

## **Executive Summary of the School Support Team Report for Skyland Community High School**

The School Support Team report is an evidence-based report that is based on nine standards or key areas of school functions:

### **Academic Performance**

1. Curriculum
2. Assessment / Evaluation
3. Instruction

### **Learning Environment**

4. School culture
5. Student, family, and community support
6. Professional development and evaluation

### **Organizational Effectiveness**

7. Leadership
8. Organizational structure and resources
9. Comprehensive and effective planning

Each School Support Team (SST) uses an extensive rubric that identifies indicators for each standard and describes four performance levels. The information gathered from the school review (documents and artifacts, interviews, and observations) is used to complete the report according to the SST rubric.

There are three sections to the School Support Team report.

Section 1 of the SST report is the Executive Summary. This section includes logistical information about the school review, a listing of the nine standards around which the report is written, commendations / areas of note, themes and recommendations, and questions to consider as the school decides how it will follow up on the report.

Section 2, the Detailed Report, describes the team's findings on the indicators for each standard, the sources of evidence used to substantiate the findings, and comments written by the team to clarify their findings. The numbers listed in the performance level column rate the school's overall performance on each indicator of each standard in the rubric.

Section 3 of the report, the Landscape section, provides a "summary at a glance" of the rating results for each indicator. The Performance Level numbers in the Detailed Report are color coded on the Landscape report and indicate the following:

Level 1: Little or no development and implementation (Red on the Landscape section)

Level 2: Limited development or partial implementation (Black on the Landscape section)

Level 3: Fully functioning and operational level of development and implementation (Blue on the Landscape section)

Level 4: Exemplary level of development and implementation (Green on the Landscape section)

## **STANDARDS FOR THE SCHOOL SUPPORT TEAM REPORT**

### **Academic Performance**

The following Academic Performance Standards address (1) curriculum, (2) classroom evaluation and assessment, and (3) instruction.

**Standard 1:** The school implements a curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards.

**Standard 2:** The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.

**Standard 3:** Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

### **Learning Environment:**

The following Learning Environment Standards address (4) school culture, (5) student, family, and community support, and (6) professional development and personnel evaluation.

**Standard 4:** The school/district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.

**Standard 5:** The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and development needs of students.

**Standard 6:** The school/district provides research-based professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

### **Organizational Effectiveness:**

The following Organizational Effectiveness Standards address (7) leadership, (8) organizational structure and resources, and (9) comprehensive and effective planning.

**Standard 7:** School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.

**Standard 8:** The school is organized to maximize the use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.

**Standard 9:** The school develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.

## **CDE SCHOOL SUPPORT TEAM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT**

### **SKYLAND COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The school support team conducted a scholastic review of Skyland Community High School during the period of Oct. 18 – Oct. 22, 2009

In order to prepare an evidence-based report, the school support team activities included a review of the documents collected for the school portfolio and profile;

Number of interviews/conversations\* with

- School administrators (4)
- District administrators (1)
- Classroom advisors (8)
- Nurse, psychologist, social worker, OT/PT (1)
- Community partnership coordinators (3)
- Secretaries, clerks, records, data (1)
- Parents (4)
- Students (21); and
- Classroom walkthroughs (35) and observations\* (10)
- Meeting observations (3)

\*The number may represent the number of observations or interviews, not the number of teachers in the school, for example.

**AREAS OF RECOGNITION:** The School Support Team would like to recognize and commend the following:

- The farm experience gives Skyland students a rich, rural, opportunity where they experience hands-on science.
- The Skyland schedule provides opportunities for staff members to meet for collaboration with team members and the opportunity to have sustained professional development.
- The Big Picture Concept of connecting young people with real world experience through the intern program opens up the world of opportunity to them.
- Students have the opportunity to explore individual interests through the projects they create.
- The staff members bring a variety of backgrounds to share with the students.
- It is apparent that the staff cares about kids.

## **Prologue**

An environment of accountability is crucial in order to provide a foundation where effective teachers deliver instruction, where students take responsibility for their learning, and where all stakeholders including the community, businesses and parents support the efforts of the students at Skyland Community High School. The culture of high accountability for both student achievement and student behavior is a key component to increasing student success. Through collaboration and coordination, with focus and clarity of purpose, shared responsibility for student learning is created and cultivated, thus leading to a positive learning environment for both staff and students.

Reeves says, “*Accountability in education is inevitable. The choice for educational and community leaders is not whether to have accountability. Instead, these leaders must decide how to make this slippery concept effective and fair.*”

Accountability is imperative in the school learning environment. The surroundings that every learner and staff member face every day impacts what is taught and what is learned. It communicates the message of whether the students and staff are valued or not. An environment that is neither safe, nor healthy will create a negative impact on learning. All stakeholders at Skyland Community High School have a right to a guaranteed safe, healthy, and equitable learning environment.

A partnership between parents, the community and the school is also a necessary part of the overall learning environment. Involving parents can be challenging, but without actively seeking the work that removes barriers to learning and enhances the parent role in student achievement, a school will be challenged to consistently impact student learning for the long term.

Just as student learning is critical, so is the importance of staff learning. Creating an environment where all student learn to read, write, and compute requires a focused, well-planned effort on the part of all staff. It does not happen by accident. The professional development of all staff needs to be aligned to the needs of the individuals as well as the identified goals for student achievement. Staff members need to be held accountable for their professional development and to be provided the support necessary to implement and sustain effective professional practices. Planning for professional growth is not an event, but a process that over time can highly impact the entire school.

## **RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC ACTIONS – MAJOR THEMES**

Major Theme #1: Create an instructional system that is accountable for providing strong standards-based instruction within the Big Picture Model.

MAJOR THEME 2: Create a well designed and implemented effective Professional Development focused on deepening instructional practices that raise student achievement.

MAJOR THEME 3: Create a learning environment that is safe, healthy, orderly, and equitable.

## **Major Theme #1 Create an instructional system that is accountable for providing strong standards-based instruction within the Big Picture Model.**

At Skyland Community High School there is not a thorough understanding of what standards-based instruction looks like. Essential learning targets are not analyzed; consequently there is not focused instruction. Proficient work is not expected, nor is there a clear understanding of what proficient work really looks like.

Urgency is imperative for schools that need change and Skyland Community High School is no exception. The students lose powerful instruction focused on skills every day. Since these students are older (some approaching 21) they do not have the gift of time. They need intense, focused instruction that is keenly concentrated on basic proficiencies. At this time many of the students will be leaving with a diploma, but not having all the necessary skills to pursue work or college goals. The reading level of students is below grade level and without the necessary support to raise these skills, their future is bleak.

Projects and internships are basic to the Big Picture Model. These can not only coexist, but can become integral in the assessment of learning for the school. Completion of these projects consumes much class time, thus limiting instruction time.

As easy as this can sound, being truly standards-based is complex and challenging for any school. It means more than teaching “to the standards”, completing a published text or program aligned with standards, or giving periodic assessments. In broad terms it means that **every teacher, every day, in every classroom engages in a cyclical process of teaching and learning that ensures all children learn and can demonstrate proficiency in the district’s adopted essential standards.** It also means that a school deeply, comprehensively and consistently is clear about the questions that every Professional Learning Community asks.

- **What does every child need to know and be able to do (and perform at a proficient level)?**
- **How do we effectively teach so every child learns every essential standard?**
- **How do we know when every child has learned?**
- **What do we do when a child doesn’t learn, or has learned our standards ahead of expectation?**

*From The Coalition for Standards-Based Education (representing the Colorado Department of Education, the Colorado Association of School Boards, the Colorado Education Association, and the Colorado Association of School Executives)*

## **Recommendations**

### **Become Comprehensively Standards Based in Daily Practice**

In a standards-based curriculum, essential learnings must be identified, aligned and pacing must be based upon those learning targets. Teachers can then teach the standards using appropriate planning and instruction tools within the instructional time available. This is called a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (Marzano, *Schools that Work*, 2000) that insures every child in the school is afforded the same opportunity to learn, regardless of the school or teacher. Consequently, to have a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” there needs to be consistent implementation of all curricula throughout the school.

### **Communicate High Expectations for all students and staff**

**High expectations** for students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds, are a cornerstone of the school effectiveness research. “Teachers must communicate high expectations directly to students using clear, measurable goals accompanied by timely and specific feedback, which is one of the “most powerful single modifications (for students) that enhance achievement.” (Marzano, 2003) To ensure consistent high expectations the following recommendations are provided:

- Expect teachers to implement quality first instruction in each classroom. Monitor classroom instruction and provide meaningful feedback to teachers to assist their efforts to both deliver quality instruction and to modify instruction to meet the diverse needs of students.
- Expect all students to engage in higher-order thinking and active learning.
- Expect students to produce quality, on-grade level work.
- Communicate essential learning targets and proficiency levels to students and parents.
- Use data dialogue teams to monitor and evaluate both student learning and teacher instruction results.
- Expect achievement results.
- Provide multiple opportunities to learn rather than simply receiving a grade or failing a test or course.
- Celebrate successes regarding student achievement in multiple ways.

### **Integrate internships and projects as viable assessments**

- Guide students in the selection of internships and projects so that they create real-life experiences that provide quality connections to real life.
- Guarantee that students receive the appropriate prior knowledge needed to successfully create projects that are rigorous and of high quality.
- Expect high achievement and quality.

### **Create ways to use time as an instructional resource**

- Provide a school structure that incorporates basic instruction so that students have the tools necessary, not only for high quality projects, but also tools that will allow them success after graduation.
- Examine time on task policies.
- Hold all advisor/instructors to high expectations in the use of time.

*Questions to consider:*

- Do we really believe that our students can learn? How do we demonstrate that belief to ourselves and to the students?
- How do we know that our students can enter college and/or the workforce with the skills that they need to be successful?
- How can we better utilize our professional resources (time, materials, and expertise) to improve our own skills and meet our student needs?
- How do we communicate high expectations to students and staff?
- How will the quality of internships and projects change if students have the prior knowledge needed to create quality work?
- How will we determine what knowledge our students need to have to enter either college or the work force after graduation?
- How do we use time in both the master schedule and the classroom?
- How can we align the Big Picture Model with the necessary tools students need for post-graduation success?
- How can we learn about Standards Based Education? How do we know what we need to do?
- How do we guarantee that a diploma from Skyland Community High School is a quality diploma guaranteeing that the recipients have all the credentials and/or credits for success in college and the work force?

**MAJOR THEME 2: Create a well designed and implemented effective Professional Development focused on deepening instructional practices that raise student achievement.**

Wagner and Kegan (2006) state it succinctly, “It seems clear that professional development activities must be aligned to a few carefully chosen improvement priorities that are informed by and monitored with data.” Other research states, “For .... school teachers, an intense **focus** on professional development includes taking on one content-area improvement at a time or implementing a single teaching practice that can be applied across the curriculum. An intense **focus** on professional development requires that teachers are persistent in learning to apply a narrow set of proven practices. When a set of practices becomes embedded into teachers’ routines and students demonstrate that they are benefitting from the initiatives, move on to the next innovation in the professional development plan.” (Mooney & Mausbach, 2008, 101-2) The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has identified professional development benchmarks which indicate that effective professional development:

- directly aligns with school improvement goals
- is based on a needs assessment and/or data analysis
- aligns instruction with learning needs
- requires collaboration and communication among staff
- provides multiple safe opportunities for practice and refinement in classrooms
- is supported by appropriate coaching, mentoring, and support
- includes clear accountability criteria for implementation

Learning and growing together as a system is about professional development and encouragement through professional learning environments and how everyone is held accountable for the work. Just as student learning is critical, so is the importance of staff learning. Creating an environment where all children learn to read, write, compute and think critically requires a focused, well-planned effort on the part of all staff. It does not happen by accident. The professional development of all staff needs to be aligned to the needs of the individuals as well as the identified goals for student achievement. Staff members need to be held accountable for their professional development and to be provided the support necessary to implement and sustain effective professional practices. Planning for professional growth is not an event, but a process that over time can highly impact the entire school.

## Recommendations

- Examine current initiatives to determine if they are high-yield strategies and research best educational practices.
- Judiciously **focus** on research-based instructional strategies that are sufficiently supported for school-wide mastery of one or two high yield strategies.
- Provide opportunities for teacher leaders to develop skills in facilitation/process, coaching, data analysis, the building of collegial relationships and professional practices.
- Provide in-depth in-classroom modeling, guided practice, feedback and reflection of focus strategies. Include information, demonstrations, and follow-up support from appropriate sources (other staff members, facilitators, administrators, district personnel, outside consultants, etc.).
- Design and implement ways to hold all teaching staff accountable for fidelity of implementation.
- Closely monitor the effect of professional development activities on student achievement. Develop and implement staff training in the deeper analysis of student data leading to modification of instruction.

## Questions to consider:

- Do we have a long-term professional development plan based on effective instructional strategies, multiple sources of student achievement data and an accountability component?
- How can we articulate our expectations of how professional development will impact student learning?
- How do we support each other and hold ourselves and each other accountable for implementing what has been learned?
- When and how will all teachers increase their ability to employ high impact instructional strategies as part of their efforts to reach the diverse needs of all students?
- Are we building leadership capacity to implement our goals?
- How does our professional development plan address our vision of all students becoming proficient?
- How can we best learn to apply useful, specific processes to help us work collaboratively, e.g. analyzing student work, using formative assessment to guide instruction, and making data-driven instructional changes?

### **MAJOR THEME 3: Create a learning environment that is safe, healthy, orderly, and equitable.**

A positive learning environment is crucial in order for effective teachers to deliver quality instruction and for students to receive an exemplary education. The culture of high expectations for both student achievement and student behavior is a key component to increasing student achievement. Through collaboration and coordination, with focus and clarity of purpose, shared responsibility for student learning is created and cultivated. This leads to a positive learning environment for both staff and students.

It takes courage to bring about the best in everyone and to allow individuals to make necessary changes in practice that results in moving forward. “Effective visions help individuals understand that they are part of a larger world and also reassure them of their individual importance to the organization” (Reeves, 2006). Critical to this work is building on the strengths that already exist in the school from the community to central office to individual teachers and empowering each of these individuals to contribute in ways that benefit the students and their achievement.

Working together provides a framework for maximizing the potential for success of the organization by incorporating the strengths of all the individuals and unifying efforts to provide a synergy for the school. Communication, accessing information, meeting student needs and cultivating trust are key ways to enhance and promote working together.

The school culture is characterized by an orderly climate with clear and enforced rules for student behavior. At Skyland Community High School, staff members express how much they care about the students and have created an environment that implies keeping students content is more important than enforcing the rules. There is an urgent academic press for achievement which requires high expectations for all students and all staff members.

Additionally, school climate relates to a learning environment that is safe and healthy. Students and staff alike have the right to learn and work in an environment that provides for basic safety and health.

The mental health and safety guidelines for schools states that schools should...”Develop and implement comprehensive preventive maintenance procedures to ensure a healthy and safe environment within the building and on school grounds.”

**Recommendations:**

- Review the facilities of the school, making note of all areas that are in need of repair (ceiling tile, broken furniture, etc.) Prioritize these needs, and weighing priority and budget constraints establish a schedule of repair.
- Examine the cleanliness of the building and determine methods in which to provide on-going maintenance.
- Create a committee to examine safety procedures of other schools and determine what the needs are at Skyland Community High School. Establish a school-wide system of safety that includes items such as check-in procedures, locked doors, etc.
- Examine the beliefs of the staff concerning student attendance and establish a policy that reflects the high expectations of student attendance. Additionally, monitor and create consequences for students who leave without permission.
- Examine and reflect on the current belief that all students at Skyland Community High School are provided an equitable education that is comparable to that provided for top performing schools. Ask the difficult question: Do we really believe that our students receive an equitable education? If not, examine those strategies, beliefs, etc. that must be modified to ensure this equity for the Skyland students.

**Questions to consider:**

- How would the climate of the school change if staff and students alike worked in a clean, healthy environment?
- How would student success change if every student, every day were held to high expectations?
- How can we guarantee that every staff member understands what high expectations really mean?
- What are the possible outcomes if we continue to allow safety precautions to be overlooked?
- What skills do our students need to learn to have an equitable education that compares to those students in high performing schools?

## CONSIDERATIONS AS YOU MOVE FORWARD:

1. Positive interdependence. Meaningful, systemic improvement requires, among other things, the positive interdependence of all members of the school community. Team members understand that they need each other to succeed. “Positive interdependence is linking [people] together so one cannot succeed unless all group members succeed. Group members have to know that they sink or swim together. When [people] clearly understand positive interdependence, they understand that... each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort...” (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998).

2. Collaboration and communication. Meaningful, systemic change cannot happen with only a few members of the school community committed to change. It will not happen with just a few hardy souls trying to accomplish the work in isolation. The Skyland staff has already demonstrated its increased willingness to spend time working together. It is recommended that the staff explore the differences between a true “professional learning community” and vertical and horizontal teaming.

3. Effective professional development.

Seek professional development that meets criteria for effective adult learning, such as:

- learning by doing (practice, trial and error, getting one's hands dirty);
- learning from feedback (other people's comments, seeing the results);
- learning with others; and
- providing ongoing opportunities to practice and refine new behaviors.

Seek professional development that will:

- assist staff members to overcome less effective, in-place behaviors;
- foster and sustain motivation and passion for learning;
- align pedagogy with learning needs;
- require collaboration and communication among staff; and
- lead to positive results.

4. Focus and sustained efforts. It may be worth noting that there is ample evidence that one reason many schools are less than successful with their improvement efforts is that the changes they have attempted have been superficial in nature, arbitrary in their adoption, or too short-lived to be effective. Teachers and schools may go through the motions of adopting new practices, but if the intention, philosophy, and strategies are misunderstood or rejected, the changes are not likely to be deep, long-lasting, or results-focused. Questions to consider:

- Are we willing to make a long-term commitment to a course of action that is meaningful, systemic, and participatory for all of us?
- Can we ensure that we will be able to follow these commitments for the period of time necessary for us to see results?
- What resources are necessary for this work to be successful?
- How can we support each other as we begin to work with this new information?

## IN CONCLUSION:

The School Support Team sincerely hopes that this report assists Skyland Community High School in the goal of raising academic achievement for all students. We have strived to help the school community focus its time, energy and resources in the areas and ways that research says will get the best results in student academic achievement. True equity demands no less.

**More resources about the nine standards used in this report are available at the Professional Development and School Support website: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/PDSP/index.asp>**

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