.

- The Visiting Team commends the leadership team for creating an atmosphere where teachers, parents, and the community feel supported and valued. The Visiting Team commends the leadership team for providing structured professional development time during which teachers have an opportunity to improve their teaching skills, share ideas, and collaborate with one another.

- The Visiting Team commends the school for the work being done to improve writing across the curriculum.

- The Visiting Team commends the school for the acquisition and use of technology.

- The Visiting Team commends the custodial staff for ensuring students and teachers have a clean and well maintained facility in which to learn and work. The custodial staff has a professional and comfortable working relationship with staff members and a friendly rapport with students.

**Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school revisit the data that has been collected and analyze the data further to identify which students and or subgroups of students are proficient in core benchmarks, which students are not, and why. Once this analysis is done, the Visiting Team recommends that the school develop a pyramid of interventions to address the needs of those students who are not meeting the benchmarks.

- The Visiting Team recommends that professional development focus on how to collect informative data, how to interpret that data, and how to use that data to drive instruction. The focus of professional development needs to shift from what and how teachers are teaching to what and how students are learning.

- The Visiting Team recommends that Bennion Junior High expand its use of common assessments throughout the school.