

ACCREDITATION FOR GROWTH

**A Report of the Visiting Team for
Accreditation by the Middle States
Association of Colleges and Schools**

**TAMAQUA AREA MIDDLE SCHOOL
TAMAQUA, PENNSYLVANIA
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INTRODUCTION

The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools is a non-governmental, nonprofit, peer-administered organization of diverse educational institutions committed to ensuring that students in accredited schools are receiving the highest quality education. Additionally, the Association seeks to ensure that accredited schools are engaged in continuous growth and improvement efforts through effective leadership, a comprehensive program of self-study, evaluation by peer educators external to the school, meeting the requirements for accreditation, exemplary programs, and supportive services. For more than 100 years, the Association has provided leadership in educational quality and school improvement for its member schools in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and in schools in Europe, the Middle East, the subcontinent of Asia, and Africa.

The school that is the subject of this report selected the *Accreditation for Growth (AFG)* self-study and accreditation protocol. *AFG* outlines a unique accreditation process that uses strategic and site-based planning as vehicles for school improvement and growth in student performance. The protocol, developed by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, also provides linkages between school improvement efforts at the school and system levels. The primary determinants of progress within the protocol are the actual results the school obtains in student performance rather than the quality of the school's programs and resources. *AFG* requires the school to focus its mission and improvement objectives on its vision of a preferred future for its students; therefore, it is a future-oriented process. *AFG* also requires the school to conduct continuous reviews of its programs and services and allows diverse constituent groups to participate in charting the future of the school.

To be accredited through the *Accreditation for Growth* protocol, the school first must meet the 12 Middle States Association Standards for Accreditation. Second, the school, through a planning team of representatives from the school's community stakeholders, must identify areas of student performance that are the highest priorities for growth and improvement, measurable performance objectives, and a plan for achieving the objectives. The plan must also include the school's mission and the beliefs or core values that guide its decision making.

In addition, the school must demonstrate that it has or is developing a planning ethic to ensure the school has both the will and the capacity to implement its plan and achieve its objectives.

When a school selects *AFG* as its accreditation protocol, it must make several commitments:

Focusing Improvement Efforts on Growing and Improving Student Performance

The school must commit itself to focusing its growth and improvement efforts primarily on growing and improving its student performance and the school's capacity to affect that growth and improvement. Improvement efforts must be aimed at targeted growth and improvement in student learning, student performance, and student results. The school must commit itself to continuous evaluation of the results it is achieving by putting into place the organization and processes needed to implement its plan faithfully, formally reviewing its plan periodically, and submitting itself to external review and evaluation by a team of its peers.

Establishing and Maintaining a Culture of Accountability for Student Performance

The school must commit itself to being accountable for its student performance and have in place a viable system for monitoring achievement of its objectives and the action plans to achieve them.

Establishing and Maintaining a Planning Ethic

The school must commit itself to continuous clarification of its unique mission, beliefs, and expectations in terms of student performance. The school must be action-oriented as shown by the development of long-term strategic action plans that integrate program, services, facilities, and other support systems to address growth needs. The school must have or be developing a planning ethic to ensure the school has both the will and the capacity to implement its plan and achieve its objectives.

Involving the School's Community of Stakeholders in its Growth and Improvement Efforts

The school must commit itself to involving a broad spectrum of the members of its community of stakeholders in identifying its mission, beliefs, a profile of its graduates, the objectives for growth and improvement in student performance, the action plans to

achieve the objectives, and in overseeing implementation of action plans and monitoring achievement of the objectives.

The Middle States Visiting Team is a group of professional educators appointed by the Middle States Association to visit the school. The purpose of the Team's visit is threefold. First, the Team determines whether the school meets the 12 Standards for Accreditation. Second, the Team determines if the school meets the requirements for a planning ethic and planning processes of the *Accreditation for Growth* protocol. Third, the Team reviews the content of the school's Plan for Growth and Improvement in student performance to determine the validity and clarity of the Plan together with the level of commitment to implementing the Plan and achieving its objectives expressed by the school's community of stakeholders.

NOTE TO THE READERS OF THIS REPORT

Readers of this report must be aware that the report is written, in part, as the Team's response to the school's self-study. Therefore, the report is most meaningful when it is read in conjunction with the School's Self-Study Document.

THE CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

The Context of the School describes the context in which the school exists. It presents a portrait of the school's "distinctive personality" and the unique characteristics of the school. The Context presents contextual information that establishes a "developmental snapshot" of where the school is in its efforts to achieve its mission and to ensure the highest levels of student performance.

The Context of the School consists of the following elements:

- Profile of the School's Community
- Profile of the School
- Profile of Student Performance

The data and information contained in the Context of the School are not evaluated by the Visiting Team. Instead, the Context serves two purposes:

- To ensure that the members of the Planning Team have a common knowledge base about the history and current status of the school in those areas on which the accreditation of the school will focus; and
- To "introduce" members of the Visiting Team to the school, and as such, provides one of the lenses through which Team members will view and evaluate the school. Thus, the Context section should provide sufficient information about the school and its students' performance to build and enhance Team members' awareness and understanding of the total milieu in which the school exists and operates.

THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

Observations

- The Validation Team was pleased to note that the school has attained "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) every year since that concept was instituted. Further, it was gratifying to note that students as grade-level groups appear to improve as

they move from sixth through eighth grade. In the most recent PSSA assessments only around 7% of the students in aggregate were below the standard hoped for, with about 87% and 76% scoring above the standard in reading and math, respectively. In addition, about 56% and 38% scored at the “advanced” level in reading and math, respectively, reflecting that the school is striving to go beyond minimums in its programs. The Team did note some differences in results for genders, with – as a generalization – males performing better in math and females in reading. These, of course, tend to be common differences in schools throughout the country. The only other significant subgroup is students with IEPs, where about 40% still are performing below the basic level.

- Since the school has attained “AYP”, there is no formal requirement for them to develop a remedial plan for the school per se. However, The Team is pleased to note that the school has embraced the importance of continuing to work with IEP students to strive to improve their overall performance.

Recommendations

- The school should continue its strong programs for students with IEPs as they work to increase the percentage who achieve the minimum standards established by the state.
 - The school may want to explore some current research addressing the question of gender differences to see if there are any promising programs that target these.
-

THE PLANNING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

A sound planning ethic and planning process are every bit as critical to achieving a school's goals for growth in student performance and the school's capacity to effect that growth as is a plan rich in content. An effective planning ethic and process address the essential question: "Does the school have the capacity, the will, and the systematic structures required to implement its plan and achieve its goals?" A fine plan full of great activities is only as strong as the ability and willingness of the school and its stakeholders to implement it.

While successful planning is reflective of an organization's context and culture, it should be visionary in describing what an organization wants to become and pragmatic in specifying the steps to reach that goal. Successful planning for growth and change has been described as a delicate balance between brave steps forward and reassuring steps to the side; between the recognition of the need for growth and a celebration of what already exists that is good, steady, and/or certain; between the bold, frequently scary, visions of future possibilities and the comfort with past and present successes.

When an institution seeks accreditation using the AFG protocol, it must commit to working toward establishing and maintaining a planning ethic within the institution. A planning ethic means that planning for growth becomes part of what the school and its stakeholders do as much as providing programs, teaching, resources, services, and activities. A planning ethic requires continuous clarification of the school's unique mission, beliefs, profile of graduates, and student performance objectives. It requires that all of its processes are vision-driven. And it requires that the school is action-oriented by developing long-term strategic action plans that integrate programs, services, facilities, and support to address the school's growth needs.

In the *Accreditation for Growth* protocol, the school also makes a commitment to continuous growth and improvement. The school and its stakeholders should demonstrate that they are never satisfied with the status quo in terms of student performance, but are striving constantly to improve that performance. The setting and striving to achieve challenging growth goals should become a dynamic process in which the school develops the flexibility to revise and modify its plans to achieve its goals based on the results received from implementing those plans. As part of the

accreditation process, the school should review the results of its efforts at least annually and willingly open its processes and results to review by its peers in the Middle States Association.

It is also essential for the school to commit to involving its stakeholders in meaningful ways in the setting of goals, developing plans to achieve and measure those goals, and the implementation of those plans. In a planning culture, the school strives to develop broad ownership of the planning process and the plan for growth and improvement by the entire community by ensuring broad based knowledge and understanding of and support for the goals and the plans to achieve them.

THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section of its report, the Visiting Team provides observations and recommendations regarding the school's Planning Process based on what was seen and heard during the Team's visit to the school.

First, the Visiting Team provides any general observations regarding the school's adherence to Requirements of the Protocol for Planning Process and any areas in which the school exceeds the Requirements.

Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

Stipulations are Requirement(s) of the Protocol that are entirely absent and, therefore, the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

A. Planning Team

A.1. Observations

- The Validation Team found the twenty-six member Planning Team to be extremely broad-based, with representation from all constituent groups. The faculty all were invited to volunteer, while students, parents and community representatives were selected by the principal and internal coordinators. Within the professional staff there also was balance between classroom teachers – both regular and special education – and among other professional staff (e.g., the librarian) and administration.
- As intended by the protocol, the Planning Team played the major roles in orchestrating processes for establishing the mission, belief statements, profile of a graduate, and objectives, as well as in overseeing progress of individual Action Teams as the rest of the process evolved. One faculty member noted, “This is such a wonderful process to help us to move forward.”
- The school showed its commitment to this process by providing meeting time during the school day and a regular schedule of meetings to sustain momentum.
- Perhaps most impressive to the Validation Team was the level of meaningful involvement on the part of students. They expressed that they were “treated as equals” and that, as one student said, “My input was respected.”
- Essentially those same sentiments were noted by parents. Indeed, one parent said, “I was honored to be chosen to participate in this process and feel like I really could make a contribution.”
- The Planning Team recognizes its continuing role as the process moves forward through the implementation and ‘tweaking’ phases and is enthusiastic about that role.
- The school does have a process in place to replace student members of the Planning Team as they move up to the high school level.

A.2. Recommendations

- The Validation Team encourages the school to devise a plan also to replace parents and community representatives as they – for one reason or another – leave the Planning Team.

B. Role of the Internal Coordinators

B.1. Observations

- The principal selected the two Internal Coordinators, feeling that representatives from the English and Mathematics departments would bring both organization and writing skills to the process. These three then selected other members of the Planning Team. The Validation Team discerned that the two Internal Coordinators worked exceptionally well as a team. They maintained strong two-way communications that kept a finger on the pulse of constituent group input, while also sharing results of deliberations as the process moved forward. They assumed the primary role of organizing all aspects of all the work and decisions into a detailed and thoughtful self-study. Both expressed appreciation for the professional growth they experienced through having this opportunity and are enthusiastic about continuing their leadership/coordinating role as this cycle of AFG moves through its completion. The Validation Team was very impressed with the work of these coordinators, as echoed by the principal, who said, "I definitely chose the right two people for this vital role."

B.2. Recommendations

- Both Internal Coordinators indicated a willingness to continue in that role for the next cycle. However, they felt it would be valuable for other colleagues to have that professional growth opportunity, as well. The Validation Team suggests the school explore possibilities for a type of 'apprenticeship' on the part of other faculty who may be interested in assuming this role for the next cycle.

C. Role of the School's Leadership

C.1. Observations

- The principal, along with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, attended the AFG workshop offered by MSA in the summer of 2009. All were excited about the protocol and recommended its adoption to the Board of Education. From this juncture the principal played the key leadership role in eliciting enthusiastic support from faculty and for overseeing the day-to-day aspects of the process.

- He selected the two Internal Coordinators and served on both the Planning Team and one of the Action Teams. However, he made a concerted effort to be somewhat low-key in his participation so that members of each of those groups would feel free to share ideas and have confidence these ideas would have every opportunity to be incorporated. He also was instrumental in keeping the Superintendent and Board of Education apprised as the process moved forward.
- Both the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent continued their support and served as resource people throughout the process, as well. Indeed, the school's leadership has championed the importance of developing a good planning ethic and has taken the initiative to assure that Tamaqua Area Middle School internalizes that concept.

C.2. Recommendations

- The Validation Team has no recommendations at this time.

D. Role of the Governing Body

D.1. Observations

- The Board of Education showed its support for this process through initial approval to move forward, as well as by providing necessary funding for the process. This included any funds necessary to afford release time for various groups to meet on aspects of the plan. In addition, the Board President and one additional Board member served on the Planning Team and were very pleased with how this group worked. All members of the Board with whom the Validation Team had an opportunity to meet noted that they felt the school had done an outstanding job of identifying appropriate objectives and creative plans to address them. "This is a prime example of the creative leadership and dedicated faculty our school is lucky to have," noted one. The Board has adopted the plans of the self-study and looks forward to seeing them implemented.

D.2. Recommendations

- Given the economic climate, both within the community in general and the area as a whole, it will be challenging to continue to provide funds for some aspects of

the plans. The Validation Team encourages the Board to give these plans priority as it addresses the coming fiscal challenges.

E. Role of the External Facilitator

	The school used the services of an External Facilitator
X	The school did not use the services of an External Facilitator

F. Communication and Awareness Activities

F.1. Observations

- Parents and community were informed when the process was initiated and invited to participate in the needs survey, as well as in advance of the visit of the Validation Team. The school's website was used for regular updates, including drafts of key aspects of the planning process and content. Throughout the process key documents also were displayed in hallways and classrooms so that faculty and students could see progress and share their reactions. The faculty was given regular detailed updates at faculty meetings and through emails. Monthly updates were presented by the principal at Board meetings.
- The Validation Team was especially impressed with the role of students in preparing for the visit per se. They designed and prepared a video tape that they presented at the annual Open House and included in the AFG link on the website. Periodic press releases were sent to the local newspaper, "Times News", and reporters were invited to report on other key meetings. It was noted that a reporter from this newspaper attended the Oral Exit Report, as well. Indeed, the school used a variety of techniques and media to make people aware of the process in general and key developments as it moved forward.

F.2. Recommendations

- The Validation Team just encourages the school to continue its broadband efforts to keep people informed in this implementation phase, including results of periodic reviews of results and any key 'celebrations' of progress.

G. Action Plan Teams

X	The school used Action Plan Teams
	The school did not use Action Plan Teams

G.1. Observations

- Members of the Planning Team were divided into four groups, with each to serve on one of the four Action Plan teams. They also had input into selecting additional members of each AP Team
- Representatives were chosen from each stakeholder group for each team. These teams met on a regular basis during the school day to develop the specific content of their respective action plans. Administration facilitated these release time sessions and provided lunch for them.
- Members of these teams communicated regularly with faculty, eliciting reactions to ideas being considered and additional input/suggestions beyond those. It was discerned by the Validation Team that faculty felt their ideas were respected and incorporated. "I could see some of the ideas shared at our department meeting included in the plan," noted one teacher.
- It was the judgment of the Validation Team that the school has incorporated a variety of noteworthy creative activities into their plans and that several already are underway. The Validation Team also was pleased to note that each AP Team identified annual benchmarks for progress, which should be invaluable in the process of monitoring growth.
- The AP Team members recognize and embrace their continuing role as the process moves forward.
- Note that the school has not designated separate Implementation Teams. The Action Plan Teams will serve in that capacity.

G.2. Recommendations

- We encourage the AP/Implementation Teams to continue their role in the phases of periodic progress review, making modifications to action plans if/as needed.

H. Implementation Teams

	The school used Implementation Teams
X	The school did not use Implementation Teams

H.1. Observations

- As noted in the previous section, the school has not designated separate Implementation Teams per se; rather, the current Action Plan Teams are planning to serve in that role. They do recognize that in many respects all faculty members are involved in some way with most of the objectives and will expand their numbers as needed.

I. Periodic Reviews of the Plan for Growth and Improvement

I.1. Observations

- The Planning Team has outlined a plan for conducting an annual review to monitor progress toward each objective. They will review pertinent data and identify areas of success, as well as those still needing improvement. Smaller groups will collate and organize data for presentation to each AP Team, with subsequent recommendations for change – if any – to be made to the Planning Team.
- The school has identified a variety of techniques for promulgating annual results to each stakeholder group. These will include posting on the school's homepage, sending press releases to the local newspaper, and having student-created posters for display throughout the school.

I.2. Recommendations

- The Validation Team suggests that the school also consider some type of 'formal' celebration, perhaps to be done at a school-wide assembly. This could take on the form of a pep rally type of activity where the school acknowledges its fine progress.

Overall Assessment—Requirements of the Protocol for Planning Process

X	The Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS the Requirements of the Protocol for Planning Process
	DOES NOT MEET the Requirements of the Protocol for Planning Process for the following reason(s): <i>[Note: A determination that the school does not meet the Requirements of the Protocol</i>

	<i>for Planning Process requires that a stipulation is added to the school's accreditation.]</i>
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Recommended Monitoring Issue(s):

In this section, the Team lists any Requirements of the Protocol for the Planning Process that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are only partially in compliance and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's accreditation.

The Team has not identified any monitoring issues.

Recommended Stipulation(s):

In this section, the Team lists any Requirements of the Protocol for the Planning Process the school does not meet and, therefore, must be included as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

The Team has not identified any recommended stipulations.

THE PLAN FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

Introduction

The purpose of the self-study and accreditation process is first and foremost to establish whether the school meets the Standards for Accreditation, the fundamental requirement to be accredited. However, establishing that the school has in place the building blocks for a quality school is largely an exercise of looking backward to see what has been accomplished.

The *Accreditation for Growth* protocol is based in the principles and concepts of strategic planning/ Therefore, the protocol requires the school to be forward thinking, not focusing so much on the past and past accomplishments but, instead, focusing on the future—what does the school have to do differently or do better to further its mission

and to ensure that all of its students are able to achieve the knowledge, skills, and characteristics the school has defined in its Profile of Graduates.

Therefore, the culminating activity of the self-study and accreditation process is the developing of a Plan for Growth and Improvement in Student Performance.

Developing a Plan for Growth and Improvement involves:

- Establishing a vision for the school by creating or reaffirming a statement of mission.
- Identifying a set of beliefs that will serve as the school's ethical code.
- Developing a profile of the knowledge, skills, and qualities the school expects of its graduates.
- Identifying the areas of student performance that are the priorities for growth and improvement.
- Developing action plans to achieve the performance objectives.
- Monitoring implementation of the action plans.
- Conducting periodic reviews of the progress being made toward achievement of its objectives.

Following are the components of the Plan for Growth and Improvement in Student Performance:

- Mission
- Beliefs
- Profile of Graduates
- External Scan (optional)
- Internal Scan (optional)
- Measurable student performance objectives
- Action plans to achieve the objectives

Relationship to Other School Improvement Efforts

In this section, the Visiting Team provides its observations regarding the degree to which the school's planning process and Plan for Growth and Improvement are aligned with other school improvement efforts and or those of a parent system.

The school district as a whole has both a general strategic plan and a long-range technology plan. There are many common and overlapping objectives and activities in

each of those with the various action plans for the AFG plan, which strengthens the probability of success.

A. MISSION, BELIEFS, AND PROFILE OF GRADUATES

A school's Mission should reflect the deepest desires of the school's community of stakeholders for what they want the school to become—its future in terms of what it will do for its students. The mission expresses what the adults in the school community commit themselves to doing for the benefit of the students.

A mission statement should describe in broad and visionary terms what the school striving to become. A mission should be outcome-based, providing clarity regarding the school's audience (whom it serves), its action (what it commits to doing for its audience), its aim (the purposes for which it exists) and its means (how, in broad terms, it will its purposes).

While it is not appropriate for a Visiting Team to determine whether the school's Mission is the right or wrong mission for the school or a good or bad mission. Nor is it appropriate for the Team to require changes to the Mission.

A Visiting Team will, however, offer an objective perspective regarding whether any elements of the Mission are unclear or seem inconsistent or incomplete or whether the school and its community of stakeholders support and are “walking the talk” of the Mission. However, it is up to the school to decide if the Team's comments are legitimate and relevant. It is in this spirit that the following observations on the school's mission.

THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS—MISSION

A.1. MISSION

The school's Mission is:

The Tamaqua Area School District, in partnership with home and community, is committed to empowering students by providing opportunities to achieve their maximum potentials as responsible citizens and productive lifelong learners competing in an ever-changing global community.

What is the school's *audience* as identified in the Mission?

Students

What is the *unique identity* of the school as identified in the Mission?

The Tamaqua Area Middle School [Note that this mission statement applies to both the middle school and the high school and was developed cooperatively by both.]

What is the *aim or purpose* of the school as stated in the Mission?

To have students achieve their maximum potentials as responsible citizens and lifelong learners in an ever-changing global community

What the action of the school is as stated in the Mission?

Empowering students to achieve the purpose

What is the *means* the school will use to accomplish it Mission?

Providing opportunities, in cooperation with home and community

To what extent do the school's stakeholders know, understand, and support the school's Mission?

All stakeholder groups had an opportunity to give input for the Mission, which then was finalized cooperatively with the high school; the two have the same Mission statement. Subsequent to adoption the Mission was posted on the website and displayed prominently within the school. As a result, The Validation Team found a high level of knowledge, understanding and support of the Mission on the part of the various stakeholder groups. Perhaps the student level of understanding is a bit less sophisticated than that of the adults, but they can paraphrase the sense of the mission and their feeling that it is important for them.

A.2. BELIEFS

Statements of belief serve as the foundation of a strong strategic plan. They are the formal expression of a school's fundamental values and serve as its ethical code. Beliefs describe the moral character of a school. In a planning process involving diverse stakeholder groups, they represent the composite of the personal values held by individual planning team members.

Because beliefs are a matter of faith, not a matter of fact, they express the school's overriding convictions, its inviolate commitments. They outline what members of the school's community of stakeholders are willing to "go to the mat" defending. Because beliefs identify the "line in the sand," they can be used as a lens through which to examine the worthiness of the school's potential decisions or future actions.

Only members of the school community can identify their deeply held beliefs. A Visiting Team can, however, offer an objective perspective on what is unclear or seems inconsistent or incomplete in the school's Beliefs. Ultimately, however, it is the school that has to decide if the Team's comments are legitimate and relevant. It is in this spirit that the following observations on the school's Beliefs are made.

The school's Beliefs are:

We believe that...

- All children learn and develop at different rates, and education must accommodate these differences.
- Learning is a life-long process.
- High expectations promote greater achievement.
- Education is a shared responsibility among school, student, home, and community.
- All children need goals.
- All children have worth and need positive self-esteem.
- The school provides a safe, secure, and healthy environment.

- The school provides opportunities for staff to engage in professional development activities enhancing their knowledge and strengthening their enthusiasm and commitment to education.
- A commitment of time, effort, and fiscal responsibility is necessary to achieve excellence in education.
- Education prepares students to meet the needs of an ever-changing world.
- Positive, optimistic attitudes foster learning.
- A well-rounded education provides for physical, emotional, ethical, aesthetic, social, and intellectual development of all students.
- An environment of trust and mutual respect is necessary to promote successful learning.

To what degree do the school's Beliefs meet the criteria of the *Accreditation by Growth* protocol? If they do not meet the criteria, explain why.

The Validation Team feels the school's beliefs do meet all the criteria. They are reflections of what the stakeholders believe and are expressed in the correct "We believe that ..." format. They are precise and succinct and are not trivial. With perhaps one mild exception ("We believe that education is a life-long process."), they are not clichés but rather reflect concepts that are practical in terms of application.

How well do the school's Beliefs represent what the Team heard from the school's stakeholders?

The Validation Team found broad and strong correspondence between these Belief statements and views expressed by various stakeholder groups. For example, in response to a question, one student noted that, "The school gives me a lot of opportunity to learn technology because it will help me when I get older." It was clear to the Validation Team that these Beliefs are a key link between the mission and the objectives chosen for this cycle of their use of *AFG* as a protocol. Perhaps most impressive to the Team was the obvious sincerity of those beliefs. They are not pleasant phrases that sound good, but rather seem to imbue the atmosphere throughout the school in its many aspects. They truly are keyed to their belief in the value of each of their students and their ability to learn and grow.

To what extent do the school's stakeholders know, understand, and support the school's Beliefs of core values?

Similar to comments in the previous section, one can find many specific examples of how various groups understand and support these Beliefs. One teacher noted that, "Kids always rise to my high standards," while a parents added that, "My son does as well as he can because the teachers take extra time to give him the help he needs." Indeed, the Validation Team found that these Beliefs truly do serve as a lodestone for day-to-day activity within TAMS.

A.3. PROFILE OF GRADUATES

The Profile of Graduates provides the answer to the following question: When our students have completed our entire educational program and have had the benefit of the services and activities provided by the institution and its community:

- What do we expect them to know?
- What do we expect them to be able to do with what they know?
- What qualities or characteristics do we want them to demonstrate?

A Profile of Graduates:

- Describes the students at the point of exit from the institution.
- States the values, achievement, and readiness that each student will manifest upon graduation.
- Should be considered both as a Bill of Rights and set of corresponding responsibilities for students, faculty, staff, administration, and the institution's community.
- Defines the outcomes each and every student will attain if the mission is operative and appropriately translated into programs and services.

A Profile of Graduates serves to:

- Translate the identity, vision, and values expressed in the beliefs and mission into statements that describe student outcomes.
- Translate and transform concepts from the ideal and global to specific expression in the development of a student in the institution.

- Give expression to what the mission means in the operational life of the institution.
- Define an outline or shape each student is expected to grow into regardless of specific courses taken or post-graduation plans.
- A concrete reference point for faculty, staff, and the institution's community when designing curriculum, instructional experiences, service programs, auxiliary resources, and student and family services.

The school's Profile of Graduates is:

A graduate of the Tamaqua Area Middle School will be...

Responsible	They will learn through experience that in order to become responsible, mature decision-makers, they must believe in themselves as dependable, trustworthy people. They will exhibit this behavior by being prompt and prepared across all settings of their lives.
Accountable	They develop an awareness of consequences for their actions and that they will make proper decisions based on core values. They should follow through with commitments and manage time wisely. Students will take initiative to solve problems and show compassion when interacting with others. They will take ownership for their actions.
Inquisitive	They develop their natural curiosity and encounter the world and embrace the future with a sense of imagination and wonder. They acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
Driven	They are aware of their individual goals. They use what skills and knowledge base they possess to achieve those goals. The students continue to develop their independence through self-confidence and determination to succeed.
Empowered	They develop the confidence to embrace academic and social challenges and employ problem solving skills. They will become independent learners promoting good decision making to positively influence others.
Respectful	They develop good manners, know right from wrong, and understand that all actions have consequences while developing a

sense of self-respect. They exhibit politeness and courteousness at all times. Students will apply these qualities to everyday life and be positive role models for others and tolerant of others' differences.

Successful

Their success is individualized, unique, and defined in different ways. Students will seek out opportunities that can make them successful while demonstrating honesty and integrity. Success requires perseverance, diligence, dedication, and commitment and leads to positive self esteem, achievement, and feelings of accomplishment.

To what degree does the Profile of Graduates express:

- **What the school expects its graduates to know?**
- **What the school expects its graduates to do with what they know?**
- **What qualities or characteristics the school expects its graduates to demonstrate?**

The school has not articulated specific academic (content-based) points of exit with respect to what it "expects its graduates to know." There is a lot of reference to individual goals and successes. There also are several references to problem-solving skills, which might be viewed as aspects of 'knowing' in that sense. There are additional skills that aren't linked to specific content per se, but which represent broader 'knowing' hoped for. These include such areas as the ability to make proper decisions, to follow through on commitment, and to manage time wisely. These also serve as expectations of what graduates do with what they know. The strongest area of all within this profile are the many qualities/characteristics the school expects, including – but not limited to – such things as compassion, natural curiosity, love of learning, confidence, a sense of right from wrong, etc. The Validation Team was most impressed with the fact that these are more than just statements, but actually serve as an underpinning for the educational climate within the school. We also thought it was clever to use the RAIDERS (school mascot) acronym to help everyone remember the seven key areas.

To what extent do the school's stakeholders know, understand, and support the school's Profile of Graduates?

As alluded to in the previous section, there is strong knowledge and understanding of this profile. It is posted prominently throughout the building and in classrooms, and use of the acronym helps everyone articulate the areas. A number of sample quotes

point to the level of support for these, and the Validation Team was favorably impressed with the high degree of respect, politeness and good manners exhibited by the students during the visit. It was interesting that one student in the group meeting used the term “driven” to describe how he felt about school. The confidence displayed during student interviews also was an indicator that this is promoted by faculty.

THE VISITING TEAM’S RECOMMENDATIONS—MISSION, BELIEFS, AND PROFILE OF GRADUATES

THE VISITING TEAM’S RECOMMENDATIONS:

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve its Mission, Beliefs, and/or Profile of Graduates. Recommendations are suggestions and ideas of the Visiting Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

- Although the Profile of Graduates is noteworthy, it may be difficult for the school to assess how well it is doing in some aspects of these. The school may want to consider developing some type of attitudinal assessment that can be used with faculty, particularly to get a sense of how well eighth graders demonstrate these qualities.

THE VISITING TEAM’S RECOMMENDED MONITORING ISSUES:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements for the Mission, Beliefs, and/or Profile of Graduates that require monitoring. Monitoring issues refer to elements of Mission, Beliefs, and Profile of Graduates required by the protocol that are not completely absent but are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be corrected by mid-term in the school’s accreditation.

The Team has not identified any areas in need of monitoring.

THE VISITING TEAM'S RECOMMENDED STIPULATIONS:

In this section, the Team lists requirements for the foundational documents (Mission, Beliefs, and Profile of Graduates) that are entirely absent and, therefore, the school does not meet. Such requirements must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

The Team has not identified any recommended stipulations.

B. STUDENT PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The centerpieces of the school's Plan for Growth and Improvement are the two, three, or four areas of student performance the school has identified as being the highest priorities for growth and improvement if the school is to move closer to achieving its Mission. This limited number of objectives is suggested so the school can focus on the most critical aspects of student performance without diverting its energies in too many directions.

To identify these priority areas, the Planning Team asked itself:

- *What are the gaps between what we say in our Profile of Graduates regarding what we want our graduates to know, be able to do, and/or what qualities we want them to demonstrate and our students' actual performance in those areas?*
- *Which two, three, or four of these gaps constitute the highest priorities for narrowing if we are to move closer over the next seven years to achieving our mission?*

Specifying clear and measurable student performance objectives identifies the school's commitment to achieve specific end results and thus, is tied directly to accountability. The objectives must be written in such a way that they outline growth in student performance for the next seven years and represent a major focus for growth and improvement in student performance in the school. The objectives should be consistent with the mission and should extend and define the *aim* portion of the mission in more specific detail. Objectives explicate in measurable terms the key end results that the school seeks to realize from its mission, as expresses in its Profile of Graduates. Not only should the objectives be related to the school's mission, but where there is also a district or system plan, the objectives should be linked to one or more of the district's or system's objectives.

The term “student performance” is intended to be defined in the broadest possible terms. The objectives submitted for accreditation may be focused on *any* of the outcomes expected of students as stated in the Profile of Graduates.

The Team’s observations and recommendations regarding the Context of the School must be read in conjunction with the Context of the School as presented by the school in its Self-Study Document.

[Validation Team Chair note: Due to technical difficulties, the baseline data included by the school in its self-study would not copy directly herein. Therefore, I have summarized them in my own ‘words.’ All baseline data shown is for 2009-2010.]

B.1. Student Performance Objective #1

By the year 2017, Tamaqua Area Middle School students will demonstrate improved academic proficiency in the areas of math, reading, science, and geography, as measured by:

Math:

- a) An increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the PSSA math tests.

Baseline: PSSA Math scores – 6th grade 81%; 7th – 76%; 8th – 76%

Benchmarks: increase of 1% in each grade in each of the 7 years

- b) A decrease in the number of students failing math.

Baseline: number of students failing math – 6th and 7th 3 each; 8th – 5

Benchmarks: decrease of 1 each year until reaching and maintaining 0

- c) A 10% increase in the number of students taking advanced math courses.

Baseline: enrollments in pre-algebra (7th) and algebra (8th) – 28%; 32%

Benchmarks: increase of 1 or 2 % each year up to 38% and 42%, respectively

Reading:

- a) An increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the PSSA reading tests.

Baseline: PSSA reading tests – 6th – 69%; 7th – 72%; 8th – 88%

Benchmarks: 2% increase per year in 6th and 7th; 1% per year in 8th

b) An increase in the number of Accelerated Reader quizzes taken by students.
Baseline: number of Accelerated Reader quizzes taken by students – 2,153
Benchmarks: increase of 25 per year for each of the 7 years

c) A decrease in the number of students failing reading/Language Arts classes.
Baseline: number of students failing – 6th – 7; 7th – 21; 8th – 20
Benchmarks: decrease of 1 per year in 6th and 2 per year in 7th and 8th

Science:

a) An increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the PSSA Science test.
Baseline: percentage of 8th graders scoring at that level – 67%
Benchmarks: increase of 1% per year for each of the 7 years

Geography:

a) A decrease in the number of 7th grade students failing Geography classes.
Baseline: number of 7th grade students failing Geography classes – 13
Benchmarks: decrease of 1% in the first year and 2% per year for each of the remaining six years

What evidence was seen and heard to confirm that this objective represents a priority for the school in growth and improvement in student performance?

This clearly was the top academic priority for the school. Like the other objectives, it grew by consensus from the school's needs assessment and from input from various stakeholder groups as to choice of objectives. Further, not only does the related action plan embody a broad range of activities designed to address the objective, they also reflect a number of areas the school already has initiated. Members of various stakeholder groups interviewed by the Validation Team expressed their own commitment to its value and importance. Students themselves articulated the strong feeling that, "We want to do well on those state tests."

What is the level of understanding of and support for the objective among the school's community of stakeholders?

Faculty members involved with the disciplines targeted in the objective have a particularly strong level of understanding and support. Parents also expressed a strong wish for their children to perform well in these basic academic areas. Though some faculty members are less directly involved with these disciplines, they agreed that, "It is vital that our kids do well in these areas." There seemed to be a positive atmosphere that said "We can achieve these" that was conveyed in interviews with various stakeholder groups.

	YES	NO
Is the objective:		
Closely associated with the exit outcomes for students as expressed in the Profile of Graduates, graduation requirements, and/or performance expectations for the school's students?	X	
Reflective of the school's mission, and supportive of the strategic plan of the larger organization?	X	
Does the objective:		
Include baseline data, and are they logically organized and presented in an easily understood format?	X	
Enjoy the support of the school's stakeholders as one of the highest priorities for growth and improvement in student performance?	X	
Does the school:		
Have sufficient energy and resources to support the implementation of the action plans and the achievement of the objectives?	X	
Have an effective and efficient way to gather data to assess the progress of the objective?	X	

	YES	NO
Is the objective reasonable and achievable?	X	

What recommendations can the Team offer to the school for any areas evaluated No and/or to improve the clarity and focus of this objective?

The Team has no recommendations.

B.2. Student Performance Objective #2

By the year 2017, Tamaqua Area Middle School students will demonstrate improved decision making skills in the area of healthy life choices, as measured by:

- a) An increase in the percentage of students attending school.
Baseline: percentage attending – 6th – 94.7%; 7th – 95; 8th – 94.5%
Benchmarks: increase of .1% each year for the 7 years
- b) A decrease in the percentage of students measuring a Body Mass Index greater than or equal to the 95th percentile.
Baseline: percentage at that level – 6th – 27%; 7th and 8th – 26%
Benchmarks: decrease of 1% per year in each grade each year
- c) A decrease in the experimentation of drugs and alcohol through a survey.
Baseline: No baseline data available
- d) A decrease in the number of discipline infractions.
Baseline: number of most frequent – 6th – 266; 7th – 223; 8th – 318
Benchmarks: decrease of 5 per year in each grade for the 7 years
- e) An increase in the number of students actively participating in clubs.
Baseline: club enrollment – shown by individual major clubs
Benchmarks: increase of 1 in each club shown for each year
- f) An increase in the number of students receiving the Presidential Fitness Award.
Baseline: number of students receiving the PFA – 9
Benchmarks: increase of 1 per year

What evidence was seen and heard to confirm that this objective represents a priority for the school in growth and improvement in student performance?

Members of the Action Plan Team that addressed this objective noted that it had emerged as a high priority in the needs assessment process. There also is a close correspondence with several aspects of the Profile of Graduates. Informal input during meetings with various stakeholder groups also expressed strong commitment to the importance and priority level of this objective. The importance of the components related to attendance and participation was emphasized by the teacher who noted, “We can’t help them improve unless we have them here and attentive.” One parent noted that she was pleased that the drug issue had been addressed.

What is the level of understanding of and support for the objective among the school’s community of stakeholders?

Because this objective lies somewhat in the affective domain, all faculty members feel a strong commitment to its importance. In addition, some Board members and parents expressed particularly gratification that there emphasis was being given in this area. "It is as important to me that we progress in this area as in the regular academics," noted one.

	YES	NO
Is the objective:		
Closely associated with the exit outcomes for students as expressed in the Profile of Graduates, graduation requirements, and/or performance expectations for the school's students?	X	
Reflective of the school's mission, and supportive of the strategic plan of the larger organization?	X	
Does the objective:		
Include baseline data, and are they logically organized and presented in an easily understood format?	X	
Enjoy the support of the school's stakeholders as one of the highest priorities for growth and improvement in student performance?	X	
Does the school:		
Have sufficient energy and resources to support the implementation of the action plans and the achievement of the objectives?	X	
Have an effective and efficient way to gather data to assess the progress of the objective?	X	
Is the objective reasonable and achievable?	X	

What recommendations can the Team offer to the school for any areas evaluated No and/or to improve the clarity and focus of this objective?

The Team has no recommendations.

B.3. Objective #3 (non-AFG)

By the year 2017, Tamaqua Area Middle School will demonstrate an increase in the quality and frequency of communication with its students, parents, community and staff, as measured by:

- a) An increase in the percentage of MMS accounts.
 Baseline: percentage of families participating – 74%
 Benchmarks: increase of 2% per year

- b) A decrease in the number of discipline infractions related to planners.
Baseline: number of infractions – 6th – 18; 7th – 15; 8th – 25
Benchmarks: decrease of 2 each year in each grade
- c) An increase in news reporting of any school activity, either extracurricular and/or academic related.
Baseline: number of published news articles – 10
Benchmarks: increase of 2 per year
- d) An increase in the number of parents attending orientation and Open House events.
Baseline: No baseline data available

What evidence was seen and heard to confirm that this objective represents a priority for the school in growth and improvement in student performance?

Since this is not an AFG objective, there is no student performance per se involved. However, it was clear to the Validation Team that this is a very important objective for the school. While they feel they have a history of making good efforts for communication, they see it as important to strive even harder in that area. It was noted that one area that is relatively new is in the use of daily planners for students, which affords a direct way for both students and parents to see what is expected for the evening. “We check each student each day at dismissal to be sure they have their planners,” was one teacher’s way of emphasizing the importance of this element.

What is the level of understanding of and support for the objective among the school’s community of stakeholders?

Parents are very pleased that further efforts are being made to keep them informed of school activity in general and their children’s work in particular. One Board member noted that he thought the school’s efforts to inform the community through local newspapers had been a successful approach.

	YES	NO
Is the objective:		
Closely associated with the exit outcomes for students as expressed in the Profile of Graduates, graduation requirements, and/or performance expectations for the school’s students?	X	
Reflective of the school’s mission, and supportive of the strategic plan of the larger organization?	X	
Does the objective:		
Include baseline data, and are they logically organized and presented in an easily understood format?	X	

	YES	NO
Enjoy the support of the school's stakeholders as one of the highest priorities for growth and improvement in student performance?	X	
Does the school:		
Have sufficient energy and resources to support the implementation of the action plans and the achievement of the objectives?	X	
Have an effective and efficient way to gather data to assess the progress of the objective?	X	
Is the objective reasonable and achievable?	X	

B.4. Objective #4 (non-AFG)

By the year 2017, Tamaqua Area Middle School will demonstrate an increase in the number of technology resources available to students and teachers, as measured by:

- a) An increase in the amount of technological hardware, as identified by technology survey results.

Baseline: No baseline data available

- b) An increase in the technological development of teachers through professional development opportunities.

Baseline: number of teachers enrolled in technology related courses – 7

Benchmarks: increase of 3 in 2010-2011 and 2 each year thereafter

- c) An increase in the use of technology by students during and after school, as monitored by student log-in forms.

Baseline: No baseline data available

What evidence was seen and heard to confirm that this objective represents a priority for the school in growth and improvement in student performance?

It was evident to the Validation Team that the school already has begun strong inroads in the area of technology and is committed to expanding that further. Students, for example, noted that, "We use technology in a lot of our classes," and, "I think I learn better now that we have more technology." Several faculty and parents alluded to the fact that they believed student achievement would be enhanced through increasing use of technology. There was acknowledgement by both Board members and administration that clearly some elements of this plan would be costly, but they noted that they were committed to striving to continue strides in this area, even in the challenging economic climate.

What is the level of understanding of and support for the objective among the school's community of stakeholders?

Again, representatives from each stakeholder group – during interviews – identified this as a vital component of their efforts to improve student performance and give them a strong foundation in the area of technology for the future. One student indicated that having more access to computers at school was important because he didn't have one at home. Administrators indicated that they were being aggressive and creative in seeking grant funding to assist with efforts in this area.

	YES	NO
Is the objective:		
Closely associated with the exit outcomes for students as expressed in the Profile of Graduates, graduation requirements, and/or performance expectations for the school's students?	X	
Reflective of the school's mission, and supportive of the strategic plan of the larger organization?	X	
Does the objective:		
Include baseline data, and are they logically organized and presented in an easily understood format?	X	
Enjoy the support of the school's stakeholders as one of the highest priorities for growth and improvement in student performance?	X	
Does the school:		
Have sufficient energy and resources to support the implementation of the action plans and the achievement of the objectives?	X	
Have an effective and efficient way to gather data to assess the progress of the objective?	X	
Is the objective reasonable and achievable?	X	

What recommendations can the Team offer to the school for any areas evaluated No and/or to improve the clarity and focus of this objective?

First, the school of course should complete gathering of baseline data for the indicators where that was not available at the time of the self-study. Further, recognizing that the major challenge in this area relates to the increased hardware indicator, we encourage the school to continue its aggressive and creative efforts to acquire alternate funding in that area.

C. ACTION PLANS

Action plans describe the methods the school will use to accomplish its mission/philosophy and its performance/capacity objectives. Action plans provide detailed descriptions of the specific actions required to achieve desired results outlined in the student performance improvement and organizational capacity objectives. This is the “doing” part of the plan. Action plans can and should include multiple activities that will engage the school in improvement activities for the next seven years. Action plans should be specific and tell in detail how the school will accomplish its objectives. Action plans should relate directly to the objectives, but they also should be related to the mission/philosophy.

The Visiting Team examined the action plans for the performance/capacity objectives in the school’s Plan for Growth and Improvement and has determined that the plans meet the criteria for effective action plans to degree noted below.

Legend: MC = Meets the Criterion
 NI = Partially Meets the Criterion/Needs Improvement
 DNM = Does Not Meet the Criterion

C.1. Action Plan for Objective #1:

What are the major strategies/actions steps in the action plan?

- Expand the current PSSA preparation program.
- Increase supplemental instruction support for students.
- Implement academic incentives for taking and passing advanced math courses.
- Improve incentives to increase the number of students completing Accelerated Reader testing.
- Reviewing classroom grading policies.
- Increasing student achievement in core content areas.

What is the level of understanding of and support for this action plan among the school’s community of stakeholders?

Like all other elements of the planning process and content, this action plan was developed with input from all stakeholder groups; hence, it has strong support. Teachers of the four subjects involved in the indicators are particularly enthusiastic about the thrust in those areas and have contributed ideas to the plan. While students and parents do not have the same in-depth level of understanding, they do express support for many of the specific ‘sub-activities’ designated

within the plan. One teacher of students with learning differences noted that she was pleased with the plans to help those students make progress.

Does the action plan:	YES	NO
Include strategies/action steps that are comprehensive in scope?	MC	
Address as many aspects of the institution's programs, activities, and services as appropriate?	MC	
Address the entire student population?	MC	
Include a logical sequence of strategies and/or action steps?	MC	
Include enough activities to ensure that the objective will be achieved?	MC	
Exclude major action steps?	MC	
Address aspects of the Middle States Standards for Accreditation identified as weak in the institution's self-assessment of how well it meets the Standards?	MC	
Identify the resources required to implement the action steps?	MC	
Identify the persons/groups responsible for implementing each action step?	MC	
Vary the groups/individuals responsible so that the burden for implementation does not fall on just one or two individuals?	MC	
Include plans for obsolescence; identifies the activities that will cease (and when that will occur) so that the additional activities can be added?	MC	
Include clear indicators of success for each action step so the institution knows what action steps have been implemented and with what result?	MC	

Establish reasonable timelines for implementing the action steps?	MC	
Demonstrate discipline and reasonableness by spreading action steps throughout the entire life of the plan?	MC	
Outline clearly and in detail the action steps to be taken in the first two to three years of the plan?	MC	
Appear to be reasonable and achievable?	MC	

What recommendations can the Team offer to the school for any areas evaluated DNM or NI to improve the clarity and focus of this action plan?

- The Team has no recommendations at this time.

C.2. Action Plan for Objective #2:

What are the major strategies/actions steps in the action plan?

- Design programs for parent participation related to healthy life choices.
- Providing incentives for students who attend school on a regular basis.
- Provide presentations from health professionals or athletes to promote healthy living.
- Implement a drug testing policy.
- Implement a drug awareness program.
- Provide positive reinforcement activities that promote healthy life choices for the grade level that has the lowest percentage of discipline referrals.
- Create a Club Fair to promote student participation in school clubs.
- Enroll the school in the Presidential Challenge Program.
- Implement Character Education curriculum.
- Develop a walking club.

What is the level of understanding of and support for this action plan among the school's community of stakeholders?

The school has been careful to keep parents informed about elements of this plan as it evolved. Parent and community members on the Action Plan Team are particularly supportive of this effort, noting that, "In this day and age it is so important to target good health and discourage bad habits like drugs." Administrators note that they are very pleased with the many ideas set forth in the plan and will strive to facilitate their implementation.

Does the action plan:	YES	NO
Include strategies/action steps that are comprehensive in scope?	MC	
Address as many aspects of the institution's programs, activities, and services as appropriate?	MC	
Address the entire student population?	MC	
Include a logical sequence of strategies and/or action steps?	MC	
Include enough activities to ensure that the objective will be achieved?	MC	
Exclude major action steps?	MC	
Address aspects of the Middle States Standards for Accreditation identified as weak in the institution's self-assessment of how well it meets the Standards?	MC	
Identify the resources required to implement the action steps?	MC	
Identify the persons/groups responsible for implementing each	MC	

Does the action plan:	YES	NO
action step?		
Vary the groups/individuals responsible so that the burden for implementation does not fall on just one or two individuals?	MC	
Include plans for obsolescence; identifies the activities that will cease (and when that will occur) so that the additional activities can be added?	MC	
Include clear indicators of success for each action step so the institution knows what action steps have been implemented and with what result?	MC	
Establish reasonable timelines for implementing the action steps?	MC	
Demonstrate discipline and reasonableness by spreading action steps throughout the entire life of the plan?	MC	
Outline clearly and in detail the action steps to be taken in the first two to three years of the plan?	MC	
Appear to be reasonable and achievable?	MC	

What recommendations can the Team offer to the school for any areas evaluated DNM or NI to improve the clarity and focus of this action plan?

- No recommendations

C.3 Action Plan for Objective #3

What are the major strategies/actions steps in the action plan?

- Develop and implement an internet survey to identify parents who might benefit from using an MMS account.
- Offer an MMS workshop for those parents who might benefit from it.
- Check daily at dismissal to assure that students have planners.
- Develop a newspaper club to increase the frequency of communication between the school and community.
- Provide services and incentives to families participating in orientation and open house activities.
- Create a message alert system to communicate important information to families.
- Enhance the current school spirit committee.
- Implement a closed circuit news reporting system.

What is the level of understanding of and support for this action plan among the school's community of stakeholders?

There is broad knowledge among all stakeholder groups, with particular knowledge by students and parents of those elements related to interactive communication. Students expressed enthusiasm for expansion of their role interacting with local news media and look forward to expanded school spirit activities. One parents noted that she "looks forward to using the closed circuit news system."

Does the Action Plan:	YES	NO
Address aspects of the Middle States Standards for Accreditation identified as weak in the institution's self-assessment of how well it meets the Standards?	MC	
Identify the resources required to implement the action steps?	MC	
Identify the persons/groups responsible for implementing each action step?	MC	
Vary the groups/individuals responsible so that the burden for implementation does not fall on just one or two individuals?	MC	
Include plans for obsolescence; identifies the activities that will cease (and when that will occur) so that the additional activities can be added?	MC	
Include clear indicators of success for each action step so the institution knows what action steps have been implemented and with what result?	MC	
Establish reasonable timelines for implementing the action steps?	MC	
Demonstrate discipline and reasonableness by spreading action steps throughout the entire life of the plan?	MC	
Outline clearly and in detail the action steps to be taken in the first two to three years of the plan?	MC	
Appear to be reasonable and achievable?	MC	

What recommendations can the Team offer to the school for any areas evaluated DNM or NI to improve the clarity and focus of this action plan?

There are no recommendations from the Team.

C.4. Action Plan for Objective #4:

What are the major strategies/actions steps in the action plan?

- Create a survey to identify current technological devices in the classroom.
- Provide technological seminars for teachers, led by teachers within the district with expertise.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to attend the PETE & C conference each February.
- Create a computer lab designed specifically for student use in completing research and doing projects, incorporating a login procedure.

What is the level of understanding of and support for this action plan among the school's community of stakeholders?

Though some teachers expressed some trepidation about their current level of technological knowledge, they recognize how important it is to expand in this area and appreciate the school's efforts to assist them. Students are extremely enthusiastic. "I can't wait for the chance to have more time in the computer lab for my work," one noted. The administration is confident that the general level of faculty expertise can be enhanced with this collegial approach.

Does the action plan:	YES	NO
Include strategies/action steps that are comprehensive in scope?	MC	
Address as many aspects of the institution's programs, activities, and services as appropriate?	MC	
Address the entire student population?	MC	
Include a logical sequence of strategies and/or action steps?	MC	
Include enough activities to ensure that the objective will be achieved?	MC	
Exclude major action steps?	MC	
Address aspects of the Middle States Standards for Accreditation identified as weak in the institution's self-assessment of how well it meets the Standards?	MC	

Identify the resources required to implement the action steps?	MC	
Identify the persons/groups responsible for implementing each action step?	MC	
Vary the groups/individuals responsible so that the burden for implementation does not fall on just one or two individuals?	MC	
Include plans for obsolescence; identifies the activities that will cease (and when that will occur) so that the additional activities can be added?	MC	
Include clear indicators of success for each action step so the institution knows what action steps have been implemented and with what result?	MC	

Establish reasonable timelines for implementing the action steps?	MC	
Demonstrate discipline and reasonableness by spreading action steps throughout the entire life of the plan?	MC	
Outline clearly and in detail the action steps to be taken in the first two to three years of the plan?	MC	
Appear to be reasonable and achievable?	MC	

What recommendations can the Team offer to the school for any areas evaluated DNM or NI to improve the clarity and focus of this action plan?

- Consider the possibility of some type of mentor pairing of teachers so there is a comfortable person to whom the teacher with trepidation can turn without feeling reluctant.

THE VISITING TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS—STUDENT PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLANS

In this section, the Team lists its recommendations regarding the degree to which the school's student performance objectives and action plans meet the Requirements of the Protocol for Objectives and Action Plans.

THE VISITING TEAM'S RECOMMENDED MONITORING ISSUES:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements for Student Performance Objectives and Action Plans that require monitoring. Monitoring issues refer to elements of Student Performance Objectives and Action Plans required by the protocol that are not completely absent but are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be corrected by mid-term in the school's accreditation.

The Team has no recommendations in this area.

THE VISITING TEAM'S RECOMMENDED STIPULATIONS:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements for the Student Performance Objectives and Action Plans the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

The Team has no recommendations in this area.

THE MIDDLE STATES STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

INTRODUCTION

The self-assessment of the degree to which the school meets the Middle States Standards for Accreditation provides information and data that portray the school's capacity to produce the levels of student performance the school and its community of stakeholders desire and expect.

The 12 Standards for Accreditation reflect research-based best practices for quality in schools. The Standards also represent the organizational "building blocks" that need to be in place to produce high levels of student performance. The self-assessment leads to identifying the school's strengths and areas in need of improvement.

Standards for Accreditation for Schools: Elementary, Middle, High, and PreK-12 Institutions

Foundational Standards: Standards addressing best practices in the components of a school that provide the *foundations* for quality in the education program, services, and results in terms of student learning.

- Standard 1: Philosophy/Mission
- Standard 2: Governance and Leadership
- Standard 3: School Improvement Planning
- Standard 4: Finances
- Standard 5: Facilities
- Standard 6: School Climate and Organization

Operational Standards: Standards addressing best practices in delivering the education program, services, and activities to the students.

- Standard 7: Health and Safety
- Standard 8: Educational Program
- Standard 9: Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning
- Standard 10: Student Services
- Standard 11: Student Life and Student Activities
- Standard 12: Information Resources and Technology

The Team's observations and recommendations regarding the school's adherence to the Standards for Accreditation must be read in conjunction with the school's self-assessment as presented in the school's Self-Study Document.

PHILOSOPHY/MISSION STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: The school has a clearly written and actively implemented statement of philosophy/mission that conveys the general and specific purposes of its educational program, expresses expectations for quality, and serves as the basis for daily operational and instructional decision making as well as long-range planning. Stakeholders give input into the development of the school's philosophy/mission and understand and accept it. This document is aligned with the community served and is reviewed periodically by stakeholder representatives.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
The school's philosophy/mission	X
Samples of publications that communicate the mission/philosophy to the school's community of stakeholders	X
Marketing, recruitment, and admissions materials	n/a
Address of the school's website	X
Policies related to the philosophy/mission	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

As noted earlier in this report, it was evident that representatives from various stakeholder groups felt they had been consulted regarding concepts to be included within the Mission statement. It is clear that these genuinely reflect what the school and community believe. Further, interviews reflected strong commitment to the philosophy and mission and that they served as a lodestone in making decisions. The school has promulgated these in various ways, including website posting and prominent display throughout the school.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

That the school be sure to codify and internalize and schedule and plan for regular review/update of the philosophy and mission.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
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No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: The school is chartered, licensed, or authorized by a state, nation, or authority that operates in the public interest. The governance and leadership ensure the integrity, effectiveness, and reputation of the school through the establishment of policy, provision of resources, and assurance of a quality educational program. The governance and leadership act ethically and consistently to assure an atmosphere of mutual respect and purposeful effort on behalf of students and their learning. School leaders foster a productive environment for teaching and learning, timely and open communication with stakeholders, and the vision necessary for day-to-day operations and long-term planning.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Job descriptions for the head of the institution and other key administrative personnel	X
Appraisal tool and/or description of the process used to appraise the performance of the head of the institution	X
Chart of lines of authority/responsibilities	X
Policies related to governance and leadership	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators.

The Validation Team felt that the administration and governing body members had a clear sense of their respective roles and responsibilities. The Board exhibited much respect for the skills of their administrators and faculty and confidence in their efforts. The Board operates by a committee system that seems to enable them to be especially effective in performing their responsibilities. There also is a strong mutual respect among the members of central administration, as well as between them and building administrators. They are proactive in exploring new ideas and seeking creative funding alternatives to sustain contained achievement and growth. It was noted that some members had served on the Board for a long period of time, yet remained committed to and excited about the district. On the other hand, several new members with special expertise have joined the group recently and lent their perspectives in a constructive way.

It was observed by the Team that the principal does an extraordinary job of establishing a positive climate within the school. He assumes the full array of administrative responsibilities for this relatively large middle school without an assistant principal, though he can call upon the help of the Director of Special Education and Director of Technology in those areas. In addition to overseeing day-to-day operations, he has full responsibility for faculty evaluation and professional development, scheduling student discipline. He serves on various building/district committees and is the liaison for the school with the Board, central administration and community as a whole. The scope and depth of his responsibilities, thus, are challenging. It was impressive to see how he fulfilled them. It is clear that teachers view their administrators positively, exemplified by one who said, "We have a highly supportive administration."

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- That the school closely monitor the level of the principal's "workload", particularly should there be a change and/or increase in the school population.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: The school uses a collaborative process to develop and implement a written strategic or long-range plan to improve its educational program and services. Plans are aligned with the school's philosophy/mission and its operational plans, and are focused on continuous improvement of student performance, staff professional and organizational growth.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Strategic and/or long-range plan	X
Development/institutional advancement plan	X
Enrollment plan	X
Policies related to school improvement planning	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

The school has a comprehensive and long-range strategic plan that connects to that of the district as a whole and has many similarities to the *AFG* plan. Faculty and department chair interviews reflect that each department has several key goals and projects they have initiated or plan to do so in the future. One key focus in the near future will be to align middle school curriculum with elementary and high school programs. The guidance and special education staff want to expand co-teaching and transition assistance for special needs students. Clearly, this is a school that has a culture of strategic planning and regularly seeks areas for possible improvement.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- No recommendations

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

FINANCE STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: Financial resources are sufficient to provide the educational opportunities defined in the school's philosophy/mission. The business practices of the school are ethical. These practices promote confidence in the school's ability to manage fiscal and materials resources in a responsible manner and follow prescribed budgeting and accounting principles. The majority of resources raised for school purposes is dedicated to the school's operations.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for
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	Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Current operating budget (for main campus and each branch campus)	X
Certified external audit letter conducted within the last two years (for main campus and each branch)	X
Student tuition and fee schedule (if applicable)	
Long-range financial plan	X
Schedule of student tuition and fees (for non-public and proprietary institutions)	N/A
Evidence that the institution has no contingent liabilities or on-going litigations that potentially could affect the institution's ability to continue operation	X
List of grants and other funding sources obtained in the last calendar year	X
Publications provided to students outlining students' financial obligations	X
Summary of the institution's insurance coverage (for main campus and each branch)	X
Policies related to finances, financial aid, and refunds	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

In light of the difficult economic climate in this mining area, the Validation Team was quite impressed with what the school was able to provide for the students as a result of careful budgeting and budget management. For example, the school already has made some major investments in computer hardware that can make a dent in limited cap amounts available. The budget is developed with upward input from faculty to building administration to central administration, with the Board's finance committee working with the latter to finalize the plan. Because the school always stays within the 'cap' percentage increase established by the PA DOE, they do not have to have a public vote on the budget. The school does have an annual impartial audit of its finances and has not had any problems uncovered by these. Perhaps one of the most telling examples in this area is that the new middle school was financed entirely from accumulated/dedicated surplus and did not require a public referendum. The Team might sum up its assessment of this standard by using the age-old idiom that they get the "biggest bang for the buck."

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- That the school continue its aggressive efforts for grants and other alternative funding.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
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No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

FACILITIES STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: School facilities are safe, clean, and well maintained. The physical environment supports delivery of the educational program/services as well as optimal student development and achievement. Facilities are appropriate and adequate to implement the philosophy/mission of the school. They are regularly inspected for effective operation and meet all applicable laws including health and safety code requirements.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Floor plan of facilities	X
Long-range facilities plan	X
Maintenance/repair schedules	X
Plans for any facilities improvements	X
Policies related to facilities	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

The facility is approximately ten years old and has up-to-date elements in all its aspects. It has an ideal layout for a middle school, with key areas centrally located and 'wings' for related grades/subject areas. The school makes special provisions throughout the building for handicapped students, including ramps, special lockers and an elevator. The building also includes a number of excellent special sites, including a beautiful new auditorium, which is also used by the high school, a spacious, well-organized media center, and a computer lab. It was noted that there is parent/visitor access only through the front safety-protected entrance. Grounds also are attractive and include a new field funded by a local industry and anonymous donations.

Walking around the school and visiting classrooms, it is clear that faculty, staff and students all take pride in maintaining an attractive, clean building. One custodian noted, "I feel really good when I see how nice it looks." The Team observed several instances in which there was 'waste' paper in the corridors that was picked up by a student who noticed it. There is a system for request repairs from the maintenance staff, using "School Dude" software to monitor response. The school's long-range facilities plan includes evaluating the feasibility to upgrade

heating/cooling controls and adding air condition in some key areas. Monitoring for energy savings is done.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- At present there is no evidence of growing in the facility. However, the Team encourages the school to monitor potential future enrollment increases and need for additional special programs with a view to any expansion that might be needed later.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ORGANIZATION STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: The school's organizational structure and climate facilitate achievement of its core values as expressed in the philosophy/mission. The school culture supports successful implementation of age- and developmentally appropriate educational programs and services. Roles, responsibilities, expectations, and reporting relationships are clearly defined. Administrative, instructional, and support staff are qualified, competent, and sufficient in number to effectively provide quality educational experiences. The school regularly conducts staff performance appraisals and offers professional development opportunities informed by its philosophy/mission. Relationships among the staff and leadership are collegial and collaborative.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. Evidence to Support the Team's Assessment:

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Organizational chart for the school and school system	X
List of members of the professional and support staffs	X
Salary schedules and descriptions of benefits packages for teachers, specialists, and support staff	X
Contracts (e.g. union, collective bargaining agreements)	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
Results of any climate survey	X
Instruments used for evaluating the performance of the staff	X
Professional development plan	X
Policies related to school climate and organization	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

Visitors can quickly discern that the school atmosphere is a very family friendly, child-centered environment. There is a warmth that seems to exude from the happy faces and hellos that greet you throughout the building. There also was a universal pride in the school on the part of all stakeholders. The quote of "We have great kids" came from meetings with groups of teachers, parents, administrators and Board members. It also was clear that the students themselves are proud of their work, taking initiative to share their work with us during classroom visits. Questioned about what they were most proud of, all stakeholder groups all pointed to the positive attitude and dedication to students that pervaded the school.

The school day is divided into 9 forty-two minute periods, with the ninth period being used for activities, remediation, enrichment, and team/curriculum planning. This approach makes possible many 'extras' for students without the need for additional special busing. This organization of the day, together with the faculty alignment, seem to serve these middle school students well.

The school has codified in writing all key elements of the personnel aspect, including negotiated contracts that outline such things as adequate compensation, reasonable workloads and working conditions, fair and just treatment of staff, etc. There is a process whereby annual surveys are used to get staff input on priorities for the next year's professional development.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- No recommendations

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: A safe, orderly, and healthy environment for teaching and learning is provided. The school adheres to local, state, and federal government health and safety requirements. Health, safety, preventive/emergency procedures, and crisis management policies are clearly written, well documented, implemented, and updated regularly.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Emergency and crisis plans	X
Records of most recent health and safety inspections	X
Record of emergency drills	X
Emergency Procedures section of Faculty Handbook	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

One important element to stress is that both students and parents expressed the feeling that the building is very safe. As noted earlier in this report, visitors must be ‘buzzed into’ the building. It is noted that various emergency drills re done regularly, including lockdowns. All professional staff have a “Crisis Management Plan” readily available.

The formal day for the school nurse is 7:30 A.M. to 12:45 P.M. However, she works daily extended hours to accommodate medical needs of special students. In addition to routine first aid, she coordinates all aspects of the health program, including maintenance of health records. She serves on the school’s S.A.P. program and assists classroom teachers with hygiene classes.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- The school should monitor closely to assure that there is adequate coverage for basic needs in the afternoon time slot in emergencies, including perhaps plans for the high school and/or elementary nurses to assist.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school’s term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or	Recommended Action
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	Indicator	
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: An effective educational program for a school consists of both carefully planned and well executed curriculum programs and solid instructional pedagogy. Also fundamental to a successful educational program are the means to assess student performance and growth as well as programmatic evaluation. Thus, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are often considered to be the “heart” of any school since these three components have such an impact on the total school experience of students. The curriculum outlines what students should know and be able to do. Instruction identifies effective ways for teachers to ensure student learning takes place. Assessment indicates at what level students are able to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Program of studies or other overview of the components of the educational program	X
Scope and sequence charts	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
Written curriculum guides for each component of the educational program	X
Master schedule	X
Policies related to educational program	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

The school seems to have a history of being proactive in terms of keeping its programs current, using a five-year cycle of regular review/revision for this purpose. They are careful to align it with state standards. With the coordination of the Assistant Superintendent, the faculty also works closely with elementary and high school staff to assure that they are a link between the two. Programs address both basic expectations and include some attention to more challenging goals within individual programs. There are a few advanced/enrichment offerings for students, as well as many ways in which programs are tailored for special needs students. The integration of technology into the curriculum also is a recent emphasis. Each department selects a major emphasis for curriculum development each year. For example, the English department most recently focused on a summer reading program, and the science department is implementing a school-wide Science Fair. The Team found the faculty to be open to new ideas and best practices as a way to strengthen curriculum and instruction.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- Because the formal school day always has its limits, the Team encourages the school to explore use of that ninth period for some additional ways to provide enrichment. For example, both creative and critical thinking are promoted by the “Odyssey of the Mind” program and might be an intriguing experience for students with talent in those areas.
- The school is encouraged to investigate creative possibilities for finding more time for collaborations with elementary and high school colleagues.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school’s term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school’s accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

ASSESSMENT AND EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: The school systematically collects and rigorously analyzes quantifiable and observable evidence of individual learning and growth from multiple valid and reliable sources. Evidence of student learning is used to evaluate and improve curriculum effectiveness, instructional practices, professional development, and support services. Progress in student learning and performance is expected and is accurately, clearly, and systematically reported to the school community.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Example of student transcript	X
Example student report card	X
Reports of the results of assessments administered to students	X
Policies related to assessment of student learning	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

Clearly the school has a history of positive achievements, as evidenced by the banners displayed for having achieved several pairs of two consecutive years of "Adequate Yearly Progress" awarded by the state of PA as part of the "No Child Left Behind" thrust. At the same time, the school used assessment data from the PSSA to formulate key components of the first student performance objective in this plan. Clearly they understand how to make good use of data in setting goals. Departments also work together to create some departmental tests and to create rubrics.

Reports cards are issued quarterly at the end of each marking period. Teachers' comments are provided in addition to just a grade. Progress reports are given midway through each marking period to alert student and parents to any potential issues. Report cards are mailed home to parents. This year, for the first time, students are not required to get a parent signature. The school is investigating ways of providing additional information about student progress through technological means.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- The Team strongly encourages the school to include assessment of critical thinking skills (e.g., the three highest level's of Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy) in developing in-house assessments.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

STUDENT SERVICES STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: The school implements written policies and procedures, in partnership with families and the community, that provide all students with, or refer them to, services that are age- and developmentally appropriate to optimize opportunities for life-long success. Student services are systematic and integral to the educational program. They are provided by qualified personnel, sufficiently financed, periodically evaluated, and philosophy/mission appropriate.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Guidance and counseling plan	X
Examples of student schedules	X
Results of follow-up studies of graduates	X
Policies related to student services, including guidance and counseling, admissions, transportation, food services, and special education	X
Admissions criteria (if applicable)	N/A
Cafeteria with healthy menu choices	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

Services to students may be said to begin with the thirty-day guidance class used to orient help incoming sixth graders adjust successfully to middle school. She also meets with each outgoing eighth grader in an exit interview to help with selection for their high school freshman courses. In discussions with students, the Team discerned that students felt very comfortable about approaching the guidance counselor at any time for help with a problem.

The school psychologist focuses on assisting students who may need supplemental support for both academic issues and home situations. Programs used to try to identify such students include the Student Intervention Team (SIT) and Student Assistance Program (SAP). It was intriguing to note that the psychologist has observed an increased caseload of students who need emotional support.

The special education department offers a wide range of services for students with all types of disabilities. These include inclusion types of programs, with co-teachers available in regular classrooms, along with some outsourced programs. There also is an RTI program in place to identify struggling students. This can serve as a preventive to avoid the need for the Child Study Team classification process. There is a modest gifted program, focusing primarily on such things as special field trips. The Accelerated Reader program also challenges students and offers incentives for reading selected books.

The Validation Team found all professional staff working in this broad area to have full commitment to academic growth and success on the part of these students with unique learning differences.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators

of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- Noting that there is no formal experience with the guidance counselor for seventh graders, the school is encouraged to explore the future feasibility of some modest moves in this area.
- See the recommendation in 'program' for the possible addition of a program like "Odyssey of the Mind" as perhaps an after-school club for gifted students.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

STUDENT LIFE AND STUDENT ACTIVITIES STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: A healthy atmosphere exists for all students. At all levels, non-discriminatory, appropriate student activities that supplement classroom experiences or community life are provided. An appropriate student activities program fosters a positive intellectual, cultural, and social climate, promotes growth in student leadership and social interaction skills, and encourages students' special interests.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Note: Problem encountered with chart below in template. "X" notations are made within the available space.

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
Samples of student publications—e.g., yearbook, student newspaper, literary magazine	X
Budget for all athletic activities	
Budget for all non-athletic activities	
Policies on academic eligibility	

Evidence	Visiting Team
Policies related to student life and student activities	X
Student Handbook	X
Student Code of Conduct	X

C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

The school has a plethora of diverse extracurricular activities available. Many of these are conducted during the ninth period class set aside for this purpose. The range of club includes such opportunities as Lego Club, National Junior Honor Society, Student Council, Geography Club, Ski Club, etc. There are some opportunities for intramural club experiences in a variety of sports, as well as intramural teams in basketball and football and interscholastic teams in cross country, track, wrestling and football. The Team was impressed to note that there is a new student-created online newspaper to be posted on the website that is an exciting new experience. There also is a MAGIC program, an after-school grant-funded program that allows over forty students to participate in a range of games and enriching activities. The club advisors estimate that between 80% and 90% of the students are involved in at least one club, noting that for some students that period must be used for extra help with academics, precluding their participation. Materials for the club usually are donated, with a parent booster club supporting the football team. Advisors for many of the clubs do receive a small stipend. Students view this ninth period opportunity very favorably. "I really enjoy being in the Lego Club," while another said, "It's nice that they let us have ideas for new clubs."

The Team observed that the school's Student Handbook and Student Code of Conduct clearly serve as benchmarks for expected behaviors and attitudes. The strong positive impression made by the students in all aspects of our visit suggest that these have clearly spelled out expectations with good oversight, leading to climate that has been so conducive to learning.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- Some advisors felt that more students would participate in some the after-school extended club experiences if there were an 'activity' bus available. Currently this does not appear to be fiscally feasible, but the Team encourages the school to continue to explore the possibility.
- The Team encourages the school to seek alternative funding possibilities to bring more diverse cultural events to the school to enable students to explore the diversity of the world around them.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

INFORMATION RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

The Standard: Information resources, materials, and technology are accessible and of adequate scope, quantity, and quality to facilitate the school's pursuit of its total educational program. These resources encourage all students and staff to broaden and extend their knowledge and skills. Access to appropriate information resources and technology is provided for students and staff. Appropriate instruction is offered to develop student and staff inquiry, research, and information literacy skills. Information technology equipment is functional and well maintained.

A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school MEETS this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school DOES NOT MEET this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Data from Observations and Interviews	X
The information resources and technology plan(s)	X
Budget for information resources and technology	X
Information skills curriculum	X
Inventory of information resources	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
Inventory of information technology equipment	X
Policies related to information resources and technology	X

C. THE TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

The school provides an environment centered on establishing a 21st century teaching and learning environment and set of skills. Using a variety of funding sources, the school most recently added to its hardware collection with additional interactive whiteboard and projectors for all core-subject classrooms. There is additional technology throughout the building available to faculty and students. There are computer labs and computer classrooms for technology integration into basic classroom instruction. Students have access to technology after school by way of units in the media center. There is a Director of Technology who serves the entire district, along with several technicians who also go to respective schools on an 'as needed' basis.

There is a program of studies in technology education throughout the middle school experience. As noted elsewhere in this report, current curriculum update efforts include attention to further integration of technology. In addition, all students and staff have individual user IDs, passwords, and a digital locker to store/save documents. The school makes excellent use of its website to enhance communication between home and school and to provide information to the community as a whole. School and district websites are maintained by the technology department, and teachers are required to maintain and update individual websites for increased communication and extended learning opportunities. Through the use of the school's management system – MMS – parents, teachers and administrators are able to maintain and communicate vis-à-vis current student progress.

The centrally located media center is a beautiful and well-stocked environment. It is used regular throughout the day by classes, as well as individual students and teachers. The librarian provides an orientation for new students and is readily available to assist with any questions. Resources include online and hard copies of reference materials and an extensive inventory of Accelerated Reader materials, all selected specifically to support the instructional program.

C.2 Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school is not required to accept or act on them.

The Visiting Team recommends:

- Continue aggressive and creative efforts to acquire grants and other sources of alternative funding for expansion in the costly areas of technology.

C.3 Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
X	NONE	

ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDATION

After its visit to the school, the Middle States Association's Visiting Team is charged with making a recommendation to the appropriate Commission(s) of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools regarding the accreditation action the Association should take.

Based on the evidence presented by the school in its Self-Study Document and supporting documentation, and based on the evidence seen and heard by members of the Team from the school's community of stakeholders, the Team recommends to the Middle States Association that it takes the following accreditation action:

X

ACCREDITATION

An "Accredited" institution is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. The institution agrees to adhere to the requirements for maintenance of accreditation, and there are no outstanding issues related to the Standards or requirements of the protocol that would require monitoring or onsite visits beyond the normal expected events required by the protocol utilized.

NEXT STEPS

As Tamaqua Area Middle School proceeds with the implementation of its Plan for Growth and Improvement, there are a number of "next steps" the school will be expected to take in order to maintain accredited status. These include the following:

- *Maintain Adherence to the Middle States Standards for Accreditation.*

The twelve Standards for Accreditation reflect research-based best practices for quality in schools. The Standards also represent the organizational "building blocks" that need to be in place to produce high levels of student performance. An accredited school is required to maintain its adherence to the Standards for Accreditation throughout its term of accreditation.

- ***Implement the Plan for Growth and Improvement***

When the Middle States Association grants accreditation to a school using the *Accreditation for Growth* protocol, it does so with the understanding that the school will make a good faith effort to implement the Plan for Growth and Improvement that served as one of the bases for accreditation.

- ***Submit an Annual Profile and Nominations to Serve on Visiting Teams***

As a requirement to maintain its accreditation, the school is required to submit an Annual Profile in which it either confirms or revises basic data about the school. A second requirement is that the school nominates members of its staff to serve on Visiting Teams to other schools.

- ***Conduct Periodic Reviews of the Plan for Growth and Improvement***

While Middle States does not “collect” evidence of the school’s annual review, the school is expected to conduct periodic reviews of its Plan. The purpose of the periodic reviews is to ensure that progress is being made in implementing the Plan, to update and revise the Plan as needed, and to pause to celebrate successes. The school should keep records of what transpired during each review such as meeting agendas, minutes, documented changes to the Plan, and summaries of results of the assessments being used to measure progress toward achieving the objectives. Documentation will be required for the Mid-Term Report and by the next Visiting Team.

- ***Complete a Mid-Term Report***

At the beginning of the third year in the accreditation term, the school will be required to submit a Mid-Term Report in which it will provide evidence of its implementing its Plan for Growth and Improvement and of progress being made toward achieving its objectives. The Report will be reviewed by the Middle States staff, which may determine that an on-site visit should be conducted to examine any areas of concern.

- ***Prepare for Reaccreditation***

At the beginning of the sixth year of the school’s accreditation term, begin a new self-study in preparation for the visit of the next Visiting Team. It should be noted, however, that if the school has implemented a planning ethic and the *Accreditation for Growth* school improvement process has been ongoing as expected, preparing for the next team visit should be an extension of work already underway.

CONCLUSION

It is perhaps logical to begin this section with an area not sufficiently emphasized within the report. Tamaqua Area Middle School lies within the northeast Pennsylvania coal region, an area that has suffered dramatic loss of jobs and economic hardships further enhanced by the recent national economic crisis. One might expect, then, to find a school struggling just to sustain basic programs for its students. To the contrary, the Validation Team found just the opposite, due to the many strengths of the people and the community.

We began by discerning quickly the very positive climate of the school. Visitors can quickly notice engaged students and smiling faces on everyone encountered. The Board again is congratulated on having been able to build this new facility in spite of economic challenges, providing the students with a wonderful physical learning environment. The administration – both central office and within the school itself – are very dedicated and have provided strong leadership to the school’s efforts. The professional staff has a genuine belief that their students can succeed and are dedicated to making that happen. The support staff shares the pride in having a good school and go the extra mile in their efforts. One might summarize this by noting that TAMS is a school whose motto seems to be, “The students come first.” Parents are involved and supportive and clearly feel that the school is doing a good job. And last, but definitely not least, we must again congratulate the students, which perhaps wasn’t emphasized strongly enough in the basic report. Indeed, the students might be considered the school’s best ambassadors. The Team observed many of the qualities set forth in the “Profile of Graduates” on the part of students. They were articulate, curious, polite, respectful, and involved in all settings in which we saw and met with them.

Since it still is by no means prevalent for middle schools to seek accreditation through this protocol, the school showed its commitment to growth by doing so. They took this to heart, setting up and implementing an exceptionally fine process. The Validation Team again wants to compliment the outstanding work done by the Internal Coordinators, Megan Frantz and Kristine Schellhammer. Perhaps one of the greatest strengths in the planning process area was the meaningful inclusion of stakeholders, with particularly noteworthy involvement of students. This has led to a strong level of commitment by all these groups for the plan that has been developed. One teacher noted, “It was a great process, and I’m proud to have been involved.” Communication/awareness activities were regular and made use of a wide variety of media to keep all groups informed. The one recommendation worth reinforcing regarding the planning process per se is to have a system in place to replace parent/community members of various teams as they leave for one reason or another.

The fact that the mission and belief statements were developed with input from all groups and jointly with the high school strengthens their value. The Team was especially impressed with

the “Profile of Graduates” areas of emphasis and creative use. Certainly we congratulate the school on its past academic achievements, as noted in the several banners from the state touting several pairs of consecutive years of “Adequate Yearly Progress” on the PSSA tests. At the same time, we were pleased that they chose to make continued improvement in those scores one of their two AFG objectives. They also should be commended for choosing a vital affective area as the second of those, as well as choosing to do two non-AFG objectives as further challenge for the school. The fact that two of the objectives focused on healthy students and communications with parents, respectively, reflect the fact that the school truly sees its role as both working with the whole child and involving parents in the process – two factors that enhance the likelihood of student success. We note, again, that the action plans are both thorough and creative. The school has a clear vision of what they want to do and has set good benchmarks to assure annual progress toward the objectives. The main challenges the school will face in implementing the plans will be as they have been – economic constraints on doing some of the activities as set forth. However, we note that the school is aware of this and is prepared to ‘tweak’ as necessary. At the same time, many can be accomplished at more minimal expense and should carry the school forward in spite of the economic situation.

A review of the Team’s findings regarding the twelve standards will show that each meets the standards, and many have aspects that go beyond ‘minimums.’ The philosophy/mission and school improvement planning have overlaps with the AFG process and the same strengths noted above. The Board of Education shows respect and admiration for its administrators and faculty, and they should again be commended for their outstanding fiscal management that enables such things as the new middle school and many innovations in spite of difficult economic times. The central administrators stay closely linked to the schools and serve as both leaders and supporters for those efforts. We would be remiss if we didn’t add a special “kudos” for the principal, Chris Czapla. Not only does he perform a backbreaking load of ‘basic’ responsibilities without an official assistant principal, but – more importantly – he sets a positive climate with high expectations that has been so important in the school’s efforts. We again just reiterate how well the now ten-year-old middle school was designed and the many fine special elements (like auditorium and media center) it has. The evident pride in the appearance of the buildings was reflected by all stakeholder groups. The Team Chair even jokingly asked the principal if he had a “gum wrapper patrol” because hallways were free of all refuse.

As we reviewed the educational programs, we were very pleased to note the school has continued attention to the fine and practical arts, again even in the face of difficult economics. Efforts are made in programs to provide for the very bright/gifted students within regular classroom settings. Given that it isn’t feasible to create additional advanced classes for this group, we again recommend that alternatives be explored for additional in-depth experiences through the ninth period ‘clubs’. The school has shown a strong commitment to its special needs students, including activities within the action plans to help them improve academically and in the solid inclusion programs. One of the things that struck the Team positively was

seeing 'regular' students interacting well with special needs students in classrooms and hallways. We compliment the faculty for offering such a wide range of clubs and sports as part of the ninth period/after-school activities. One area we'd encourage the Board and administration to explore is the feasibility of some type of transportation that might enable more students to participate in those that occur after school. Finally, in this area we note that the school already has made a strong investment in computer hardware, with the most recent additions of such things as interactive whiteboards so that all basic classrooms now have them. The administrators should be complimented on their aggressive efforts in seeking grants and alternative funding to make this possible. These efforts will need to continue as the school strives to stay on the 'cutting edge' of rapidly advancing technological growth.

Of course the school will continue to face economic challenges that have the potential for negative impact on their efforts. However, given the creativity and dedication the Team is confident that this school and its broad community will manage somehow to succeed in spite of those challenges. There is a spirit that we discerned during the visit and that we encourage the school to maintain as its vision moves forward:

Excellence can be attained if you ...

- Care more than others think is wise;
- Risk more than others think is safe;
- Dream more than others think is practical; and
- Expect more than others think is possible!

VISITING TEAM ROSTER

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