The Report of the Accreditation Visiting Team

Helper Junior High School 130 Uintah Street Helper, Utah 84526

March 26, 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

Helper Junior High School 130 Uintah Street Helper, Utah 84526

March 26, 2010

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

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

The evaluation, March 26, 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 Helper Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Tom Montoya is also commended.

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

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

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HELPER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Tom Montoya		Principal
	Counseling	
James Dart		Counselor
	Support Staff	
Susan Arnette Joyce Branson MaryAnn Brown Celeste Fillingim Coleen Haigler	Patricia Howell Sheila Jackson Mindy Moss Lauran Murdock Brent Nelson	Sharon Prettyman Amber Wilde Peggy Wilmonen
	Faculty	
Robert Bradley Edwina Brown Wendy Emerick Susan Heller	Philip Howa Allen Hughes Joe Jamison Mika Salas	Chris Sweeney Julia Vincent Cathy Wilson Jeff Zivkovic

HELPER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Helper Junior High School is to prepare students to meet the challenges of their developmental stages through the teaching of intellectual, technological, physical and social skills in partnership with families, other students, teachers and the community.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

Helper Junior High is committed to providing many and various opportunities for personal growth. This commitment is based on the following beliefs:

- Everyone is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity.
- Everyone has the ability to learn and progress.
- High standards foster high achievement.
- Everyone is a valuable individual with potential.
- Every individual is accountable for his or her own actions.
- Learning is a life-long process.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

- 1. Goal Statement: All students will demonstrate quality work using a variety of learning strategies and evaluate their learning for improvement.
- 2. Goal Statement: Students will demonstrate their responsibility for personal actions.

Date of Visit: March 26, 2010:

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Gwen Callahan, Emery School District Office, Visiting Team Chair Nicole Svee-Magann, Albion Middle School, Canyons School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

HELPER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Helper Junior High is one of two junior high schools in Carbon School District. Helper is located in the central part of the state in an area of historic mining activity. The school's enrollment is 182 in grades seven through nine, with 14 teachers. Socioeconomic levels are low since the mining industry has decreased. Because of economic conditions, some valuable programs have been eliminated, but the school continues to offer a quality education to students.

- a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?
 - It is evident that the school possesses the same strengths now as it did at the last accreditation visit. The school is well maintained, and students feel very positively about their teachers and the experiences they are able to have. Test scores have improved slightly in some areas and, although there are many new teachers, they are making a strong effort to collaborate on stated goals.
- b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?
 - The Visiting Team feels that improvement had been made in focusing on overall school goals. The two goals of behavior and academics are stated in terms that could be more specific and data driven in their inception.
- c) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?
 - There is evidence that the self-study quite accurately reflects the school's current strengths and weaknesses. The school has been quite honest and frank in its evaluative look at itself and its programs, but is still in the beginning stages of community input and support.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- State overall school goals distinctly and with clear, concise measurements of progress.
- Data analysis needs to be done in more depth and used to guide instruction.
- Continue to work with community members and build a strong collaborative, learning atmosphere.

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?

There was evidence to show that although relatively new to the faculty, teachers had had the opportunity to study and discuss the mission statement and beliefs. No changes were made by this particular faculty, but their input was given on the acceptance of these statements. There was no evidence to show that any community partners were involved in this process.

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

The school's DRSLs are somewhat vague, but there was evidence that the faculty had collaborated on these goals. The mission statement and beliefs do support the DRSLs, and are aligned. It is evident that the administration, faculty, staff and students are aware of the goals and beliefs and are working toward more effective implementation.

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

Indicators used to assess the "Learning to Learn" DRSL include monthly written paragraphs, integrated technology projects, independent reading daily, the Utah Write assessment, and a ninth grade portfolio. The "Personal and Social Responsibility" DRSL is assessed by strict tracking of all student behavior, required community service projects, specific dress code, and close monitoring of attendance.

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?

This is an area of strength. There is evidence that the mission statement and beliefs are closely aligned, and that they guide the school's policies and affect its culture. Students are aware of the beliefs (which posted in school), and they are in agreement that these beliefs form the core of the positive environment they enjoy each day. The administration takes extra effort to ensure that the school believes in the mission statement and supports it with actions.

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?

Teachers know the State Core, and most teachers post this information on their websites. Teachers report working collaboratively within departmental teams to develop goals and standards, but these standards are not shared across curricular areas. Focus groups found that teachers knew the standards but these had not been clearly communicated to students.

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

In focus groups, students reported feeling challenged and said that teachers differentiate to meet the needs of all students. Parents reiterated this idea in their focus groups as well. In the school's self study, 80 percent of students believed that teachers' lessons were current and 100 percent of adults felt that the curriculum was engaging and challenging. The school also utilizes full inclusion of all its special education students.

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

Although this is a newly formed faculty, its education level is impressive. They are experienced and caring teachers. There is evidence that collaboration is taking place, and that they are aware of the importance of this effort. Teachers are beginning to be involved in the community focus groups and are attempting facilitate that process.

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

It is evident that teachers are aware of the importance of using data to drive their instruction. The principal has been trained in the Harvard Data Wise program and is in the process of training teachers too more effectively use the data available to them. State Core Testing data is the primary source of data, but there is evidence that individual teachers are working on common assessments within their area.

Instruction:

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

Teachers work hard to employ a variety of instructional strategies. Classrooms have a great deal of technology, special education teachers and aides work with regular

education teachers to differentiate education, and students are engaged. Students report feeling involved in the classroom.

b) To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?

There was not a lot of demonstrated instruction for teachers using the DRSLS in every class. However, the school-wide behavioral plan, which is explicitly tied to one of the DRSLs, is known and followed by all students. In addition, students are learning to do quality work.

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

The school's administration uses data and needs assessments to guide professional development and identify instructional needs. Teachers are asked to look at data and test information in order make curricular decisions and modify their instructional strategies. The principal feels that this is one the school's strengths.

d) To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?

There is an overwhelming consensus that teachers are current in their practices. Parents and students feel that teachers are current and knowledgeable in their content areas. A majority of teachers at Helper Junior High have advanced degrees, and they work to stay up to date on current instructional practices.

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

All classrooms have Smart Boards, and the teachers are actively using them. In addition, all students are given technology projects as part of their assessments in a variety of curricular areas. There are some classes where technology is used more than others. Students enjoy the technology available to them and report that it helps in their learning.

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 staff has developed an action plan for achieving school improvement, complete with a timeline and targeted goals. Assessments are based upon in-depth and comprehensive analysis of data.

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 principal is aware of subgroups and which students need increased individual services. Also, teachers are very aware of struggling students and use data in developing academic expectations. Teachers and staff members indicate that there is a need for more training in this area.

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

Teachers are finding that the only way to really help students improve is to target their weak areas. Sessions are being held to allow teachers to discuss each student's test results. There is evidence that this has become more focused, but is encouraged to continue.

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 receives some district training, and the principal has provided books on pedagogy. The staff indicated that they do work together in collaborative groups and are working together to analyze data. It appears that this in an area which could use more focus.

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

During the visit, there was evidence of an organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool. However, there was clearly an understanding of the goal and the need to make students aware of expectations.

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?

It is clearly evident that Principal Montoya is striving to address the academic needs and concerns of his school. He has diligently sought out training opportunities for himself and

his staff, both in data analysis and content area professional development. He has made major gains in his own understanding of the need for data analysis to guide instruction.

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

Principal Montoya is beginning to chart and look at individual student performance on standardized tests. He is working with teachers to address the specific needs of these students. It is evident that Helper Junior High has made substantial improvements in the way data is analyzed and discussed.

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?

There is convincing evidence that Principal Montoya provides very positive and everimproving leadership in this school. He is dedicated to the staff and students, and works tirelessly to maintain a positive climate for all in his building. His actions are consistent with the mission statement and beliefs.

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?

Although there is still limited participation from the community in the decision-making process, Principal Montoya is making much progress in involving the community in specific focus groups. There is evidence of more commitment and participation from the community, but the process is still in the beginning stages. Parents seem to be ready to move toward more involvement and responsibility.

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 ample evidence to show that this area is showing some strength. The school is small, and teachers know all of the students. It is significant that individual students' academic strengths and weaknesses are being more fully addressed.

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?
 - There is a comprehensive school improvement plan in place. It addresses the areas of climate, academics and student behavior. There is evidence that teachers have had input in this plan and that school leadership is carrying out the steps outlined. Ongoing evaluation of the validity and success of the plan is encouraged.
- 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?
 - Carbon School District has a comprehensive professional development plan that makes training available for teachers at Helper Junior High. Principal Montoya is diligent in searching out research-proven opportunities for his teachers. Although funding is limited, subject area trainings are provided and encouraged.
- 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 faculty members know where their strengths and weaknesses are. They have used the NSSE rubrics, and there is evidence that departmental goals are in place and are measurable. Two school-wide goals are listed.
- d) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?
 - Evidence exists that both administration and staff desire the best learning situation for students. They are all willing to spend extra time beyond the school day to ensure that students are successful. The student behavior plan is very specific and is supported by each staff member. The steps taken in this plan and the attention given to attendance have made improvement in test scores possible. The school improvement plan is implemented and evaluated often to ensure it will continue to be the basis of productive change and continuous improvement.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

One of the greatest strengths of Helper Junior High School is the fact that the staff and students know each other well and that the school works hard to foster relationships between teachers and administration and students and teachers. The head secretary knows all the students and is the first line of communication if parents have questions. Teachers work collaboratively to help with student issues, and the principal models clear communication and collaboration strategies. Students and parents reported benefits from these relationships during the focus group conversations.

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

The school collaborates with local businesses to reward positive student behavior. The school also works with local businesses on projects such as the electric light parade at Christmas time. It was very clear throughout the visit that the school has developed collaborative networks throughout the school and the community.

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

The school is working on developing a more collaborative self-study process. Teachers have met in some study groups with parents, but this is an area that they could strengthen in the future.

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

The school shares information through the School Community Council, a local radio program, report cards, and the SIS program. In addition, teachers communicate at parent teacher conferences and through notes home. Results are communicated through Back to School Night, monthly letters, and phone messages as well. The school principal desires to find more ways to communicate the school improvement process to parents.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Helper Junior High for its culture of belonging. It is evident that there are strong, positive and loyal relationships within the faculty and students. There is a strong sense of community.
- The Visiting Team commends the use of technology at Helper Junior High. Technology access and use is impressive and becoming a strong instructional focus.
- The Visiting Team commends the work done to inform and involve stakeholders. Parents feel positive about the experiences their children are having at Helper Junior High School, as evidenced by a district waiting list to attend this school.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends and encourages Helper Junior High School to continue working on parental involvement issues and increase PLC commitment.
- The Visiting Team recommends that data analysis be done in more depth and used to guide instruction.
- The Visiting Team concurs with the recommendation of the focus group on assessment for student learning that teachers improve on communicating the standards and expectations to both students and parents.