

Cottonwood High School 5715 South 1300 East Salt Lake City, Utah 84121

April 14-15, 2011





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

Cottonwood High School 5715 South 1300 East Salt Lake City, Utah 84121

April 14-15, 2011

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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

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FOREWORD

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

The evaluation, April 14-15, 2011, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Cottonwood 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 Mitch Nerdin is also commended.

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

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

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COTTONWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Mitch Nerdin David Gatti Dan Snarr	Assistant Principal			
Counseling				
Judy Liapis				
Support Staff				
Jane Crockett Joyleen Haslem Jennifer Justesen Betty Kresser Linda Rodriguez Sandra Riches Marsha Weatherhead Cindy Venz Cindy Dotson	Financial SecretaryCareer Center SecretaryMain Office SecretaryPrincipal's SecretaryRegistrarComprehensive Guidance AssistantELL Assistant			
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Austin Wadsworth	Tracker
Jared Willis	Tracker
Valorie Wyall	Special Ed Aid
Elaine Beardshall	Special Ed Aid
Cale Shepherd	Softball Coach
Brian Sorensen	
Bryan Ririe	School Resource Officer
Lenny Bruno	Security
Susan Hall	Cafeteria Manager
Becky Edwards	Cafeteria
Barbara Kite	Cafeteria
Beverly Wickham	Cafeteria
Reva Holding	Cafeteria
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Jim Eakins	Anne Hawes	Josh Lyman
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Scott Fowler	Janae Hirschi	Dave McConnell
Glen Fuller	Lori Holmberg	Cathy McDonald
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Susan Perkins
Thomas Petersen
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Watts, Kim Watts
Aminda Wells
Adam Wilkins
Ryan Willis
Aaron Wilson
Pixie Wirth
Stephanie Wynder

COTTONWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

All students have a right to a quality education. Our work is to cultivate a safe, positive and accessible learning environment in which students can develop the essential skills they need to become successful, ethical and productive members of the global community.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- We will offer quality education.
- We will offer an environmentally, physically and emotionally safe school setting.
- We will offer a positive learning environment.
- We will be accessible to all stakeholders.
- We will encourage the acquisition of essential skills
- We will offer students the opportunity to develop individual ethics.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

- 1. Effective Communication
- 2. Critical Thinking

Date of visit: April 14-15, 2011

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Doug Finch, Cascade Elementary, Alpine School District, Visiting Team Chairperson
Elayne Finlinson, Davis High School, Davis School District
Gary Allen, Bear River High School, Box Elder School District
DeLaina Tonks, Open High School of Utah

VISITING TEAM REPORT

COTTONWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Cottonwood High School is one of seven high schools in Granite School District. During the 2010-2011 school year, it served about 1,555 students in grades 10, 11, and 12. Cottonwood High strived to provide specialized learning opportunities for students at all levels of learning. In addition to the unique academic offerings, Cottonwood High provides strong extracurricular programs for students. Another defining characteristic of Cottonwood High is the diverse demographic the school serves. Students have a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

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

With the changes in district boundaries due to the closure of Granite High School in 2007, the school's student population has changed in size and composition. The school now includes the district's Newcomer program, which added about 60 students who have been in the United States for less than a year. This student population experienced a relatively high mobility rate (between 30 and 46 percent), and has increased in non-Caucasian students from 18 to 36 percent since the last accreditation. Cottonwood High reports that more than one-fourth of its current students are English language learners.

The school is concerned about student attendance patterns. Currently one out of every four students misses ten or more full school days during the school year. There is also concern for the punctuality of students and the impact it is having on student learning, particularly with non-Caucasian students.

General trends from the student achievement data reported by the school include lower rates of passing on CRT tests by mobility, ELL, low SES, and Hispanic students. Participation in AP exams has remained relatively consistent, despite enrollment changes.

- b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?
 - Adding student achievement data beyond results available from CRT results would help further identify student performance for more students in more curriculum areas.
- c) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

With the accessible information and trend data, including recently completed surveys, the school has given a responsible effort to identifying its strengths and limitations.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Considerable time and money have been spent since the last accreditation on supporting math instruction; however, it appears that very limited student performance data was analyzed to measure the impact of the investment and decision to continue or discontinue that work.
- Another important intervention implemented since the last accreditation visit is the AVID program. What impact (intended or unintended) is it having on student success?
- Both the school profile and interviewed students noted that current student attendance trends may be affecting student learning.

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 administration took painstaking efforts to involve the faculty in the process of developing, revising and refining the mission, vision and DRSLs via professional learning communities and focus groups. The school's collaborative efforts in this arena are highly commendable.
- b) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?
 - The school spent a lot of time developing a mission and supporting vision statements that clearly articulate what the school will do to accomplish the mission. There are a variety of items that faculty and administration will implement or are doing that are producing good results.
- c) Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.
 - There were no measurable indicators evident to assess the DRSLs.
- 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?

There is a lot of student and faculty pride in being a part of Cottonwood High School, in part because of its accessible learning environment. However, little has been done to communicate the specific content of the school agenda to stakeholders, or to use it as a filter for the administrative and departmental decision-making process.

The Visiting Team's recommendation is to clarify the DRSLs, align them with the vision and mission, develop a strategic implementation plan, effectively develop buyin, and communicate these learning targets to all stakeholders.

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?

Cottonwood High is working to implement a collaborative team model to ensure the curriculum of each class is based on clearly defined standards. Several teachers expressed how important this is, because the students here are very mobile and often move from school to school. The curriculum has moved away from being textbook reliant to doing more with student research, primary resources, and connecting learning with today's world.

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

The Visiting Team noted that Cottonwood High is actively working to prepare more students for participation in college prep and Advanced Placement courses through the AVID program. This program's curriculum and emphasis is to teach students the inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills necessary to be successful. Honors courses, concurrent enrollment classes, and some block classes teaching math and science are also offered. Evidences of teaching higher-level thinking skills were found in most of the classrooms the team visited.

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 staff members reported the priority of teaching communication and critical thinking skills, yet limited concrete evidence of explicit teaching and assessing these traits was found in classrooms. The Visiting Team strongly recommends that Cottonwood High work to institutionalize the newly determined DRSLs.

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

Cottonwood High teachers are emerging in their ability to develop common assessments to determine the success of all students in more curricular areas. CRT, AP, and ACT scores have been examined to measure some students' progress.

Developing common formative assessments in other areas is part of the improvement plan for the school.

Instruction:

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

Collaborative teams are being developed in every department to help teachers work toward developing essential standards, as well as common curricula and assessments. In a staff survey of instructional practices, 15 teaching strategies were evaluated. Seven of the 15 strategies were practiced by more than 50 percent of all teachers. Ninety-four percent of teachers use lecture and direct instruction often or frequently. Multimedia presentations were used by 78 percent of the faculty, teacher tutoring by 69 percent and collaborative groups by 56 percent. According to the survey, the teaching strategy most seldom used was on-the-job training.

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?

While the Cottonwood High staff members all had a clear understanding of what the DRSLs were because they had been involved in the developing process, the students we questioned were not as aware of the DRSLs. Visiting Team members observed many forms of critical thinking being taught, but not necessarily referred to in the instruction as explicit strategies for teaching the school-wide desired outcomes. Teachers' capacity to develop specific instructional strategies would be strengthened by further development of the DRSLs as measurable and explicit learning objectives in every classroom.

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 Cottonwood High faculty members have recently embarked on the development of collaborative learning communities as the vehicle for their professional development program. Embedded collaboration time is scheduled each Monday to begin the work of developing common curriculum and assessments. Common assessments allow teachers to assess student learning and then make adjustments or modify their instructional practices. The faculty reported that the collaboration time is helping to more quickly identify struggling students and provide the scaffolding they need before they get into real trouble.

Cottonwood High teachers are strengthening cross-curricular connections between disciplines. Examples include a woodshop teacher and math teacher working together to have students use their math skills to design and build wood projects, the English Department developing a common rubric to be used for writing in all departments,

and the Science and Math Departments collaboratively working to develop physics and math block classes.

Greater focus on student learning gaps guides administrators to make plans for changes in teacher professional development. In response to the increasing language diversity at the school, the administration is having Utah State come to the Cottonwood High campus and offer ESL endorsement training to interested staff members. Another example is the participation of the teachers of the AP and honors classes in AVID training to better align the college prep program.

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 many teachers who were highly qualified and proficient in their content area. Due to the high rate of turnover among the staff (60 percent) since the last accreditation, the staff has been infused with many new teaching strategies. The collaborative teaming opportunity is beginning to allow for more reflective work among the faculty. The Visiting Team anticipates that the continued work as collaborative teams will further strengthen the implementation of effective instructional approaches.

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 was unable to identify a formal plan or committee in place to implement the integration of technology into curriculum and instruction. However, as the team members visited classes, they saw technology being used by students and teachers. Each classroom has been equipped with a projector, and several with Smart Boards. Teachers reported that the administration has been very responsive to their requests for technology. The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop a well-defined plan for implementing technology into curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

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 Cottonwood High School teachers are beginning the work of developing both class and school-wide assessments. Current practice is characterized by use of some summative assessment in individual classes. The Visiting Team applauds the plans of the school leadership to focus on embarking on the work in learning communities to develop more formative common assessment and providing checkpoints in all discipline to assess learning throughout units of study.

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

With the recent influx of diverse students at Cottonwood High, efforts have been made to create a more fair and equitable assessment. The staff members have recognized the individual needs of their students, and have made great strides in identifying many ways to assess student learning. Special emphasis is placed on identifying multiple learning strategies and identifying ways to measure student learning.

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

During the self-study process, the Cottonwood staff had access to specific data as a faculty and as individual departments. Much of the success in access and evaluation of data came from the staff's weekly professional learning communities meetings. The teaming opportunity provided the entire staff with an opportunity to look at data closely and share observations in departmental meetings. The staff members are emerging in their discussions on methods, strategies and interventions to improve instruction. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff work to more fully develop common assessments aligned to the State Core.

d) To what extent does the school's professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?

The staff members at Cottonwood High are beginning to develop the capacity to have collaborative opportunities to discuss the broad range of student assessment approaches. This effort is being facilitated by the implementation of collaborative learning teams within the faculty. As common assessments are developed and results analyzed, the table will be better set to discuss the effectiveness of these assessments.

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

The Visiting Team was unable to identify a coordinated mechanism for assessing an identified DRSL. The closest thing available may be the common writing rubric the English Department is developing. This has been identified as an area for focus and improvement by the school.

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 Visiting Team observed that the current leadership has made great progress in emphasizing the importance of being results-oriented. Student performance data is beginning to be reviewed in collaborative teams. The learning climate has been strengthened by the consideration of how current practices can improve student outcomes.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?

The school's self-study is a reflection of its commitment and practice to utilize a decision-making process that is data driven. The accreditation steering committee also administered three surveys to parents, students and faculty members to identify qualitative perception data. This committee thoroughly engaged the staff in an indepth study of the data and a consensus process for decision-making.

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?

Cottonwood High School identified its administrative team as an important component of ensuring a positive direction for school improvement. Administrators participated in and trained departments and focus group members in collaborative processes. Details associated with managing resources and providing a safe school are also skillfully administered. An emphasis on nurturing relationships was reported as the greatest strength in developing an effective learning environment.

The Visiting Team recommends that under the direction of the administration, the staff members work to unify work related to developing detailed school goals for improvement.

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 Visiting Team found that parent and student groups felt they have a voice in what the school was doing and the direction it was going. Teachers expressed the perspective that that the administration was not an autocratic team. Decisions are typically made with input from staff and other stakeholders. Of note, however, was

the absence of parents from the focus group teams. While committed and talented parents are frequently involved in supporting and developing a tradition of excellence in the extracurricular programs, the Visiting Team recommends a greater inclusion of this important stakeholder group in the academic decision-making process.

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?

Cottonwood High School is very aware of individual student needs. Teachers make themselves available for before- and after-school tutoring. One late start is made available each month for one-on-one help. Also, the school has provided a variety of services to meet the needs of the diverse population. The staff recognizes the diverse population it serves and has identified the need to look for additional ways to provide remedial help. The school has grown proficient at providing individualized help for at-risk students, but a formal system school-wide of connecting adult staff members with each student is not in place.

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?

Cottonwood High school has conducted a thorough self-study, and thus has a comprehensive school improvement plan. The current administrators are new to the school since the last accreditation, and report that efforts to review and revise the improvement plan have fluctuated, primarily based on the significant demographic

changes introduced in 2007. Many significant additions have been made to the school programs as a result, including AVID, credit retrieval systems, and writing rubrics.

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?

Cottonwood High is implementing a collaborative team model to develop greater capacity for professional growth and teaming. The leadership is emerging in its understanding and expectations of the products and processes that will lead to effective implementation of this model. Beginning this year, staff members utilize the late-start Monday schedule to have embedded time to develop in this area. In addition, many staff members reported intentions to participate in a summer ESL and AVID training program.

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 new/revised school-wide action plan is broad enough that it encompasses the critical areas of professional development and the next steps for DRSL development at the school. The school admittedly reports that the leadership team recently developed the current goals and action plans, and thus buy-in or even familiarity may be lacking within the faculty. The leadership team identifies that creating ownership with the whole staff in these plans as being a next and essential step. Furthermore, the Visiting Team recommends a realistic and specific timeline and benchmark goals for performance that would enhance capacity to monitor progress and build commitment to the current draft of the school-wide action plan.

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

By implementing a staff collaboration model, Cottonwood High is creating conditions that support productive change and emphasis on student learning results and ways to facilitate regular conversations about continuous improvement.

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

Candidly, the current school leadership admits limited progress was observable from the previous action plans. Significant yet sporadic efforts and investment were made to improve student learning in the areas of numeracy and literacy and supports for the "imperiled populations." Energy and attention spent since the last full visit, coupled with changing staff (60 percent of staff, including all administrators) have diverted some leadership attention away from implementing the original action plan.

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

The four recommendations from the previous Visiting Team were addressed in varying degrees. The school has given attention to improving data collection and analysis utilizing existing student performance data. The school has identified the need for additional, formative assessment data in more curriculum areas. The school has focused on involving more stakeholders in the school improvement effort, yet realizes there are still significant populations who are not actively participating in that process. Of note, the school was not successful in involving parents in the focus group process for this accreditation. The action plans were significantly revised, or even abandoned, though many programs and improvement efforts have been attempted loosely aligned to the school's previous work. Finally, an ongoing professional development plan was not implemented until this year's inception of the professional learning communities.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

Cottonwood High has experienced great success with fostering community building and working relationships within the school. Despite the high levels of diversity among the student body, the overarching theme of the positive comments about Cottonwood High School is "live and let live." Students enjoy and take pride in their school. Teachers are generally positive and satisfied about their roles and take pride in being a part of the school community. Parents seem mostly satisfied with the level of interaction available to students from counselors and teachers.

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

Professional learning communities foster collaboration and time for dialog among faculty. This collaborative opportunity has led to initial steps in developing a writing rubric across the curriculum that supports a school-wide DRSL. Cottonwood High is experiencing some success through teachers making themselves available before and after school to assist students in need and accelerated learners with tutoring. An activity bus leaves later in the evening to accommodate students who live far away and need transportation outside of the typical school hours.

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

The school primarily focused on teacher participation in the focus groups, where most of the effort went toward refining the school mission, developing vision statements, and recreating school-wide DRSLs. In recent months, teacher and parent groups have given direction regarding the development of the action plans. On the whole,

Cottonwood High has made a good faith effort to engage the school community in the self-study process.

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

The school partnered with Utah State University to administer the Indicators of School Quality survey to benchmark and document areas of success and opportunity to improve in various areas such as parent support, teacher excellence, student commitment, school leadership, instructional quality, resource management, and school safety. Additionally, the school underwent a comprehensive review, the School Team Appraisal for Teaching and Instructional Support (STATIS), prepared by Granite District Instructional Consultants, that highlighted areas of success and opportunities for improvement in the academic arena. The administration met with the Community Council and PTA to go over CRT and AYP results. The school also experiences success with its individual SEOP program, where each student meets individually with his/her parents (when available) and counselor to review test scores, progress made, and measures he/she can take to improve.

The Visiting Team recommends that the school explore different ways to engage more parents and communicate specific overall school improvement plan indicators to them in particular.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Cottonwood High for the healthy culture of relationship building and acceptance that is prevalent throughout the school. As parents reported, Cottonwood is where "diversity is done right." Students continually reported that every student feels that he/she has multiple teachers who care about how he/she is doing, and who are willing to make concessions to help each student with his/her individual learning needs.
- In spite of considerable changes in staff and students over the past six years, staff has demonstrated courageous leadership and dedicated service to the students at Cottonwood. The Visiting Team commends the faculty and staff for working to develop interdependent, collaborative teams to create greater capacity in managing externally imposed change and skillfully implementing innovative ways to improve student learning. Particularly in extracurricular areas, staff members have wisely utilized committed and talented parents to help develop a tradition of excellence.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team strongly recommends that Cottonwood High work to institutionalize at least one of the newly determined DRSLs. This process includes clearly defining teachable, observable, and assessable skills and behaviors relative to every classroom and working to explicitly monitor the effectiveness of the school at teaching this holistic learning outcome. Measurements of rigor (i.e., rubrics) should also be collaboratively determined. Using the school's collaborative teaming model to implement this recommendation may prove very helpful.
- The Visiting Team recommends that, under the direction of the administration, the staff members work to unify many well-intended and sincere efforts to improve the school into a more unified and coordinated body of work. The school needs to establish a stronger tradition of developing comprehensive and engaging school-wide action plans. A model such as SMART goal-setting may produce greater ownership and point toward timely reflection of performance data to measure progress. As processes are aligned, clear responsibilities and deadlines for products and processes are established, and planned opportunities to reflect and renew are established, the school-wide action plans can unify the school's staff and community members in support of the school's common mission.