

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Indian Hills Middle School  
1180 East Sanders Road (11600 South)  
Sandy, Utah 84094**

**April 27-28, 2010**



**Utah State Office of Education  
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P.O. Box 144200  
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**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Indian Hills Middle School  
1180 East Sanders Road (11600 South)  
Sandy, UT 84094**

**April 27-28, 2010**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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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 27-28, 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 Indian Hills Middle 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 Floyd Stensrud is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Indian Hills Middle 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 Indian Hills Middle School.

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent  
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**INDIAN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

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Halbert, Ronald	Pratt, Melanie	

**VISITING TEAM REPORT**  
**INDIAN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Indian Hills Middle School is to provide the opportunity for the academic success of every student.

**BELIEF STATEMENTS**

1. We believe students living in a global community should treat others with respect.
2. We believe in a collaborative environment where common assessments and measurable results are achieved.
3. We believe that community service is essential to a balanced education

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

1. An **Effective Communicator** is capable of using oral, written, artistic, mathematical and technological forms of expression to effectively gather, develop and communicate ideas based on all academic curricula.
2. A **Resourceful Learner** is capable of utilizing and adapting to a variety of physical, technological and creative thinking and learning strategies to solve problems and learn both independently and collaboratively.
3. A **Responsible Citizen** takes personal responsibility for improving the quality of life for self and others through participating in charitable, accountable, and respectful behaviors such as: honesty, environmental awareness and self motivation.

Date of visit: April 27-28, 2010

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Lori Gardner, Park City School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Brent Stephens, Bountiful Junior High, Davis School District

Jason Coyle, Bountiful Junior High, Davis School District

## VISITING TEAM REPORT

### INDIAN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

#### CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Indian Hills Middle School is one of eight middle schools in the newly formed Canyons School District. It serves a student population of 1120 in grades seven, eight and nine. The school is located in a stable upper socioeconomic suburban neighborhood.

The student population is predominately Caucasian, although the minority population has increased from 4% to 5% since 2004, the year of the school's last accreditation visit. Approximately 9% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

The school is the only middle school in its district that operates on a trimester modified block system. Students attend 5 periods of 72 minutes apiece. Math and language arts classes meet every day. Other required classes meet every day or every other day for one or two trimesters. The school offers a range of electives that meet every other day for the full year or for one trimester.

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

The school profile indicates that the student population is stable and fairly homogenous. Most students come to school from two parent homes that have significant or adequate income and whose parents are well educated.

The school boasts of high levels of student achievement in most curricular areas. Most CRT scores meet or exceed state and district scores. However, the achievement gap between Caucasian students and those of all subgroups but Asian is significant. Other sources of data such as IBTS scores, the AGS and SRI Reading Test, also indicate high levels of achievement.

The school uses the Indicators of School Quality as its means of surveying student, parent, and teacher perceptions of the school. The ISQ results from 2008 and 2009 illuminate aspects of the school that are exemplary or satisfactory and indicate that the school has taken the area of concern and are working to address deficiencies.

Due to the implementation of a new data recording system, the discipline referral information for 2008-09 serves as the baseline data for the future. The information presented provides sufficient overview of most discipline issues.

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

The Visiting Team recommends that as the school is developing benchmark assessments for all courses, a summary of the data revealed by their use be included in the school profile along. As the school has identified the significant number of students transitioning to high school with credit deficits as a major issue, it is recommended that the school begin tracking data starting with the incoming class of students to inform early intervention and patterns of failure.

While the self-study presented information regarding truancy there was no information regarding overall attendance patterns or tardies. It is recommended that the school include such information in revisions of the school profile.

The school presents an overall view of student achievement; the corollary between such data and the quality of teaching is unclear (with exception to the information regarding Advanced Placement Human Geography scores). Such information derived from teacher surveys, peer observations, and other valid measures of teacher effectiveness could serve to inform practice and provide valuable information for professional development.

Finally, in order to fully address the concerns of stakeholders, a more comprehensive survey of school effectiveness should be used. The ISQ provides general information but does not hone in on specific programs or practices worthy of celebration or need of remediation. It is recommended that the school explore possible alternatives or complements to the ISQ survey to be given prior to the next site visit.

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

The school profile for Indian Hills Middle School provides a concise summary of how its students compare in proficiency on state and national assessments. It provides a clear definition of its student population and school community.

To some extent, the 2010 school profile offers a more narrow view of who is successful and who is not than the profile developed in 2004. The 2004 profile provided a wider range of data, while the 2010 profile focuses almost solely on standardized tests. Graphs demonstrate the percentages of students proficient on tests, but there is not a clear understanding of how many students participated in the testing. The student achievement data is presented in a way that compares the school's success with other similar schools, but more importantly, the narrative of the data needs to address how the school is using the data to make instructional decisions for students.

**Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school include a stakeholder survey that more clearly identifies the school's strengths and limitations.

- As the school is focusing on student academic success, the school profile should include data that provides information to guide program and instructional decisions.

## **CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (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?*

Indian Hills Middle Schools mission statement, belief statements and DRSLs are reviewed annually by the school administration and Building Leadership Team, comprised of faculty members. In the past two years this review has led to revisions of the mission and belief statements.

The faculty reviewed the mission statement, belief statements and DRSLs. Professional Learning Communities and departments submitted reflections on proposed changes that then led to further refinement. Teams participating in building the mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs used data from various sources to aid them in the process. The mission statement, belief statements and DRSLs were also presented to students in the form of class meetings. The building leadership found student responses to be of value.

There is some review by the other stakeholders, such as the School Community Council, but the parents interviewed by the Visiting Team expressed interest in having greater input into the development and revision as well as inclusion in other decision making processes at the school.

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

The school's mission and beliefs clearly define the core values of the school. The beliefs are concise and have been simplified for better understanding and for clarity.

In the process of aligning the mission and belief statements with the DRSLs, the school has made adjustments as needed to make sure they compliment and support each other. The Building Leadership Team and administration have made changes as needed several times over the past few years.

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

In the past two years, as the Canyons District has been organized, district initiatives have superseded the continuous improvement work the school had defined six years ago. In particular, the requirement to develop Targeted Learning Goals in each curricular area has drawn focus away from the school's DRSLs. As a result, the school had commenced the work to institutionalize at least one of the DRSLs that work was necessarily set aside. The school has developed rubrics correlating to the DRSLs, but the Visiting Team found little evidence of the integration of the DRSLs into daily teaching and learning. Upon interviewing students, the Visiting Team found that most had no idea what DRSLs were or their purpose, except that math teachers were wearing T-shirts with the acronym on them.

The Visiting Team strongly recommends that the school community revisit the DRSLs and that effort is renewed to develop a school-wide system for the implementation and assessment of at least one DRSL within the next two years. Targeted Learning Goals, while important in specific academic areas, need to be aligned with the school-wide 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?*

While there is little overt evidence that the mission and beliefs drive the procedures and decisions of the school, the Visiting Team did find that they do in fact define the culture of the school. It is clear that the faculty and staff have high goals and expectations of themselves to provide high quality education for students. Parents and students feel that the administration and faculty are dedicated to student success and work to foster respectful relationships. The school is considered by most stakeholders to be a leader in academic success and in the preparation of students for high school and higher education. Teachers have made great strides in working towards a collaborative environment. Common assessments have been created and implemented with the results to be used to make changes as needed. Community service as a belief statement seems to be an important piece in the examination of the culture of the school. Students have numerous opportunities to serve and participate in projects to better the school and the community.

In the course of the last two years, the school has revised its DRSLs, consolidating from four developed six years ago to three. Teachers have discussed them in the context of addressing them in the department reports for the self-study. The Building Leadership Team led the effort in developing corresponding rubrics. However, concerted effort needs to be given in order to make the DRSLs an integral factor in the development of policies, practices and procedures in the school. The importance of integrating the DRSLs is a strong recommendation of the Visiting Team.

### **Curriculum:**

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success?*

The Visiting Team found clear evidence that teachers base curricular decisions based on the standards and objectives of the Utah Core Curriculum. Teachers working in departments have defined essential knowledge and skills; have collaborated to define them in *Targeted Learning Skills* and in the development of curriculum maps. The Visiting Team found evidence that the maps are utilized in everyday teaching. Some departments, such as mathematics, are working on collaborative documents, such as Google Docs. This has enhanced collaboration.

The Visiting Team commends the administration for providing the instructional leadership required to foster collaboration, and the faculty for the dedication to collaborative work. It clearly is evident that the work is beginning to have impact on student success.

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

Indian Hills Middle School has a history of high academic achievement. It has developed a schedule that allows students extended learning time especially in language arts and mathematics. The school offers exceptional opportunities for high achieving students in the form of honors and advanced placement classes. Special education teachers work closely to support student success in mainstreamed classes. The Visiting Team found evidence of lessons that incorporated high levels of engagement, inquiry, and higher order thinking. However, with few exceptions, the *Targeted Learning Goals* do not address complex thinking or learning, with most goals centered on the ‘remembering,’ ‘understanding,’ and ‘applying’ levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

One of the areas of improvement that administration and teachers identify is the need to support and challenge all students to excel in their learning. Data has identified an inordinate number of freshmen moving forward with deficit credits. The Visiting Team commends the school for taking the first step in the accountability for all 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?*

Efforts have been made to coordinate the curriculum across grade levels, but this has not necessarily led to a shared vision for student learning in each subject area. Many faculty members have invested time and effort towards the implementation of the DRSL for Effective Communication. It appears that this effort has mostly focused on what the educator is doing, not what students are expected to know and be able to do. The Visiting Team recommends that collaboration focus on overt instruction and assessment on this, and the other, DRSLs.

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

As part of the school's professional learning communities, teachers have been developing pre and post assessments. This effort has been in correspondence with the development of *Targeted Learning Goals*. The pre and post-test model has begun to generate data that educators can then use in the standardization of curriculum. It was clear to the Visiting Team that this work has created greater alignment in departments and has enabled teachers to collaborate on student success. In particular, special education teachers report that it is becoming much easier to hold students accountable for their work and provide academic support when they have more complete information as to what students need to know and be able to do as evidenced by pre-tests.

**Instruction:**

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

The site visit provided evidence that students are provided with opportunities to receive instruction in varied formats. Given the extended instructional time, many teachers have found the need to provide several different learning activities in the course of a period to keep students focused and engaged. However, according to students, this does not seem to be a constant across departments and they advocated for more hands-on, active learning. Teachers report that the incorporation of multiple forms of technologies has been instrumental in fostering more active learning.

With the planned realignment, to grades 6-8, the Visiting Team recommends that the school consider how they might restructure to meet the needs of younger children whose need for active learning will be important.

- 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?*

Instructional strategies and learning activities are aligned with most of the *Targeted Learning Goals*, however, the DRSLs are not explicitly taught in classrooms. In math classes, teachers tie the use of notebooks to the Effective Communication DRSL, but this connection is not clearly understood by students. Overall, the Visiting Team found that students did not know what DRSLs are. It is expected that by an interim visit there will be substantial progress in the articulation and teaching of the DRSLs.

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

The school's Building Leadership Committee meets several times a year to analyze student achievement data and adjust or modify the school's plan to better meet the needs of students. One area of responsibility is to plan professional development. The faculty has focused their learning on Mike Schmoker's *Results* and Rick DuFour's *Professional Learning Communities*. This professional development has served to develop a collaborative culture allowing for focused conversations on student success. Collaborative work is progressing to looking at effective instructional strategies. Teachers have many opportunities to engage in professional learning according to their needs and interests.

- 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?*

It is clear that the Indian Hills Middle School faculty is highly qualified and knowledgeable of current research. Sixty-five percent of the faculty has advanced degrees and two teachers are National Board Certified. The school's departmental reports reveal commitment to best practice and a willingness to engage in reflective self-study.

As the faculty has engaged in reviewing the results of assessments of student learning for the purpose of improving instructional effectiveness, this has promoted reflective dialogue and planning. As an example of this work, the Language Arts Department created an assessment tool to gauge the growth of students' skills and increase the community support of persuasive writing.

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

With the support of the principal, teachers and students have benefitted from the inclusion of technology in many classes. Teachers and students in many classes utilize interactive white boards, LCD projectors, computers, and hand-held devices.

Teachers have incorporated the use of software or web-based applications to enhance student learning. All students use *My Access* to improve writing. Teachers professional learning in the use of Google Docs, Wikispaces, and Photo Story, have enhanced instruction and provide 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning experiences for students.

### **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 school adheres to district and state mandated assessments. These results are then reviewed periodically and in some instances lead to adjustments. The adjustments and

modifications to instruction are made within the parameters set by the district. The use of AGS/SRI reading tests have provided data has to student progress year by year.

Teachers have been working to develop *Targeted Learning Goals* related to their curriculum. The goals provide a structure for the development of shared curricular maps and have also served as the basis for common assessments.

In reviewing the *Targeted Learning Goals*, the Visiting Team found that the majority defines performance standards that are rudimentary, with most focusing in the cognitive domain of knowledge and comprehension. The Visiting Team commends the faculty for commencing the difficult work in developing common assessments and recommends that teachers raise the bar for student expectations and develop assessments that truly measure student mastery.

- 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 Visiting Team commends the faculty for its considerable work done in the development of *Targeted Learning Goals* with, in some classes, performance standards and criteria for judging student performance established and shared with students in advance of the assessment. However, while teachers within a department collectively apply the *Targeted Learning Goals*, there is little uniformity in grading. The disparity in grading was raised as an issue by parents, students, and teachers during the course of the site visit. The Visiting Team recommends that as development and implementation of *Targeting Learning Goals* is refined, that the school studies the value of grade standardization.

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

The Visiting Team commends the faculty for its thorough examination of standardized testing data. Grade level teams meet to review results of CRTs and other school-wide standardized tests to better guide instructional practices and expectations. Testing data is provided to parents and students through the SEOP process. The school considers the data in light of state and national averages, along with the performance of some of its neighboring schools, or schools competing for enrollment. State assessment data clearly reveals that the majority of students fare well above district and state averages.

It is through the consideration of classroom assessments and grades that the faculty is beginning to discover correlation between teaching, learning, and student success. Those discoveries are lending to discussions about how to better teach struggling students and how to best provide interventions.

- 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?*

As teachers have engaged in professional learning communities, defining *Targeted Learning Goals* and developing common assessments, they have also been considering other assessments that are commonly used in classrooms, their intent and purposes. Some departments such as language arts, math, science, and social studies are using pre-tests of *Targeted Learning Goals* to guide instruction. Teachers use a variety of formative assessments and increasingly, teachers are using data to modify instruction by re-teaching concepts and allowing students to demonstrate improvement.

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

While rubrics for the DRSLs can be found in the schools' self-study, they have been used on a limited basis for the assessment of student work and there is no evidence of an organizational agreement on the use of the rubrics. Departments report that they incorporate the DRSLs into instruction, but this is done more implicitly than explicitly. Math teachers report that they have developed specific assignments designed to explicitly instruct on the DRSLs, but students have failed to make the connection. The Visiting Team recommends that by the interim visit the school be able to document how the DRSLs have been woven into instruction and assessment with scoring tools that are in student-friendly language and that are being used at least to some degree in all classes.

### **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?*

School leadership does a commendable job in supporting an academic learning environment. The school has adopted a schedule that provides for extended learning time, the only model of which used in the district. With the district focus on professional learning communities, teachers are provided time to collaborate and share in lesson development and assessment for learning. Administrators highly regard the professionalism of the school's teaching staff and work to provide whatever support is needed to foster successful learning for all students.

Building leadership is shared to include teacher leaders who play an important role in the development and implementation of programs and practices. The school administrators have facilitated teacher leadership so that teachers feel empowered to make decisions and share in the responsibility of school improvement.

- 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?*

School leadership is working to put into practice the mission of the newly-created Canyons district. The most significant implementation has been in the formation of professional learning communities both within the school and district-wide. Teachers have been given latitude to consider student achievement data that is pertinent to their subject matter and to collaborate in developing benchmark assessments.

The formation of professional learning communities has provided weekly collaboration time with a framework for the work to be done by teams. The priority has been in the development of common assessments. The Visiting Team commends the initial efforts, and recommends that time be given to delving deeper into what students need to know and be able to do to demonstrate mastery in particular content areas.

- c) *To what extent does the 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?*

While Indian Hills Middle School has defined its mission and beliefs, the school goals are somewhat unclear due to the school's shift to meet the expectations of the reorganized district. The school had once defined its DRSLs but when professional learning communities were established with expectations for common assessments, this district initiative superseded the school's work, so that *Targeted Learning Goals* and DRSLs have little in connection. The Visiting Team recommends that the school creates an alignment of departmental *Targeted Learning Goals* to the DRSLs.

- 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 administration established the framework for a Building Leadership Team four years ago and the work of the team really became significant last year. Teachers and administrators both regard the leadership team to be integral to what they consider to be transformative change. The team meets three to four times a year for full days to review data and plan.

Parents are provided information on-line through the school's website or via email. Both administrators and parents report that communication channels need to be strengthened. Parent members on the School Community Council expressed interest in having the council play a more active role in school decisions and planning. The Visiting Team recommends that at least yearly the building leadership team meet with the community council to share information and planning.

- 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?*

Indian Hills Middle School has organized grade level teams that meet once a month for thirty-five minutes. It is through this configuration that student issues can be addressed. The school explored the possibility of creating smaller learning communities with common teachers sharing common students, but could not make teaming work with the trimester system.

Parents report that teachers do take active interest in students, and several who were part of the focus group gave examples where teachers went to extra lengths to meet students' needs. Many students also report that they believe administrators and teachers care about them as individuals. Some students, especially 7<sup>th</sup> graders, reported that in some cases it was hard to keep track of who some of their teachers are, especially in trimester classes. Overall, the Visiting Team found students who were enjoying their classes and engaging in positive interaction with staff members.

The Visiting Team recommends that with grade realignment formal structures be built into the schedule, such as advisory or smaller teams, to more establish positive adult and student connections, especially with sixth graders.

#### **CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD**

##### **Culture of Continual Improvement:**

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

The school has developed and implemented a school improvement plan that is under continual examination and revision. There is a system in place for monitoring student progress using common assessments for each department. Instructional practices have also been aligned by subject matter using *Targeted Learning Goals* to assure a common curriculum is being taught in each subject area.

The use of defined instructional concepts and common assessments as tools for continuous improvement are in place but because of the recent implementation of both, an examination of the results of their implementation has not been fully reviewed.

- 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?*

The Building Leadership Team examines the school's professional development plan each year. Professional learning is conducted weekly using a late start schedule. The school uses this time to implement steps focused on the goals for improvement. This year, teachers collaborated in defining *Targeted Learning Goals*, and became proficient in using assessment programs such as *UtahWrite*, *UTips*, and *My Access*. Time was also provided for technology training. Professional development was focused on providing teachers the tools to better support the teaching of communication skills.

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

The school wide action plan addresses the critical needs the school as identified by the stakeholders involved. The plan, as written, states that DRSLs are addressed, but it does not include explicit instruction of the DRSLs or assessment of student progress directly aligned to the DRSLs. The Visiting team found clear evidence of sufficient commitment to action in talking to teachers, reviewing professional development plans, and reviewing the work of professional learning communities. The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and Building Leadership Team consider the plan in light of the district's initiatives to make sure that the school plan is copacetic with district expectations and to bridge the DRSLs with the *Targeted Learning Goals* of each department. With that work completed, the school can revise the plan to include the implementation of the DRSLs across the curriculum.

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

The school administration, under the direction of Principal Stensrud, has set the standard for continuous improvement. The administration has worked with the Building Leadership Team to create culture of collaboration and it is evident that individuals are both supported in their professional learning and held accountable for quality instruction and student achievement. Teachers regularly engage in the examination of data and have multiple opportunities to contribute to decision-making through department meetings and grade-level team meetings. Parents are supportive of the school and there is an active and viable PTSA group and Community Council Organization in place. Both feel that they have a voice in reviewing school policy but are used sometimes to only review what has already taken place rather than be included in the process from the start. The Visiting Team recommends that this strong parental support be utilized to its fullest in contributing to continuous improvement.

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

Indian Hills Middle School has made considerable progress since the implementation of its original action plan of 2004.

- Technology Integration: The school has adopted a new student management system that has the potential for providing more extensive means of communication with parents. Interactive white boards are in place in most math classes and all classrooms will have mounted projection systems by the end of the year. Teachers have had multiple opportunities for professional learning in technology and as a result many have robust web pages, use Wikis and blogs, and integrate technology regularly into instruction.
- Increase communication within and between departments, and with parents and students: The school has implemented weekly collaboration time, which has served to increase communication within the school. Time is regularly set aside for teachers to communicate with parents and the student management system provides the means to send emails and announcements. All students have Google Docs accounts.
- Data-driven decision making: Teachers have been trained on how to interpret data as a means of informing instruction. The weekly collaboration time has provided the venue for sharing data and developing team approaches to interventions. Teachers are moving from considering state assessment information such as CRTs to classroom assessments. The faculty has been collecting longitudinal data on reading scores that has provided useful information for planning and programming.
- Identify students not performing at proficiency in math and language arts and provide interventions: The school reports that students who are non- proficient are identified and teachers have adjusted instruction to meet their needs. Instructional time in math and language arts has also been increased with the full implementation of the trimester block system.

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

Indian Hills Middle School has addressed the major recommendations of the 2004 site visit in the following ways:

- The incorporation of survey information to drive continuous improvement: The school has implemented the use of the ISQ survey to assess progress. The school also relies on the input of the PTSA and the School Community Council to inform decisions.
- The school action plan should be revisited, and benchmarks established, to that progress can be measured and celebrated: In 2008, teachers began to develop *Targeted Learning Goals* in each subject area. This work has led to the development of common formative assessments in many departments. Many departments are also collecting data to share with students and parents.

- The implementation of common planning time: This has been achieved through the district alignment to include weekly planning time. Indian Hills Middle School uses the time for collaboration and professional development.
- Provide professional development based on the needs of the faculty: The Building Leadership Team meets regularly throughout the year to develop a menu of professional learning opportunities.
- Identify student who are not learning, determine the causes, and develop a plan to meet their needs: The faculty has developed the means to identify struggling students. Since the last site visit, they have implemented several programs to provide support and interventions. They recognize that not all efforts have been successful as a significant number of students move on to the high school deficient in credits, but grade-level teams are committed to finding solutions.
- Instructional practices need to be modified to reflect changes in the schedule: The self-study reports that teachers are continually provided information on chunking class time and meeting the needs of the learner in an extended period. While the Visiting Team found many examples of active learning, students expressed frustration that there weren't more hands-on activities during the course of a day. The Visiting Team recommends that the school conduct an instructional audit or student shadow studies to confirm or disprove perceptions.
- A centralized calendar be developed so that parents, students, and teachers have a better idea of what projects or assignments are due to avoid student overload: To date, the school reports that they have taken no action on this. The parents interviewed by the Visiting Team report that the number of group projects is often overwhelming. The reduction or elimination of such projects was one of the top recommendations voiced by students and parents.

## **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

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

The school works well in establishing positive relationships between students and among the staff and faculty. According to the ISQ survey, students rated themselves as superior in the degree to which they were well behaved and overall, that perception is borne out in the behavior referral information provided in the self study. Teachers work well together and actively participate in professional learning communities. It is clear that the faculty and staff respect the administration.

Students and teachers have regular opportunities to engage in service learning and in activities that build school spirit and pride. Student accomplishments are celebrated, as are those of the staff and faculty.

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

Teachers meet monthly in district professional learning communities. Based on subject matter, these groups refine *Targeted Learning Goals* relative to the discipline; learn of district programs; and network with those from other schools. The school also connects with business, local government, and agencies to connect learning with the real world, provide enrichment or recreational activities or to celebrate students' accomplishments. The PTSA newsletter provides timely information to parents of not only school activities but also community information. The school is working with the high school and the elementary schools to create more seamless and successful transitions.

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

The Visiting Team commends the school on engaging in a self-study that revealed its accomplishments along with the areas in which it struggles. The administration and faculty recognize that as the needs of students change, they must change to respond to those needs. The administration involved teachers, staff members, and students in the self-study process and their input was carefully considered and incorporated into the reports and plan.

The school made several efforts at involving parents. Rates of participation were low, but reports were made to the PTSA Board and School Community Council. The Visiting Team recommends for future endeavors, the Building Leadership Team meet with such bodies, not to just report on progress, but to engage in joint planning and assessment.

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

Results have been used as information for future planning. Teachers reported that in developing the department reports, several departments began to set goals for the coming year, based on the information they collected. The Building Leadership Team has used the information to form a professional development plan for the coming year.

Results have been shared in newsletters and at meetings or events where parents might be in attendance. The actual document was shared with the School Community Council.

The Visiting Team recommends that the school publish some of the information contained in the self-study on its website.

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

### Commendations:

- Indian Hills Middle School is to be commended for its strong academic programs, with emphasis on the core for all subject areas, students are given the foundation for college readiness.
- Indian Hills Middle School is to be commended for the degree to which teachers are embracing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills through the integration of technology into teaching and learning. Special recognition is to be given to Principal Stensrud for his commitment to providing the tools teachers need in order to provide quality learning experiences for students.
- The faculty and staff of Indian Hills Middle School are to be commended for their commitment to collaboration and their dedication to students. They have demonstrated not only cohesiveness but the willingness to adapt to change.

### Recommendations:

- Indian Hills Middle School needs to develop the means to explicitly teach and assess the DRSLs across the curriculum. Students, parents, and teachers should be able to articulate what the desired results for student learning are, and provide evidence, through the use of rubrics or assessments, of student progress in every classroom. *Targeted Learning Goals* should not run parallel to the DRSLs but should be subject-specific articulation of the DRSLs.
- As the school will be subject to grade realignment, the Visiting Team recommends that a formal study of curricular offerings and schedules be commenced to consider what is best for younger adolescents. The self-study reports that the trimester modified block is “cherished” by teachers, but interviews with students and parents revealed very mixed feelings. Consideration should be given as to how the school can create smaller more personalized learning communities, especially for the incoming sixth graders.
- The Visiting Team recommends that as the school continues to address the needs of those students who are failing classes. As teachers collaborate on developing common assessments, consideration needs to be given to conformity in grading. Care needs to be given to avoid stratification of academic classes, or the creation of tracks. Teachers should be supported in providing rigorous and relevant learning experiences for all students.

- Finally, the Visiting Team recommends that the school works to create more community buy in by providing the means for groups like the PTSA and the School Community Council to have more input before decisions are made and plans are finalized.