The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team

Sunset Junior High School

1610 North 250 West
Sunset, Utah 84015

January 14-15, 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

Sunset Junior High School

1610 North 250 West
Sunset, Utah 84015

January 14-15, 2010

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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

DIVISION OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Brenda Hales, Associate Superintendent

Lynne Greenwood, Director
Curriculum and Instruction

Gerolynn Hargrove, Coordinator
Curriculum and Instruction

Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist
Curriculum and Instruction

Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

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

The evaluation, January 14-15, 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 Sunset Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by the principal, Dr. James Schmidt is also commended.

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

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

UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
250 East 500 South
P. O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200

District 1
VACANT

District 2
Greg W. Haws
5841 West 4600 South
Hooper, UT 84315
Phone: (801) 985-7980

District 3
Craig E Coleman
621 South Main St.
Genola, UT 84655
Phone: (801) 754-3655

District 4
David L. Thomas
7875 South 2250 East
South Weber, UT 84405
Phone: (801) 479-7479

District 5
Kim R. Burningham
932 Canyon Crest Drive
Bountiful, UT 84010
Phone: (801) 292-9261

District 6
Michael G. Jensen
4139 S Aubrey Ln
West Valley City, UT 84128
Phone: (801) 968-5960

District 7
Leslie B. Castle
2465 St. Mary's Drive
Salt Lake City, UT 84108
Phone: (801) 581-9752

District 8
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5256 Holladay Blvd.
Salt Lake City, UT 84117
Phone: (801) 272-3516

District 9
Denis R. Morrill
6016 South 2200 West
Taylorsville, UT 84118
Phone: (801) 969-2334

District 10
Laurel Brown
5311 South Lucky Clover Ln
Murray, UT 84123
Phone: (801) 261-4221

District 11
David L. Crandall
13464 Saddle Ridge Drive
Draper, UT 84020
Phone: (801) 501-9095

District 12
Carol Murphy
463 West 140 North
Midway, UT 84049
Phone: (435) 729-0941

District 13
C. Mark Openshaw
3329 Piute Drive
Provo, UT 84604
Phone: (801)377-0790

District 14
Dixie Allen
218 West 5250 North
Vernal, UT 84078
Phone: (435) 789-0534

District 15
Debra G. Roberts
Box 1780
Beaver, UT 84713
Phone: (435) 438-5843

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

Douglas J. Holmes***
274 ½ 25th Street
Ogden UT 84401
Phone: (801) 479-8163

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

Larry K Shumway
Executive Officer

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

Twila B. Affleck
Secretary

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Craig Poll ..... Asst. Superintendent
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John Sheffield ..... School Director - Elementary
Rick Call .....School Director– Junior High
Rulon A. Homer.....School Director–High School

SUNSET JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Dr. James Schmidt ..... Principal
Robert Ito ..... Assistant Principal
Dick Close ..... Assistant Principal
Jefferson Powars ..... Assistant Principal

Counseling

Dale Carter Haacke ..... Head Counselor
Christy Hutchinson ..... Counselor
Robin Buckwalter ..... Counselor

Support Staff

Cindy Anderson
Susan Andrews
Randall Barton
Brady Bell
Adriana Benvenuto
Scott Bush
Silvia Cortes
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Judy Hancock
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Jerian Miller
Susan Moser
Jana Parker
Gay Parkinson
Marsha Perkins
Sandra Ralphs
Hazelann Rushton
Dixie Simpson
Sherry Stewart
Dylan Swallow
Renee Warner
Wendy Tremea
Shawna Warrick
Ilene Wayment

Faculty

Brianne Altice
Jennifer Baker
Darrin Bateman
Shirlynn Baird
Penelope Burbank
Eileen Burke
Richard Callister
Lawrence Carrillo
Jason Charlesworth
Patrick Crawford
Eileen Dempsey
Elizabeth Davis-Evans
Darren Ferrell
Carol Gardiner
Robin Gumbrecht
Marsha Hamblin
Robert Hillier
Anna Holman
Arthur Hosmer
Mark Jordan
Claire Long
Derek Loveland
Leslie Mancini
Melanie McEvoy

Sherry Meibos
Dean Miller
Cristie Nicholas
Tamilla Oliver
Ann Page
Lance Powell
Merci Rossmango
Mary Shepherd
Randy Shipley
Hua Shuo
Trevor Smith
Linda Stalter
Holly Stock
Jana Taylor
Edgar Trout
Becky Vervloet
Melanie Wilcox
Judy Williams
Todd Williams

SUNSET JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of Sunset Junior High School is to prepare students to become responsible life-long learners in a safe atmosphere of respect and cooperation.

Sundevils SHINE and Believe They Are:

Safe at School
Held Consistently Accountable
Involved in Learning
Nurtured by All Stakeholders
Expected to Learn in Diverse Ways

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Students will benefit from the integration of school curriculum.
2. Students will find emotional and physical safety at school.
3. Students will communicate effectively.

January 14- 15, 2010

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Dan N. Johnson, Tooele County School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Eric Ferrin, Spanish Fork Junior High School, Nebo School District

James Hubbard, Spanish Fork Junior High School, Nebo School District

Stacey Jackson, Rocky Mountain Junior High School, Davis County School District

Willa Jamieson, Eisenhower Junior High School, Granite School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

SUNSET JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Sunset Junior High School is located in the community of Sunset, Davis County. The school was built in 1964 and has undergone additions and upgrades over the years. The facility is clean and houses a student population of 969 in grades seven, eight and nine. The students come from diverse backgrounds, with a 22 percent minority population and about 25 percent of the population receiving free or reduced-price lunch. The school offers a wide variety of academic programs and extracurricular activities. Emphasis has been placed on creating an environment that is welcoming and safe. The school is characterized by active involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making, program development and implementation. The school is not anticipating any major changes that will dramatically affect it over the next few years.

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

A significant finding revealed by analysis of Sunset Junior High School's profile was the impact that implementation of the Safety DRSL (citizenship) has had the learning environment at the school. Further, surveys administered to teachers, parents and students revealed to school leadership that the efforts made toward continuous school improvement are supported and believed to be effective. The profile revealed that conditions have been created that will foster positive school change.

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

The Visiting Team feels the school has done a great job of moving forward since the last interim review. Once the school begins to create common formative assessments, it will need to find a way to capture and report this data to affect instruction. This data will be valuable in the future profile to illustrate growth in student achievement.

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

Sunset Junior High School has shown a lot of growth in this area. Goals were developed for future implementation through an analysis of each of the components of the self-study. The Visiting Team felt the data generated in the study were sufficient to support the school's improvement efforts. Future profiles, though, will need to contain specific data related to academic growth of students. The school did a great job of following the USOE accreditation process.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- It is suggested that Sunset Junior High School investigate the impact that the use of data from the creation of common formative assessments would have on teaching and learning. This data would strengthen the school's profile.

- The Visiting Team suggests that Sunset Junior High consider rewording the DRSLs so that they do not appear to be belief statements or objectives. The USOE Life Skills document would be an excellent resource for this work.

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 DRSL's developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?

Sunset Junior High has developed a mission statement, beliefs (SHINE) and DRSLs that define the compelling purpose and direction of the school. Two years ago, Sunset Junior High decided to simplify its prior mission, beliefs, and DRSLs. A large group of faculty members was involved in the development of the "SHINE" acronym that is a condensation of the school's previous belief statements. From survey results, a faculty team reworked the mission statement that was accepted by the faculty. Both parents and students who were interviewed by the Visiting Team were involved with and very supportive of the shared vision of Sunset Junior High.

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

The belief statements of Sunset Junior High (SHINE) are in perfect alignment with both the mission and the DRSLs of the school. The Visiting Team commends the school for its efforts to create beliefs and DRSLs that have been implemented and used in the everyday culture of the school and followed by all stakeholders.

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

Sunset Junior High has ongoing data from frequent safety surveys completed by all school stakeholders to assess the level of emotional and physical safety at school. However, the school needs to develop and formalize school-wide rubrics to measure progress in curriculum integration and effective communication. The Visiting Team believes that with the implementation of professional learning community (PLC)

practices at Sunset Junior High, the indicators for school progress will be developed and implemented in the school.

d) *To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school and appear evident in the culture of the school?*

The Visiting Team found that the "SHINE" belief statements were developed by a large group of faculty members at lunch. Students, parents, and staff questioned by team members knew the SHINE acronym. The school has conducted activities during the advisory period to help students with this. Furthermore, the faculty at Sunset Junior High has done an outstanding job of creating opportunities for the students to learn effective communication strategies and techniques. The Visiting Team members visited many classrooms where students were actively engaged in effective communication learning projects. Furthermore, the Visiting Team witnessed, both in the classrooms and in the hallways, several examples of student work that resulted from the integration of the school curriculum.

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?*

Sunset Junior High has an early release system in place that allows the teachers to get together on Fridays to discuss instruction and student needs. They have established rubrics for scoring student work based on the Core Curriculum. They are currently finishing up the work of this discussion by creating curriculum maps in each department. The school's plan is to take these maps to the grade level teams and discuss how the curriculum can be integrated across the grade level.

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

Sunset Junior High uses a large variety of teaching methods to involve every student. The Visiting Team noticed that the students were engaged in activities that had the students exploring, writing, and thinking about the curriculum. Staff development has reinforced the use of research-based best practices.

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

Sunset Junior High teachers meet at least once a week to (1) establish and discuss curriculum as a department team, (2) compare cross-curricular ideas and concepts as a grade-level team, and (3) address and discuss as an entire school issues relating to procedure, safety, and best practices. These meetings focus on integration of the school

curriculum, and the communication of that curriculum to the students using reading and writing, while maintaining the physical and emotional safety of the students.

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

Sunset Junior High teachers use coordinated rubrics and individual teacher-created assessments to measure students' progress toward the intended learning outcomes. With students who struggle to meet the learning outcomes, there is a peer mentoring program and after-school tutoring. This program is frequently used by students and receives great support from parents and guardians.

Instruction:

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

It was observed by the Visiting Team that teachers at Sunset Junior High use a myriad of strategies to engage students and enhance the learning process. Examples observed by team members were lab work, computer tutorials (such as, Read 180 and PLATO), direct instruction, guided practice, small-group activities, individual activities, class discussion, writing, incorporation of technology (such as Interwrite pads and LCD projectors), video instruction, cooperative learning, performance-based assessments, projects, and music. In addition to all the observed strategies, the school offers a late bus for students to stay after school for remediation, tutoring, and to make up absent work.

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

The Visiting Team deduced that the institutionalized DRSL was that of safety and citizenship. The team witnessed teachers present in the halls between classes; there was evidence of anti-harassment and respectful language lessons within the advisory/reading classes, and school rules are posted throughout the building. The school enforces proper conduct through a point system, ISS, and detention. The Visiting Team recommends that the school refine the wording of the DRSLs, and define clear, measurable indicators.

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?*

There are times allotted for teachers to receive district training to develop practices such as website design and 504 instruction. In addition, the Visiting Team found the teachers worked collaboratively to improve their own instructional strategies. Each Friday, students are excused from school early and teachers meet in a variety of ways to address student/school needs. It was mentioned that some teachers receive Internet instruction,

while others are enrolled in a variety of university classes to improve teaching. There are also plans for technology training for the teachers through Davis School District.

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 the opinion of the Visiting Team that the teachers are extremely proficient in their content area and knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches. Twelve teachers currently have, or are working on, their master's degrees; one is working on an administrative endorsement and eleven are ESL endorsed. Three teachers are in the ARL program, and twenty-one teachers have completed, or are working on, a variety of other endorsements. All first-, second-, and third-year teachers receive visits from a district mentor at least monthly. The only recommendation from the Visiting Team would be to use more data to reflect on their own 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?*

JSSC guides decisions made for the use of Trust Lands monies. For the past few years, these monies have been used to upgrade school technology. The Visiting Team discovered that a new computer lab had been created. Also, Interwrite Mobi pads and LCD projectors have been purchased for many teachers. There are plans for teacher training on the new technology. English teachers use My Access to give immediate feedback to students about their writing. Low-level math classes use individualized computer tutorials for remediation purposes. There is a similar program for low-level readers in the school.

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?*

While the Sunset Junior High staff has developed classroom assessments with clearly articulated performance standards, rubrics, and models, these assessments rarely extend beyond the individual teacher's classroom to the department. School-wide assessments are largely only the standardized testing currently offered in the form of the Iowa and CRT tests. The mapping work being done will facilitate school-side assessment on commonly taught concepts and skills.

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

Sunset Junior High meets collaboratively as a school, as departments, and as grade-level teams. These teams often discuss curriculum and the rubrics to guide and measure student

learning. This process could be used to create a school-wide tool to assess individual progress. The development of common formative assessments will greatly aid in this process.

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

Sunset Junior High uses data produced by individual teachers' assessments to measure the students' academic performance, but without a school-wide rubric or common departmental assessment, it is harder to see the progress of the school toward its academic expectations.

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?*

Sunset Junior High's current program of meeting in teams on a regular basis is functioning well as a tool for change in establishing good curricula and rubrics and evaluating teaching techniques. There is no reason why this program cannot be extended to establishing assessment strategies—though there is little evidence that it has been used to that purpose thus far, except in the creation of rubrics to guide individual assessment strategies. The Visiting Team feels that the school has taken the first steps and laid the foundation for future assessment work.

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

Currently at Sunset Junior High, there is no school-wide scoring tool to assess the DRSLs. Assessment is done by examining individual programs that assist in making progress toward implementation of the DRSLs. There are also multiple departmental rubrics that help to measure progress toward the DRSLs. There does exist, however, a school-wide program to improve writing and a requirement that all classes have at least one writing assignment per term. The English Department assists with the scoring of these writing assignments. The school has done a solid job of creating curriculum mapping, and is positioned to create school-wide DRSL assessments.

CHAPTER 3: NAAS SUPPORT STANDARDS

Leadership and Organization:

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

The concept of continuous improvement is evident throughout Sunset Junior High School. Administrators and teacher leaders review school goals and provide the time and tools needed to focus on academic achievement. The Visiting Team noted that there were many examples of sharing research-based instructional practices in both formal and informal settings. Students stated that they enjoyed the variety of teaching methods.

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 is working hard to use data to inform decision-making and instruction. The Visiting Team reviewed evidence of this work that included data related to attendance, behavior, and assessment. Teams, departments, faculty and community groups used the information to direct the business of the school. The decision-making process identified by the Visiting Team was inclusive and purposeful—a strength of the school.

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?*

The faculty and community were very complimentary of the administration of Sunset Junior High. It was frequently stated that the administrators are effective listeners who will do whatever it takes to get the needs of the teachers and students met. The Visiting Team noticed that there was a high degree of alignment in developing, implementing, and assessing the citizenship DRSL. The work done in this area will continue to serve as a great model for implementation of other 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 Visiting Team indentified the effort to include the community in decision making as a strength of the school. Students also felt like they had input into the programs and practices that affected them. Various teacher teams have been formed to provide opportunities for individuals to be actively involved in the operation of the school. Efforts have been made to form both permanent and ad hoc committees to address the school's improvement goals.

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?*

The school is refining this process, and offers many opportunities for students to interact with adults in activities, clubs, and athletics. Grade-level teams and departmental teams offer special opportunities for the staff to meet and address the academic needs of students. The Case

Management Team (CMT) provides monitoring of special circumstances and student needs. Programs such as this help assure student advocacy through group decision-making.

CHAPTER 4: NAAS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

Culture of Continual Improvement:

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

The Visiting Team observed that Sunset Junior High School has developed a comprehensive school improvement plan, but has yet to implement it fully. There is still a need for all stakeholders to be made aware of the plan, and a framework for cohesiveness needs to be devised. As a result of the interim visit, as well as community input, the school determined that some changes were needed to the mission statement and DRSLs. The resulting work refined the original mission statement and changed the language as well as the number of DRSLs.

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 Visiting Team has noted that Sunset Junior High uses the early-out time on Friday afternoons to work in departments and grade-level teams to address and plan ways and means to attain the school's goals. The staff appears to be genuinely committed to improvement.

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

The Visiting Team has observed that the action plan for Sunset Junior High is adequate, for now, in addressing the needs of the school. Internalization of the Safety DRSL is apparent, though it could use some refining through the creation of measurable indicators that could be tied into the school's SHINE program. The team has noted that all of the components are there, but just need to be tied in together.

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

Sunset Junior High School and its administration create a culture of productive change and improvement. It was readily apparent to the Visiting Team that the staff is willing to explore the ways and means to continuously improve.

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

The current action plan has changed somewhat due to self-study by the staff at Sunset Junior High School. It is commendable that the staff has recognized the change in the needs of the school community and has been willing to address that change by revision of the 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 Visiting Team has observed that Sunset Junior High took the prior recommendations as a validation of the work that the school needed to do, and has been working to address those recommendations. The self-study indentified specific steps taken to address each recommendation.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

Sunset Junior High School is actively working together to foster relationships throughout the school and with the community, and to create curriculum maps and to work with these across the curriculum. It is recommended that the staff continue to work on these maps and investigate the structure of PLCs as a means to facilitate further community building.

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

The Visiting Team noted the beginnings of collaborative networks in various departments and teams throughout the school, and urges the school staff to continue its work to create means that support student learning, including professional learning communities, cross-curricular and grade-level teams, SMART goals, and common assessments.

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

The Visiting Team has observed that Sunset Junior High has a very viable School Community Council, and that there is much collaborative effort between the council members and the administration and staff. This is another strength of the school.

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

The Visiting Team observed that the self-study contained sufficient data, but there was also a huge amount of data available to the staff, and that many decisions were being made based on this data. It is recommended that this highly useful data be disaggregated and included in future decision-making endeavors. It is also recommended that all stakeholders be made aware of the data. The data will serve the school well as it moves to implement the goals established in the action plan.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Sunset Junior High School for creating a safe and nurturing environment. All stakeholders are proud of their school and feel it is a place where the safety of students comes first. This DRSL includes several elements of citizenship, and has been institutionalized across the school. Several methods are in place school-wide to track and report the data.

- Students are offered a wide variety of academic and extracurricular programs. A huge effort goes into finding the resources to develop and implement the programs that students, teachers and the community want and need. This attention to providing equity and access for all was very impressive to the Visiting Team.

- The facilities are clean and support a positive learning environment. The media program, hot lunch program, clerical and classified support programs are all supportive of the school's goals. Each support system was found to be instrumental in developing a sense of school pride at Sunset Junior High.

- The Visiting Team noted effort for school improvement in the areas of attendance, behavior and academics. Strong leadership across the school and from the community is working to redefine the mission, goals, DRSLs at the school. This work was seen in the areas of student management and recognition, teaching and learning strategies, and individual classroom, department and school-wide assessment, as well as professional development.

- Sunset Junior High School is to be commended for its focus on student learning. The work currently being done to map the curriculum will prove to be an important stepping stone in answering the question: “What do we want our students to know and be able to do?” This is difficult work, but the necessary teacher leadership and expertise exist at Sunset Junior High School.

- The school has implemented some of the structures necessary for them to become a “professional learning community” (PLC). Evidence includes released time for grade level and departmental teams to meet on predetermined courses of action.

- The school’s attention to literacy in both reading and writing is impressive.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended by the Visiting Team that Sunset Junior High School use the USOE accreditation process as an umbrella to guide decision making and the school improvement process. It is the framework under which all goals, programs, and interventions should fall.

- The school leadership should consider rewriting the DRSLs so that they are the broad concepts that the school wants to attain. (The Life Skills Document would be useful for this work.) Belief statements, goals and program implementation would then become steps by which the DRSLs are attained. As each DRSL is institutionalized, a school-wide assessment system should be put into place so that the data collected can be monitored and reported for school improvement purposes.

- The Visiting Team recognizes that an incredible amount of work that has been done at the school to promote collaboration. It is recommended that Sunset Junior High School investigate the principles found in the PLC literature to give a framework to what has already been accomplished. PLCs are a wonderful complement to the USOE accreditation process.

- It is recommended that, after the school completes its curriculum mapping project, it take the next step and begin writing common formative assessments for each course. These assessments made within departments will facilitate both horizontal and vertical articulation of curriculum. The mapping and assessment projects will also help the school with its goal to develop more cross-curricular instruction.