

THE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

*of*

Rye Junior High School  
Rye, New Hampshire

March 29-April 1, 2009

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Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools

New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc.

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## **THE DISTRIBUTION, USE, AND SCOPE OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

The Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this Visiting Committee Report of Rye Junior High School to be an important document submitted to the school principal, the superintendent of schools, and to the Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. Distribution of this report within the school community is the responsibility of the school administration, and it must be made available to the public within sixty days of the receipt of the final document. When released, it should be done so in its entirety.

The prime concern of the Visiting Committee has been to assess the quality of educational programs at Rye Junior High School on the basis of the school's own self-study and in terms of the school's stated Mission and Expectations and the Association's Standards for Accreditation for public middle level schools. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual faculty member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.

## INTRODUCTION

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges is the oldest of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. Since its inception in 1885, the Association has sought “to advance the cause of education in the colleges and schools of New England” and has awarded accreditation to those educational institutions in the six-state New England region who seek voluntary affiliation, comply with stated Standards of Membership, receive a recommendation for accreditation by the Commission, and make a commitment to the three-phase process of self-study, on-site visitation and follow-up.

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees which supervises the work of six Commissions:

Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools

Commission on Independent Schools

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

Commission on Public Secondary Schools

Commission on Technical and Career Institutions

Commission on American and International Schools Abroad

The Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools functions within the framework of the Association and has seven Standards for Accreditation for middle level public schools. These Standards reflect seven basic areas, each of which should be viewed by the school and its community as a vital element of educational excellence. They are: Mission and Expectations, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Leadership and Organization, School Resources for Learning and Community Resources for Learning.

Within the Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools is the Committee on Middle Level Schools which oversees the accreditation process for the middle level schools belonging to the Commission.

The self-study of Rye Junior High School extended over a period of eighteen months and was organized and directed by a steering committee of seven members, who were: Mary Coombs, Ruth Cote, Piper Cronin, Mary Harte, Bridget Hughes, Chris Pollet and Kerry Ridolfi.

During the self-study phase, it was the responsibility of the steering committee to appoint sub-committees of faculty and parents to assess the school in relation to each of the Standards for Accreditation and to the school’s Mission Statement. To this end sub-committees utilized the self-study instrument An Investment in Planning the Future, a document which guided them through the process of discussion, consensus building, and the final appraisal of how each Standard was met, not met, or exceeded. The outcome of each of the sub-committee’s work was a report highlighting the strengths and needs in each of the seven Standard areas including many

specific to each of the learning areas. Upon completion of each Standard report, it was presented to the full faculty for a majority vote. The completed self-study document was then mailed to each member of the visiting committee and became the team's basis for the on-site visitation.

After the lengthy period of introspection by the school, a visiting committee of seven members was assigned to the school by the staff of the Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools. Team members were recommended to the Commission and chosen on the basis of their demonstrated abilities in their own school settings in New England. Members of this visiting committee came from the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Maine. (A list of team members may be found in the Appendix.) It is important that the reader of this report realize that the visiting committee's role was not to act as educational consultants for the school but rather as peer professionals with the following responsibilities.

- To validate and evaluate the school's perceptions of its strength and needs, based on the Standards for Accreditation
- To assess to what degree the school's programs are reflective of its Mission Statement
- To participate in "educational conversations" with peers in determining the unique characteristics of the school, where it needs and wants to go in the future, and the ways in which it believes it can get there
- To prepare written commendations and recommendations designed to strengthen/improve education.

In the weeks following the on-site visitation, this report was prepared by the chair of the visiting committee and submitted to the building principal for dissemination. It was also forwarded to the Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools of NEASC, a group of twenty New England educators and one public member, elected to study the report and, subsequently, to make a decision regarding the accreditation status of the school. It is important to remember that the visiting committee does not make a decision regarding accredited status. On the following pages you will find a report on each of the seven Standards for Accreditation written by the visiting committee and reflective of the evidence gathered to make quality judgments and observations about the school. Each of the Standards' reports is divided into four sections: descriptions, perceptions, commendations and recommendations.

On behalf of the visiting team I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Rye Junior High School administration, faculty and staff for their hospitality, friendliness and utmost cooperation in what is undoubtedly a very stressful time. In addition I would be remiss not to mention the students who were so respectful and friendly to the team. The visiting team left Rye Junior High School with an appreciation of a school that recognizes the multiple behaviors of the middle school child. It is noteworthy that all that was written in the self-study does not reflect all that was learned. The visiting team hopes that its commendations and recommendations provide a perspective to a school and assists it in moving forward.

## **MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS**

*Rye Junior High School will provide appropriately responsive school programs, policies, and practices to meet the particular intellectual, physical, social, and emotional needs of each middle level learner. Everyone within the community shares a responsibility for developing and nurturing the whole child. Every young adolescent can learn, and we resolve to make that learning a reality.*

## **OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The Mission Statement of Rye Junior High School describes how the school sees its role as an integral part of education in the community. It is a reflection of the school's character and addresses the school's response to the academic, social, physical and emotional needs of the middle level learner. The mission statement is prominently displayed in every classroom and has become the nucleus from which the school and community attempt to build their programs, practices and policies.

Community members are active participants in many school and after-school activities and events. Student work is displayed throughout the building in classrooms, hallways and showcases. Opportunities are abundant to demonstrate the many talents of the students through performances and activities. There is a broad range of extra-curricular activities. Rye Junior High School reflects both school and community respect and pride.

The mission statement is reviewed annually by the staff, the school board and representatives of the community. It is aligned with the mission statements of both the community and the district. During the review process the mission and expectations are refined accordingly with the entire staff having to agree to any changes. The school board also reviews all modifications. Parents are invited to participate in the review process, but the opportunities are limited because of schedules and meeting times. The community is apprised of all changes through the school newsletter, emails and teacher communications.

The school has developed a set of expectations for student achievement, both social and academic, which should assist the faculty in determining how well the mission has been implemented. However, the visiting team found inconsistent evidence that these expectations are used to measure success or identify areas of improvement. The academic expectations used by the school are not aligned with the district-wide curriculum which is in the process of being revised and rewritten. The staff informed the visiting committee that once the curriculum project has been completed, clear expectations can be developed. The state curriculum, as a means of assessing both the mission and student performance, is lacking and provides little guidance to the teachers to be able to measure student success. Rubrics to assess student performance are not evident and could not be used for assessment. The staff has developed its own content curricula which in and of themselves do not provide a consistent format for measuring the expectations of the school. And finally, standardized test scores do not provide any consistent measurement over time on which to evaluate the implementation of the mission statement.

The student handbook and agenda books generally describe student expectations for social interaction and behaviors. At the beginning of each year the principal and staff meet with all students to review these expectations. The books are sent home for parents to read and sign

and then returned to the school as an indication that they have received the information. In addition expectations are also communicated via: teacher and office email, phone conversations with parents, newsletters, grade level coffees with the principal, online calendars and parent conferences. The school strives for a safe and secure environment. Most students feel safe. Some students have expressed a feeling of ostracism and bullying. There are minor concerns that staff and administration have inconsistencies in dealing with student behaviors and expectations. There have been ongoing discussions on this issue regarding consequences for behavior and inconsistencies among staff. Programs such as “Feel Good Fridays” and Rachel’s Challenge have been introduced to assist in this effort.

The absence of observable and measurable opportunities to demonstrate adherence to the expectations, both social and academic limits the opportunity to utilize the mission statement as the guiding force behind decision-making at the school. The school and its community should review the mission statement and develop a set of academic and social expectations by which the mission can be measured and evaluated. Subsequently, the school should establish a process to review and modify those expectations to ascertain the effectiveness of the school’s progress in relation to its stated mission.

### COMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee commends Rye Junior High School for the following:

- A mission statement that is clearly student focused
- The process for reviewing the mission statement annually
- Seeking input from the staff and community in the annual review of the mission statement
- Designing a variety of communication vehicles to apprise the community of the mission and expectations

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee recommends the following:

- Establish measurable expectations for academic performance and social behavior for Rye Junior High School the school’s mission
- Create and implement a system by which these expectations determine the success of the school mission
- Complete the curriculum project to ensure that academic expectations reflect the new curriculum
- Engage in decision making that parallels the mission statement
- Provide opportunities to engage parents in reviewing the mission statement

## CURRICULUM

### OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A traditional curriculum should reflect the goals of a middle school's mission statement as well as meet and exceed expectations for student academic achievement and social behavior. In middle level education, students are expected to encounter and master selected content from various disciplines through school subjects that are intended to represent them.

Visiting team members viewed many on-site, vibrant approaches to delivering instruction as demonstrated through many real-life experiences. However, the formal curriculum which sparked those instructional successes was lacking in content, direction, assessments and overall consistency. The district is undergoing a complete review and revision of its curriculum documents, but, at the time of the visit, it was using the New Hampshire state frameworks as its curriculum structure and the goal was to align the SAU documents through an analysis of the New Hampshire State Standards, Frameworks, and grade level expectations. The staff stated the SAU 50 district curriculum framework was, in fact, the school's curriculum. When asked to share the curriculum in specific subject areas, teachers referenced different sources of information, some generated through committee work, and some from district documents, demonstrating inconsistencies which validate the need to formalize curriculum documents

Small groups of teachers throughout the SAU meet twice a year to discuss curriculum. The status of each content area curriculum is in various stages of completion. The design is good, but the progress is judged by the staff to be slow. The inclusion of all teaching staff in the curriculum process reflects the framework and research of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) to which Rye Junior High School subscribes. Although these PLCs are established, they do not include all the components necessary to scrutinize the curriculum and needs to be reviewed.

The staff at Rye Junior High School states that it is "committed to maintaining current curriculum standards." The staff views the current curriculum development process to be vital, active, and ongoing. Each curriculum area meets twice-monthly to discuss curriculum within the building and twice-annually to discuss alignment and standards with other schools in the SAU. Core subject teachers told the visiting committee that the work is extensive and detailed and, although it is taking a long time, the final product will be a worthwhile document for both the school and the district.

The following paragraphs highlight the state and focus of each of the content areas. The information has been taken from both the self study and conversations between departments and the visiting committee.

#### Art

The academic expectations in the Art curriculum are attained through a variety of projects and materials. There is at least one project per grade level that is integrated with a core area during the year and at least one project per grade level that integrates technology. The mask project was integrated with the study of Belize in social studies.

## Language Arts

The general expectation for language arts students is that each student develop independent reading and writing skills that will help him/her to become an effective communicator and an intrinsically motivated middle school learner. The school-based curriculum for this learning area is delivered through heterogeneously-based classrooms in grades 6-8. Since individual students are expected to “reach his/her potential,” the instruction is differentiated. Models and techniques that promote this expectation were evident in classrooms including reading and writing workshops and student choice for independent reading. Interdisciplinary projects such as the Renaissance Novel Project are a regular part of the school-based curriculum.

## Mathematics

The goals for students in math are based on the Common Order of Required Elements (C.O.R.E.) curriculum document. They are: to learn to value mathematics; be able to communicate and reason mathematically; to become confident in their ability to do mathematics; and to become mathematical problem solvers. The curriculum for this learning area is delivered through a differentiated model in grades 6-8, allowing for the authentic application of knowledge and skills including hands-on activities such as the Stock Market Project in seventh grade. It is evident that a variety of learning opportunities for students exists across the continuum such as the grade 8 online Algebra 2 program.

## Science

The expectations in this learning area are for students to make progress towards becoming scientifically literate individuals. The self study indicates that students should have an understanding of global interconnections in order to become informed and thoughtful decision makers. Skills in science are spiraled and scaffolded. An example of scaffolding is the introduction of the scientific method in grade 6 and a culminating project in student-directed inquiry in grade 8.

## Social Studies

Through strategies delivered in this learning area, students are expected to become independent learners, develop an intellectual curiosity about the world around them, and engage in group discussions and activities attempting to use higher order thinking skills. Unit planning for instruction is differentiated. The school-based curriculum includes instructional strategies that employ exploratory and self-directed practice. Interdisciplinary collaborative planning provides experience for students in the practice of the non-fiction essay. Assessment rubrics that are aligned with the language arts standards are utilized by some teams.

## General Music

The 6<sup>th</sup> grade music class studies rhythmic patterns learned from the reading of and listening to music. Students are exposed to the music and culture of several countries including Africa, Brazil, India and the U.S. Students play simple songs on piano keyboards and drums and perform for an audience.

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade music class C.O.R.E. curriculum covers standard music notation, tablature, and independent learning of songs. Students create original music and apply it to a visual production. Students also compare and contrast musical styles through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque and Classical time periods.

Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade music perform intricate rhythmic patterns on both traditional and non-traditional instruments. Eighth graders explore the music of the U.S. in the twentieth century.

### Band

Lesson plans directly relate to the SAU 50 music curriculum framework. They include artistic and creative expression, historical and cultural context, and aesthetic valuing.

### World Language

The general expectation for students in this learning area is to be able to read, write, and communicate in the target language at the appropriate level. Students study the people and traditions of other countries that will help develop a greater understanding and appreciation of various cultures around the world.

### Physical Education

Teachers state that the C.O.R.E. documents are being used to determine the essential skills in physical education. The school-based curriculum lists the focus of instruction in Basic Movement, Spatial Awareness, Movement Patterns, Speed, Teamwork, Gross Motor Skills, Net Sports, Defense, Offense and Target Sports.

### Technology Education

The expectations for Technology Education students are posted in the classroom and are reviewed with students. Awareness of safety rules before utilizing tools and machines, safety and projects provided evidence of the school-based curriculum.

Visiting team members reviewed the evidentiary curriculum and reviewed The Common Order of Required Elements (C.O.R.E.), which is the School Administrative Unit (SAU) 50 curriculum, lesson plans and projects. The teachers at Rye Junior High School see the C.O.R.E. document as workable, useful and

1. That the curriculum provides not only for the academic needs of students, but for the personal, physical and social aspects as well, thus educating the whole child; and
2. That integrated within their curricula are goals that create high standards for all students.

Overall, the current status of curriculum includes SAU documents for the following learning areas: language arts, reading, mathematics, science, social studies, world language, music, physical education, technology and art. The district document for each learning area from

pre-school to grade 8 communicates grade level expectations, listed as skills, which are aligned with and derived from the New Hampshire Curriculum Framework. All teachers state that they create their own academic expectations for students. While reflected in the Mission Statement, there is no evidence that they effectively substantiate or measure student achievement.

The focus of the school-based instructional activities appears to be challenging and respectful of diversity and opens the door for multiple opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills. However, the absence of strong curricular documents limited the visiting committee's being able to agree with the self study when it states that the curriculum is both challenging and developmentally appropriate, because there are few concrete examples of how this is so. The self study highlights the individualizing of instruction and differentiating of instruction as evidence, but little is said to demonstrate how the written curriculum focuses on challenging and developmental standards for everyone. Interdisciplinary units in social studies, language arts, art and music are common occurrences across the grades. Rye Junior High School's "One Book, One Community, One School" philosophy allows for the further integration of theme-based learning. This was evident in the introduction of the book *Seedfolks* in Language Arts and Social Studies focusing on tolerance and community, culminating in the planting of a community garden. Rye Junior High School offers co-curricular coursework which includes a wide range of diverse opportunities is managed by a flexible schedule that accommodates the ever-changing needs of the middle school child. Examples of co-curricular offerings are: French Club, Math Counts and Student Council.

Daily grade level team meetings, bi-monthly staff meetings and subject level meetings promote communication among staff members at Rye Junior High School. Teachers continually work to make interdisciplinary connections across the curriculum. The self-study stated that teachers have worked on electronic curriculum mapping and presently are involved with curriculum coordination. However, the evidence only supports this minimally on a formal basis. The agendas for district-wide professional development days do not meet the needs for curriculum development. This impacts curriculum coordination with all receiving and sending schools. There have been some but infrequent on-site meetings and discussions between academic content areas, and, when they take place, the focus is on expectations of curriculum, learning styles, and behaviors as part of the grade 5 to 6 and 8 to 9 transition.

The Library/Media Specialist is aware of the curriculum content needs and works closely with teachers to support their goals for the classroom. She works with the town library to ensure that materials are also available at that venue. She collaborates with classroom teachers to integrate specific library-media curriculum standards into the school-based curriculum to support the research needs and skill development of the students. Students are also exposed to skills such as the incorporation of media and technology into various projects. The Library/Media Specialist is available to students to guide them through individual projects.

Technology plays a large part in supporting curriculum. Along with other responsibilities, the Library/Media Specialist has helped spearhead the integration of technology at the building level while specific members at each grade level have worked with their colleagues to help integrate technology standards into a student's experience at Rye Junior High School. The Information Technology Director helps maintain the school's technology and does so working with a building based technology team made of staff members who help trouble-shoot day to day

issues. Each class uses technology in a variety of ways from word processing, internet searches, graphing, data analysis, access and submission to online data bases, spreadsheets, scientific probe ware, online simulation, digital design and Web Quests to support the content being taught. Technology is integral to a student's learning at Rye Junior high School. The abundance of hardware, libraries of carefully selected software, learning expectations in a wide variety of applications and occasions for classroom, and out-of-classroom use offer opportunities for students to be motivated to explore their interests and expand their knowledge.

The school budget is adequate to support basic curriculum needs. There are additional funding opportunities available through the Parent-Teacher Association, and the Professional Development and Enrichment committees.

The SAU provides in-service days and registration for regional in-service day (Seacoast Educational Services (SES). Oftentimes, the building administrator may use the in-service day for school or individual goals. Individuals may attend opportunities outside of the SAU with administrator approval. Rye Junior High School does not currently have a representative on the SAU Professional Development committee, who is responsible for gathering feedback and disseminating information. The staff takes advantage of opportunities for professional growth.

### COMMENDATIONS

The Visiting Committee commends Rye Junior High School for the following:

- The faculty commitment to the curriculum project Participating in Professional Learning Communities
- Collaborating effectively as grade level teams on content curriculum
- Demonstrating knowledge and expertise in specific content areas
- Reflecting social expectations in the school-based curriculum

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Visiting Team recommends the following:

- Formulate a timeline for completion of the curriculum review and revision project
- Develop a written curriculum for each subject area through the use of a common format of curriculum expression
- Ensure that each curriculum area reflects the skills necessary for each adolescent student to be academically successful and offers the academic challenges necessary for growth
- Develop rubrics and assessments as integral parts of the curriculum document
- Incorporate a data-driven decision-based model in the review of curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Form a school-based curriculum committee to follow up the review and revision project and make on-going recommendations to the district
- Utilize professional development trainings (i.e. Curriculum Mapping) in developing the written curriculum

- Create a literacy model that promotes reading and writing in all content areas across all grades
- Increase the frequency of transition meetings between and among all grades

## INSTRUCTION

### OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

At Rye Junior High School, it is the belief that every child can learn, and the school and community share in the responsibility to make that learning a reality. The focus of the day to day environment of Rye Junior High School is the individual student and his or her success. That philosophy is clearly visible in the classroom where the goal of every classroom instructional plan is to concentrate on the individual student and modify instruction to meet individual student strengths. Both the self study and discussions with teachers recognized Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences* as the source of the school's instructional philosophy, but, although individualization was easily detectable, the visiting committee did not observe many instances in which the philosophy was reflected in instructional strategies. The terms *differentiation*, *individualization* and *Multiple Intelligences* were used interchangeably by many staff members, and, while the intent reflected the school's commitment to maximize the individual strengths and needs of every student, it was not clear to the visiting committee how the school blends the goals of curriculum with the delivery of instruction.

Teachers have the opportunity to be exposed to new strategies and best practices through their participation in professional organizations and workshops, and they willingly share those techniques with their peers. Current professional development is not designed to address the alignment of teaching strategies with curriculum goals as it has in the past. Much mention is made in the self study and corroborated in discussion with teachers that differentiated teaching strategies are used by teachers to ensure that students with ability and students with needs have every opportunity for advancement or remediation. However, it was clear to the visiting committee that, while these opportunities certainly are present, they do not address the variant skill levels among all the students in the classrooms. The absence of clear curriculum goals and academic expectations impact this. The visiting committee's judgment is that, once the curriculum is completed and learning standards and expectations are clearly stated, then instructional strategies will not be the main focus, but, rather, the vehicle for reaching those goals and standards.

The typical Rye Junior High classroom offers a variety of instructional techniques such as teacher and/or student led whole and small group discussion, hands on activities, challenge activities for students who have completed work expeditiously, and interdisciplinary units which, in some cases, included the unified arts programs. The absence a goal driven curriculum impacts the rigor necessary to establish consistent, high expectations, and, as a result, for strong academic achievement. Although there is evidence of a variety of instructional styles which contribute directly to the individualization of learning opportunities, they are unable to be connected to any approved district-wide curriculum. The visiting committee observed a few examples of instructional strategies being formulated through pre-assessments to prepare for upcoming units and to accommodate diverse learning styles, but it seemed not to be the common practice. the expectation is that common planning time (CPT) is used to craft interdisciplinary lessons that give students the opportunity to meet perceived academic and social expectations but this procedure is not consistent across grade levels.

At all grade levels the students experience learning through many differently focused activities. Sixth graders visit local tide pools. Seventh grade students conduct a road kill project.

Eighth graders participate in a local bird population experiment which was designed by a former student. Students choose the topic they research as well as what characteristics and data they plan to analyze. Authentically based activities also include a seventh grade math stock market simulation, where students choose and track their own stocks. Art students created a Rye history mural. Eighth grade students culminated their World War II (WW II) unit by creating a museum exhibit, and the WW II unit is also integrated across the eighth grade curriculum. The seventh grade Renaissance unit, medieval museum and the sixth grade Africa and Maritime units are all interdisciplinary units. There are a number of learning activities which require the involvement of more than one content area, and teachers are very willing and interested in finding ways to align themes and projects with different academic subjects.

The visiting team identified evidence of the development and application of higher order thinking skills and problem solving abilities embedded in instructional strategies seen in some of the classrooms. Bloom's Taxonomy is the basis from which teachers develop strategies to embrace higher order thinking skills, but there is no consistency across either the teaching staff or the curriculum itself. Math teachers recognized movement from concrete concepts to abstract, while language arts teachers talked about different levels of reading materials. Teachers temper and tailor material to meet the individual ability levels, but the visiting committee sensed more individualization than challenge. Student reaction to questions about challenge and higher order thinking skills was as follows: the sixth graders said they had a "settling in period" when they arrived wherein class work was basic and of little challenge. Students arriving in the seventh grade also spoke of a "settling in" period. Students informed members of the visiting team that it was not until the eighth grade that they felt "pushed and challenged" and the best example, according to them, was the advanced math class. Students did not view this in a negative light, because they were clearly aware of the individual attention each had received.

Each grade level and the unified arts team is equipped with a computer on wheels (COW) for class use for word processing, internet research, united streaming, and other computer applications. Some teachers have produced podcasts and teacher tube pages where students can log on and watch a previous lecture. Smart board technology is located in a classroom at each grade level as well as in the art room. Audio players are available for students to enhance project work. For example, audio players were utilized by seventh graders to interview town members for the Rye History Mural. Students can listen to the stories of townspeople and how they relate to the mural. Projector carts are available for student PowerPoint projects as well as educational movies. The library collection and research software is online and available for home use as well. While most teachers integrate varying forms of technology in their classrooms, there is a continuing need for training and application to enhance skills and production. The school enjoys ample hardware and software, and students have a clearly stated set of standards and applications at which each is expected to become skilled.

The school district provides opportunities for professional development throughout the school year. There is a professional development committee for the district which addresses district-wide needs. Rye Junior High School is represented on that committee. At the school level, grade level teams meet daily, so academic teachers may plan, share and develop lesson plans that cater to the needs of all students. Special education staff attend these meetings when able, usually three times per week. Incorporating unified arts into this model has been difficult due to staffing and scheduling issues. Staff-sharing with two local elementary schools prohibits

the unified arts team from meeting more than once a week. The professional learning teams working on the curriculum project meet twice a month.

Bi-weekly staff meetings are scheduled to provide the opportunity for all staff to share ideas with their colleagues. Department meetings are scheduled twice a month so teachers of one discipline can meet during which time classroom strategies and instructional techniques are part of the conversation designed to aid students as they progress through the discipline. CPT meetings are held daily by grade level teams to discuss logistical and student issues, as well as curriculum and instruction practices. Unified arts find it difficult to collaborate due to scheduling and limited availability of part-time staff.

There is a formal evaluation procedure in place for teachers, the protocol for which varies based on length of service. Teachers write annual individual goals that will coincide with the school-wide goals. The improvement of student learning is not specifically addressed as a specific goal within the evaluation process, although its presence is assumed, since improvement may be issued by the administration and they are designed to help teachers needing assistance with teaching strategies.

### COMMENDATIONS

The visiting team commends Rye Junior High School for the following:

- Creating a schedule that supports dedicated team planning time
- Developing interdisciplinary units using the team model
- Developing teaching strategies that demonstrate a caring, nurturing approach to adolescent students
- Incorporating differentiated instruction
- Integrating the use of research skills into the instructional strategies
- Increasing communication and cooperation among grade level teams
- Utilizing multiple technology tools to enhance classroom instruction

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting team recommends the following:

- Devise strategies that address the development and application of higher order thinking skills in all content areas
- Undertake a study to examine effective utilization of the unified arts staff
- Provide professional development in research-based instructional strategies that will result in high academic achievement
- Continue to support training in technology integration

## ASSESSMENT

### OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Rye Junior High School employs a mix of formal and informal assessment procedures to determine its success at delivering the curriculum and to measure the individual progress of each student in light of the school's mission and expectations. The state mandated New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) is utilized to assess math and reading for all students in each grade annually, and the Terra Nova California Achievement Test measures student growth in reading, mathematics, social studies and science. This latter test is nationally normed and presents a broader picture of student achievement. The school also participates in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), administering it bi-annually to eighth graders.

The informal assessment procedures are teacher based and developed and relate directly to the curriculum goals which have been established by the teacher to measure his or her individual expectations. There are no department or subject area assessments developed at the local level either from grade to grade or across a grade. Both the self study and the teacher interviews corroborated the discernment that there is no research based assessment program at the school, although the curriculum revision project which is current and ongoing has, as one of its goals, the development of assessments which flows from and is connected to the academic expectations of the school and the district. The absence of academic expectations related to a formal curriculum limits any coordinated effort to implement a data driven system of curriculum development and revision.

At the same time, the teaching staff produces and provides informal strategies for assessment within their own classrooms. They integrate a variety of measurements into their teaching strategies including tests, both written and oral, hands on and challenge activities, portfolio materials essays and demonstrations. However, there is no definitive plan or direction offered beyond what individual teachers see as necessary to their own goals and work.

The mission of Rye Junior High School focuses on the individual needs and developmental stages of the middle school child, and teacher generated assessment tools are reflective of that focus. Each individual child is measured through a diverse and changing set of assessments all of which take into account the many learning styles and developmental stages of the middle school learner. Many different kinds and styles of measurements are used such as portfolios, group projects and performances. In different classrooms, the committee saw rubrics, journaling, discussions, labs, cooperative learning, conferencing, portions of the writing process. During the visit, the visiting committee also observed group projects, portfolios and a visual presentation. In addition, the committee took note of materials posted throughout the school which were reflective of hands on-work and demonstrations.

Assessments are said to be reflective of student differentiation. However, it was unclear to the visiting committee how the various assessments address the differentiated skill levels among the students in the classrooms. There is minimal formal sharing of assessment results among staff both vertically in content areas and horizontally in teams, and discussions with teachers resulted in a perception that the results of informal assessment are not generally shared from classroom to classroom or teacher to teacher. Teachers seem to be quite cognizant of the results of their own student assessments, but there is little or no connection to the school

assessments. There is a need to organize data teams to begin to analyze and use the information gathered from both standardized and teacher made assessments to improve instruction.

Formal student assessment results are analyzed and discussed in a general manner by the faculty and administration. The school guidance counselor attends faculty and team meetings to report out the assessment results. The results are also discussed when the Common Order of Required Elements (CORE) / SAU 50 curriculum are discussed at grade/team meetings. Every teacher receives a copy of the results and identifies all students who score below the proficient level. In an attempt to address student weaknesses, the individual faculty member uses the results of the assessment to modify instruction for that student.

Students are active learners who reflect upon and assess their learning in a variety of ways. After student projects are graded in language arts, conferences are held with the students and goals are set for the next project. Portfolios are used at each grade level of language arts to show growth in reading and writing. In language arts students use the Six Trait Writing Rubric to assess their progress in the various areas. On major projects in social studies the class looks at a grading rubric before the assignment is due, so they can compare their product to the grading criteria. In mathematics, students assess their own knowledge at the end of each unit. In world language, students view their own video in order to self assess. This helps each student recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. Music and drama performances demonstrate student proficiency.

The assessment of student learning is communicated regularly to parents through a variety of procedures. The school has three marking periods a year. Parents receive three report cards and three progress reports a year. Faculty regularly communicates with parents through email and phone messages. Parents attend team meetings to get an update on their child's progress. The school also provides weekly progress reports when requested on student academic and behavioral performance. Portfolios and folders are used to illustrate student progress. The student agenda book is used to update progress.

Rye Junior High is working toward designing their own assessments and grading practices around the CORE curriculum and the learning standards established by the district. Report cards are currently not standards based, with ongoing discussions to address this issue.

The school district provides professional development opportunities to discuss effective assessment procedures. Team meetings are used to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The guidance counselor coordinates standardized assessments for the school. The language arts and science departments have developed rubrics for students in grades 6-8. The school provides the fiscal resources, materials, technology, and supplies to support assessment procedures.

The school systematically interprets and reports assessment results to the community. Parents receive 3 reports cards and progress reports yearly. The school counselor analyzes all the testing results and reports to the School Board. Individual reports are sent home to each student's family. Teachers share student progress on academic achievement with their parents. Reports are made to the School Board on a monthly basis outlining programs and achievements of students.

## COMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee commends Rye Junior High School for the following:

- Developing and administering a wide-range of assessments across grade levels
- Providing opportunities for student self-assessment
- Communicating frequently with parents about assessments
- Scheduling professional development opportunities for teachers to utilize current research in their methods and classroom assessments

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting team recommends the following:

- Imbed assessment practices in the new curricula being developed
- Establish procedures to share standardized assessment results across all content areas and grade levels
- Create a standards based report card that aligns with state and SAU expectations
- Develop a process to share standardized assessment results with students
- Develop an authentic assessment system based on state standards in all curriculum areas
- Develop and train data analysis teams

## LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

### OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The staff and administration of Rye Junior High School promote and facilitate a vision that encourages respect at all levels and among all groups within the school and community. Rye Junior High School has as its focus the success of its students and embraces the concept that students must be respected for who they are as individuals, both academically and socially.

The principal of Rye Jr. High School is committed to providing leadership that communicates a vision focused on academic achievement and the social growth of the middle level child. The principal demonstrates his dedication to the school community by greeting each student as he or she enters the building in the morning. He interacts with them as he supervises the lunch room and/or monitors recess. He is very visible throughout the building and takes the time to listen to the students, working with the student council as well as at other student programs, games or meetings. The principal of Rye Jr. High School is also receptive to staff suggestions and concerns, providing monthly meetings for staff to discuss building level ideas, issues and concerns. The principal supports staff professional development, trainings, teacher initiatives, and in-house talent as resources for school improvement. The parents of the school community commend the principal's strength as a school leader and the dedication of the staff which fosters a respectful and caring environment. The principal invites parents to coffee, communicates with parents through e-mail and newsletter as well as person to person and seeks input about the parents' expectations through an entrance survey.

The principal has made a commitment to middle level education and works to put the pieces for its success into place. He encourages both students and teachers to be risk takers and to impact school culture and embrace change, keeping the well being of students as the first priority.

The professional and support staff willingly and happily share the responsibility for implementing the school's mission, achievement standards and the social well-being of each student. The mission statement contains the words, *"Everyone within the community shares a responsibility for developing and nurturing the whole child. Every young adolescent can learn, and we resolve to make that learning a reality."* The concept of shared leadership is strong characteristic of Rye Junior High School. Staff members understand that all have an integral role and responsibility for making a good school work well, and their commitment to the mission and the middle level philosophy is a hallmark of the school's success. Staff members accept their roles and responsibilities in carrying out the school mission and doing what is best for their students. They are pro-active in handling the academic and social necessities of a school housing sixth through eighth graders. They sponsor and support student centered activities intended to acknowledge individual students and their strengths. They participate in "Feel good Fridays" which enable them to recognize eighth grade students; they reward sixth graders with character awards. They promote thematic projects which support student awareness of the environment; the world beyond and around them; health issues; adolescent concerns. The faculty's commitment to building and maintaining the self-esteem and self-awareness of each student is also evident in the classroom where each student receives individual opportunity to grow academically. Students who are in need of extra assistance and support receive it; students who are accelerated learners have the opportunity to have access to the Virtual Learning Academy.

The commitment of Rye Junior High School to the middle school model has resulted in a change in student grouping practices. Classrooms are largely heterogeneous except for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra class, and students are grouped by teams. The school spends much time determining the best balance for groups in terms of gender, age and ability. Regrouping takes place at different times of the year to ensure variety and to subtly address the needs of students without singling anyone out. Each team has a special education teacher as a member along with a paraprofessional. In an effort to maintain continuity for students with special needs, the special education teacher follows the children rather than remain a member of the team.

The schedule generally meets the needs of the program. However, it is limited by the schedules of part time personnel who have little flexibility in their allotted times. It is also limited by Unified Arts classes that have different meeting requirements. The administration and faculty try to tweak the schedule to make it work at its best, but it is often the schedule that drives the program rather than the reverse.

Communication is a strength at Rye Junior High School. The school website is regularly updated with links to homework assignments, Parent and Student Handbooks and the District's Master Plan. The student agenda is also used as a communication tool for teachers and parents. An email system provides another line of communication between school and home, and a website is in a developmental stage. Future plans include an interactive website. Parents of the Rye Jr. High School community told the visiting committee that they felt that communication with teachers and administration was strong and helpful and it helped to maintain a sense of trust between home and school.

Rye Junior High School has clearly stated and developmentally appropriate standards for student behavior that are conducive to the well-being and safety of everyone in the building. Expectations for conduct are stated in the student handbook. Students and parents must read the agenda handbook and sign off that they have read the school's code of conduct. The core value of respect is evident on posters and art work displayed throughout the building. Student discipline embraces the concepts of maturity and responsibility by providing an opportunity for students to learn from their mistakes. The principal manages discipline in the cases of more serious infractions. The Rye Junior High School discipline model is based on the core value of respect and includes discussion related to those values with students. Students are asked to reflect on four basic statements: *Manage yourself. Respect others. Work in a healthy, legal and ethical manner, Cooperate with others.*

Some staff members are still learning to work within the new discipline model. There are concerns that discipline is not evenly administered, and while some of those concerns are seen as an offshoot of the move to a middle school model, they do, nonetheless, need to be addressed. In response a data management system has been incorporated which enables both the administration and faculty to track disciplinary matters and the consequences. Discussions have taken place and both faculty and administration are committed to improving it. The visiting committee observed positive, respectful interactions between students and staff at Rye Junior High School. Acceptable behavior rubrics are posted and modeled throughout the building.

Rye Junior High School presents a warm welcoming environment where students feel cared for. In conversations with students, the visiting committee was told that students believe

their teachers care very much about them and their success. The feeling was mutual from their perspective. Students said that for the most part they feel safe at Rye Junior High School. They acknowledge some bullying present, but none of those interviewed sensed any major issues. The school supports an anti-bullying initiative and addresses it from an adolescent growth perspective. The Student Council, by organizing a variety of service activities, solidifies the image of the school as a caring institution. Students exhibited pride in their school and their building. Its graffiti-free exterior along with its well cared for and clean interior is another indicator of the self awareness and self respect called for in the mission and expectations. The adult members of the Rye Junior High School community demonstrate collegial respect and cooperation with each other. Their willingness to collaborate and share instructional strategies is but one example of the singleness of purpose and the strong sense of respect which permeate the school and its community.

The parents, teachers, and school community members of Rye Jr. High School have expressed an overwhelming sentiment that they feel welcomed at the school. The PTA and Principal's Advisory Committee are encouraged to participate in decision making centered on what is best for students. Staff members mentioned that the principal is open to discuss team and building concerns. Parents remarked that they appreciate the opportunity that their children have to explore new academic interests in a non-threatening learning and social environment. The parents agree that they felt students were adequately prepared for furthering their educational experience.

Rye Junior High School takes time to recognize the social and academic achievements of the students. Rachel's Challenge Chain Reaction, student artwork that is posted on the website and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Feel Good Fridays are some examples of student recognition. Halls, classrooms and display cases all serve as posting places for student work. In conversations with the visiting committee, staff members suggested that, while there are some opportunities for staff recognition, it would be worth exploring for additional ways to recognize faculty achievement.

Rye Jr. High School has a clearly defined and professional evaluation process for the evaluation and supervision of the faculty, staff, and administration rooted in the district and school improvement plan. The teacher evaluation plan aligns with the State of New Hampshire teacher evaluation requirements. The goals of this process are derived from Charlotte Danielson's effective teaching practices. The principal is responsible for evaluating all professional staff, including special education and unified arts teachers. Rye Junior High School educators are expected to seek professional development opportunities in order to stay current in their teaching practices. Rye Jr. High School has no formal mentoring program requirement for new teachers or support staff.

Rye Jr. High School has an all-encompassing crisis/emergency response plan that includes fire drills, lockdown, and evacuation procedures and accompanying drills. Each classroom is equipped with an emergency bucket that includes exit maps and student seat assignments for evacuation. The guidance secretary has pertinent student back up information for emergencies and evacuations. The school routinely reviews emergency procedures.

Professional development is coordinated at the district and building levels. The district professional development committee includes a teacher representative from Rye Jr. High School. The 5 year master plan was approved and implemented after review and feedback was elicited at

staff meetings. Professional development has been expanded to include job embedded opportunities that align with individual teacher goals. The staff at Rye Junior High School is enthusiastic and turnout for professional development workshops is high. Teachers are required to track their own professional development towards recertification.

### COMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee commends Rye Jr. High School for the following:

- The dedication of both teachers and principal in creating a positive and nurturing learning environment
- The maintenance of an academic and social environment based on respect
- The acceptance of the roles and responsibilities of shared leadership
- The pride in and respect for the school as demonstrated by both staff and students
- The opportunities for collaborative decision-making
- The commitment of a good professional development program
- The willingness to take a risk with a new schedule
- The strong commitment to good communication both internally and externally
- The empowering of staff, students, and the parent community to create an environment that promotes civic mindedness
- The celebration and recognition of students
- The opportunities for teachers to develop and implement an initiative

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee recommends the following:

- Continue to work with the schedule to meet the instructional needs of students
- Explore opportunities for staff recognition
- Create a professional development plan to address specific curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies that influence learning
- Establish a working group to discuss and make recommendations about the schoolwide discipline policy
- Develop an orientation/mentoring program for new staff
- Establish a working group to examine all internal communication barriers and make recommendations for improvement
- Address the improvement needs of the website

## SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

### OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Rye Junior High School's mission statement states that the school "will provide appropriately responsive school programs, policies, and practices to meet the particular intellectual, physical, social, and emotional needs of each middle level learner." The Rye School Board, in its commitment to living out this mission, provides access to ancillary services for all students. Each of these takes on a different shape and size, but the School Board ensures that there is an array of services to give every student an equitable opportunity for success. These student support services, programs and resources include health services, guidance, special education, and technology and library media resources. In addition to academic and social support services, Rye Junior High School also provides clubs, organized after school learning opportunities, service projects, accelerated learning opportunities and parent/student collaboration. Students have equal and open access to all services.

There is one certified special education teacher and one paraprofessional per grade level. Rye Junior High School has a full time Registered Nurse, a .8 Guidance Counselor, a full time certified Library Media Generalist (LMG) and a part time library assistant. Additional District-wide support services are available to assist in meeting academic and social student needs. In addition, the school has a relationship with an area mental health clinic which provides services on an "as needed" basis.

Rye Junior High School participates in a statewide program designed to ensure that schools not only address the academic needs of students but also the social needs of young adolescents. As a result, the school enters into a "Learning Compact" which calls for counseling services, social support groups, emotional support and healthy food among others. The school makes this available to those who wish to participate.

The size of the school enables the support services to assume a prominent role in the day to day activities. The presence of a special education teacher on each team provides a link to special services and allows for an active communication system. While all staff may not have the responsibility for specific student services, teacher collaboration, common planning time and, once again, the size of the school brings key people together regularly so that each is fairly well informed about the needs and the resolutions. The community provides other services that support both the students and the school via the library, fire and police, the historical society, and service clubs.

The Rye Junior High School's self study was forthcoming about the strengths and shortcomings of support service areas, and during the visit, the committee members agreed with the school. The school and its faculty are very pleased to be able to have spaces for these services and the visiting committee heard no complaining about them. However, heating and ventilation create issues with the guidance office, waiting area, nurse's area and library. There are no designated spaces for one on one special education work, nor are there easily accessible areas for small group work. The nurse's office lacks a private bathroom and sink. Confidentiality could be compromised unintentionally for both the health area and the special education areas. The library is, without question, the most heavily used room in the building, but it lacks good work space for students, is in need of additional shelving and mobility lanes for

handicapped persons is awkward at best. Each of these issues limit the building and program in some small way and it is incumbent on the school to continue to seek ways, either, creatively or fiscally, to begin to resolve them.

Parents are informed about student support services through the guidance and special education departments. Referrals and/or services can be initiated by a student, parent, individual teachers, teacher teams, guidance or health professionals in the building. Progress is tracked by student support services staff to facilitate the communication of needs and strengths to students, parents, and other staff. Any one of the professionals representing student services is accessible by phone or email to initiate support for any individual student.

Rye Junior High School does not employ formal program evaluations for its support services, but has had the opportunity through a variety of strategies to make improvements in its programming and delivery of same. The health office has used the New Hampshire School Nurse manual self survey tool. The state of New Hampshire Minimum Standards Team visited the school and made recommendations for improving guidance and library services. The state also judged the special education department to be in compliance with all state and federal rules and regulations. Personnel are evaluated as employees under the contract.

Staffing appears to be sufficient given the size of the building and the enrollment. The fulltime guidance counselor was reduced to a .8, and it is anticipated that the educational assistant position, designated to assist students in need of help, will not be funded in the 2009-10 school year. It is the judgment of the visiting committee that each of these areas would profit from additional help, but, at the same time, staffing levels are adequate.

The guidance counselor provides a full range of guidance services for Rye Junior High School students. These include individual counseling on a "requested", "referred" or "suggested" basis. Counseling sessions may be conducted individually, in small groups or even classroom based. The counselor maintains good contact and interactions with the teachers to determine if a student is in need of some sort of service, support or intervention. With the school valuing the needs and differences of the adolescent student, both the teachers and the guidance counselor are on the watch for changes in student status that might require some sort of intervention or support. There is always a need for support groups to assist students who find themselves in difficult situations such as: divorce, health issues, death and dying etc. The guidance program also assists with private school placement and transitioning of students to Rye Junior High School and to Portsmouth High School and supports the delivery of special education services. In addition the counselor participates in social service and health service programs. Parents and students told visiting committee members that the guidance program met their needs and was also very present to them when there was a problem to be resolved.

Rye Junior High does not have a specifically identified advisory program, but students can receive peer and adult services support through homeroom, team time and group counseling through various programs that instruct and/or counsel students. The size of the school, along with the adult to student ratio of 5 to 1, does not require a separate advisory timeframe, although sixth graders have an extended homeroom period once per week. Students told visiting committee members that teachers were always available and willing to help them. In addition, students pointed out the availability of other staff (principal, counselor, nurse,) who are present to help them at all times.

The library and media services program is housed in an area which, over the past ten years, has developed limitations in terms of shelving, access and use. The growth of the collections and the need for more shelving has filled the current capacity of the library. The accumulation of a curriculum collection and A/V and technology equipment has exceeded the available storage space. The Rye Fire Department has noted that more space should be allowed for mobility within the library. In addition, the ventilation system is noisy and interferes with student learning.

The library media program is managed by a full time certified librarian and a part time assistant. Library work is supported by parent volunteers. The school is working to imbed library skill strands into the regular curriculum. According to conversations with staff, not all teachers include library skills in their classroom curriculum, and among them, some do not access the librarian for her expertise. The expectation that library skills will be integrated into curriculum calls into question the need for professional development and accountability to ensure they are taught. Library skills can be taught by the librarian on an as-needed basis. The librarian makes herself available to go into classrooms to co-teach research skills and familiarize students with the strategies of good library use.

During the school day, the library serves many purposes from providing reading areas for individuals to checking out materials to supervising small and large groups working at tables. Class groups schedule time in the library for research, work sessions or viewing of media. When the library is filled to capacity students are sometimes turned away. If the librarian is teaching or out of the building, the library may be locked. Increased hours would further support collaboration with teachers and flexible scheduling. The library is open to students before and after school.

Technology is abundant at Rye Junior High School. Both the school and community have committed time and money to ensure that the appropriate hardware and software is available to the students. Presentation equipment, classroom desktops and laptops for students, laptops for teachers, Computers on Wheels (COW) for each grade level and unified arts with extra computers are some of the available options.. In addition, peripheral devices such as audio players/recorders and listening stations, scanners, microscopes with digital capabilities, cameras (both still and video), game systems, palm pilots, DVD players, CD and MP3 players, and Smartboards are in the building for staff and student use.. Some technology is housed in the library while other technology is dispersed throughout the building, generally in team areas. Mobile units (COWS) are available to teams and contain an allocation of equipment sufficient for most classroom use. Each teacher has a laptop equipped with the necessary software including Easy Grade Pro, and Micro Office 2007. Teachers can update their computers based on curriculum needs to access equipment such as Smart Boards. Audio players/ recorders, digital cameras, game systems, communication software for interschool and communication between other schools for collaboration such as Skype and Oovoo) can also be accessed. There is a wireless network in the building which is easily reached by all computers.

The size and breadth of the library media collection is acceptable. The librarian attempts to offer a variety of materials to meet the needs of all learners based on style and ability level. New titles are provided regularly and are chosen to support curricular themes as well as to provide leisure reading opportunities for members of the educational community. The librarian employs a weeding process that guarantees the appropriateness of the materials as well as ensuring it is current.

The Rye School District has policies in place for the selection and removal of resources and materials as well as an Acceptable Use Policy for accessing technologies and the Internet.

The school's health services are carried out primarily by a school nurse. All students receive annual health screenings and seventh graders are also tested for vision and hearing. Additional screenings are conducted at the request of the special education staff or parents. The health department maintains student health records and complies with state regulations on immunizations. Student care plans are either developed or updated to reflect the latest information and need. The health department also takes responsibility for teachers being informed about an individual student's health issues on a need-to-know basis. The school nurse obtains an annual permission slip from parents for emergency care and possible transport.

The school nurse conducts staff training sessions in universal precautions, first aid and CPR. Certification and re-certification for CPR and first aid can be obtained through the nurse's training program. First aid kits are provided and maintained throughout the building. Via a variety of communication methods, parents are informed about pertinent health issues, information sites, and healthy practices for kids and families.

Special education services are comprehensive and follow state and federal regulations appropriately. A recent state audit praised the school for its compliance status. However, the visiting committee was concerned with the adequacy of the facilities assigned to the special education staff. Size and noise and privacy issues affect the delivery of service and should be reviewed, addressed and monitored. The special education staff makes a strong effort to maintain strong communication links with parents, teachers and students. Since one special education teacher and paraprofessional loops with a grade for the three years, there is little reason for any student to fall through the cracks, if, in fact, he or she is in need of service. Inclusion is the followed philosophy, and every effort is made to ensure that all students have equal access to the curriculum and programs. The special education staff monitors students at lower grade levels in anticipation of their arrival at Rye Junior High School to ensure a smooth transition.

## COMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee commends Rye Junior High for the following:

- The inclusion of special education staff on every grade level team
- The dedication and commitment of the nurse, librarian and guidance counselor to support the academic and social development of the students
- Ongoing parent communication

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee recommends the following:

- Continue to advocate for the library renovation project
- Develop a process for infusing library information skills into content area curriculum and provide training for teachers who will implement it
- Address space issues for guidance and special education services

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

### OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The community of Rye, New Hampshire, has been consistently supportive of its schools, both fiscally and morally. The schools and the education of the students they serve are accepted as the responsibility of the community, and budgets over the years have reflected that commitment. The elected school board assumes the responsibility for developing and presenting policy in either a pro-active or reactive form in its response to the needs of the schools and uses policy to deter potential issues and resolve others. The committee seeks administrative input in its decision-making and communicates its work to the community at large. The school board seeks input from its constituents through the use of surveys and email, but, although the opportunity is there, there is limited involvement by the citizens. The school board also has the responsibility for providing sufficient revenue to fund an appropriate middle level program for its students. It requires the administration to present a budget, in which all proposed expenditures are justified and presents that final budget to the town for approval. Subsequently, it works with the administration, overseeing the implementation of the budget and making adjustments when necessary. Additional revenues are sought through grant applications, entitlements and the Rye Education Fund

The community not only supports the annual budget, but it also supports the school's programs through the Rye Education Foundation, the PTA and the many community wide activities which are endorsed by the school as either service projects or fund-raising activities. Student conversations revealed to the visiting committee that the school is an integral component of the community and students' vision is that the two entities are one. Interaction with other members of the community is seen in the Pease Greeter program, food and clothing drives and scholarship fundraisers.

The school board maintains a focus on long range planning working with the superintendent and the town principals. It develops long range goals and includes them in the budget process. Recent results include grounds improvement, professional development funds and technology. These results flow from the Capital Improvement plan, the Master Plan and a technology plan.

Led by the school administration, the faculty is involved in the development of the budget. The budget year starts in September, when the staff is asked to provide budget requests for the following year. The visiting committee heard numerous concerns about the timing of the budget process, because there is no opportunity to assess the success of the previous year's budget requests before the new budget is formed. Once requests have been submitted to the principal, he develops a building budget for submission to the SAU. At that point the central office examines and reviews it after which it is finally submitted to the town budget committee in the late winter and, ultimately, to the voters. The process is transparent, thorough and comprehensive and, according to the administration, that is one of the reasons that the town is willing to support it.

There are many opportunities at Rye Junior High School for parental involvement in their child's education both in and out of school. Although the students are at an age when they do not get very enthused over parental presence, the school encourages parents to be an active part of the process. The principal espouses an "open door policy" not only for himself, but also for the school in general. Teachers encourage communication through the active use of email and meetings. Parents are welcome to meet with teachers to discuss their child's successes and needs. Parents told the visiting committee that they feel welcomed and comfortable in the school, that staff goes out of its way for the most part to answer their questions and be of assistance to them. Many Rye parents take advantage of these opportunities to voice their support and concerns by being part of some of the following: "Coffee with the Principal", the PTA, Yattitudes, the King Arthur Life Skills program, Destination Imagination, volunteer support aides, Book Fair. The visiting committee was told by both parents and teachers that parent involvement was strong and productive and their contributions went a long way to helping the school meet its mission.

The school is also supported by partnerships with the community. Many of these are other town departments such as Police, Fire, Library and Recreation which exemplifies the seamless approach that Rye has adopted to meet the needs of the town's young folks. In addition, the townspeople have established the Rye Education Foundation which provides monetary grants to teachers for programs and projects outside the school budget. Some projects which have benefited from the support of the foundation include the climbing wall and additional musical instruments.

There are also many noteworthy programs within the school, such as Rachel's Challenge, Project Safeguard, Merrowvista, and King Arthur Life Skills Bread-making which can provide outreach from the school to the community. The success of these programs can be measured by the high number of students who are actively involved in the myriad of community activities.

Rye Junior High School was built originally in 1932 and has undergone renovations three times in 1942, 1965, and 1997. The building has historic value and the upgrades have been the response of the community to balance the traditional with the then current educational needs of the students. The building, in its present form, can generally handle all aspects of a good middle level program. The school site presents itself very well. The building is clean, well lit, and in good repair. In several situations building space limits the effectiveness of school programs, none of which is unfamiliar. In fact, the school district has had and will continue to have discussions about a warrant article dealing with building issues.

As programs have changed, building use demands have been modified as well. The library, as mentioned in a previous section of this report, has outgrown its initial space. The increase in the library collection over the years, even with an active weeding program, along with the use of the facility for meetings, small groups and project-based classes has limited its use as a research/study/leisure reading center. The increase in special needs programming requires not only space but different kinds of space that can be adapted to the need at hand. Currently, special educators are using the cafeteria, the library, the special education spaces and regular classrooms to accomplish their work, but it is often to the disruption of others and the distraction of their own students. All teachers have their own classrooms which provide stability to the program and the students, so the building needs really focus on those "other" places that support the programs provided.

Space for physical education, music, art, drama and lockers is of continuing concern. The visiting committee noted that, while none of these areas can be addressed quickly or reasonably, their current status impacts the programs. The building is handicapped accessible, but there are numerous adjustments that should be reviewed and modified to improve that access.

The capital improvement plan calls for a four-phase energy audit consisting of upgrading insulation, new boilers, new heating and ventilation control systems and energy efficient lights. In addition, repairs to the roof and cupola are also cited in the plan.

The building is very clean and attractive. The custodial/maintenance staff consists of one day custodian and two night custodians. All custodians/maintenance workers are thoroughly versed in emergency procedures and receive adequate training in such areas as hazardous materials, asbestos awareness and ladder safety. The custodial supervisor, who has responsibility for Rye Elementary, as well as Rye Junior High, actually does some cleaning to alleviate the workload of the two night custodians, an demonstration of the need to consider more staff. The custodial/maintenance staff works carefully to maintain the cleanliness of the buildings as well as to handle small repairs and projects.

The physical plant meets all applicable federal and state laws and is in compliance with local fire, health and safety regulations. The school holds ten fire drills per year. The Rye Chief of Police and school principal coordinate and conduct two lockdown drills per year.

The food service director is responsible for all phases of cafeteria management. Lunch is the only meal served by the cafeteria. The director works six hours per day and has two part-time assistants. The director is "Serve-Safe" certified and her two assistants have received "Serve-Safe" training. The cafeteria has received a perfect score on its last three state inspections. The cafeteria serves approximately 100-120 students per day, which represents fifty to sixty percent of the school population.

Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure the safe arrival and dismissal of students. Students arrive by school bus, private car, and bicycle or on foot. Large orange traffic cones are set up to direct all vehicular traffic. Students disembark from vehicles in an orderly and well supervised fashion. A Rye police officer is present at arrival and dismissal times.

## COMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee commends Rye Junior High School for the following:

- The supportive and generous community of Rye
- A proactive commitment of the school board to excellence in education
- The strong parental involvement in and support of the school
- A budget process that involves all constituencies
- The provision of a multitude of school and community connected programs
- A clean, well-maintained building
- A safe and efficient transportation system

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The visiting committee recommends the following:

- Improve communication among all stakeholders during budget development
- Address the improvement of handicapped accessibility throughout the building
- Develop a workable plan to address the varying space issues (i.e. library, special education space, music, art, physical education, teachers' room)

## CONCLUSION

On behalf of the Visiting Committee I commend all those who contributed time and energy toward the completion of the self-study, as well as toward the preparation and hosting of the peer review team. We have enjoyed participating in this professional experience with you.

We hope that this visiting committee report, in conjunction with the strengths and needs determined during your self-study, will serve as rich resources for your short and long-term planning and that they will assist you as you continue to strengthen education for your students.

Upon your receipt of this report, you should review the Commission's guidelines for dissemination, action planning, and follow-up. It is suggested that the school appoint an action planning committee or steering committee to review the visiting committee report's recommendations and to divide them into meaningful categories - whether according to the Standards or according to another relevant format. However the recommendations are divided and whatever timelines are drawn, the follow-up process must remain relevant to your particular school.

As previously stated in the introduction, this report has also been mailed to the Commission on Public Elementary & Middle Schools' Committee on Middle Level Schools for an in-depth review and recommendation regarding accreditation. The recommendation will then be forwarded to the Commission itself for final approval. Depending upon the Commission's recommendation, the school may be requested to submit one or more special progress reports in the years prior to, and following, the five-year report. At the five-year mark the school must submit a report explaining the status of all the team report's recommendations - whether completed, in progress, planned for the future, no action as yet, or that the school feels the recommendation should be rejected.

Once again, on behalf of the visiting committee, please accept our esteem and respect. You do wonderful things for the children of Rye in the face of economic difficulties, governmental interventions, and diverse educational philosophies. For Rye Junior High School, the bottom lines are those students who walk through the door every day. You do that well.

## **RYE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

Rye Junior High School will provide appropriately responsive school programs, policies, and practices to meet the particular intellectual, physical, social, and emotional needs of each middle level learner. Everyone within the community shares a responsibility for developing and nurturing the whole child. Every young adolescent can learn, and we resolve to make that learning a reality.

Rye Junior High School  
Rye, New Hampshire

VISITING TEAM ROSTER

Stephen J. Furtado, Chairperson

Michael Hogan, Assistant Chairperson

Pahm Allard

Paul Cavaliere

Dan Haugh

Miriam Klein

Ray Wynne

STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

Teaching and Learning Standards

Mission and Expectations for Student Learning  
Curriculum  
Instruction  
Assessment of Student Learning

## **Mission and Expectation**

The mission statement describes the school's role as an integral part of the educational community. The mission statement emanates from the school's beliefs about education and its purpose, and leads to a set of expectations enabling the school and its community to assess its effectiveness.

1. The school has a mission statement, which addresses the school's beliefs about teaching and learning and reflects the character of the school, the unique developmental characteristics of the middle level child and the values of the community and its educators.
2. The school has high, clearly stated and measurable expectations for academic achievement for all students. These expectations include a description of the different levels of performance as well as indicators of the successful attainment of each.
3. The school has high, clearly stated expectations for social behavior, which are developmentally appropriate and address the needs of the middle level child.
4. The school community establishes, accepts and supports the mission statement and expectations for academic achievement and social behavior.
5. The school provides observable and measurable examples of adherence to the mission statement and expectations for academic achievement and social behavior.
6. The school sets a clearly defined cycle for the review and revision of the mission statement and expectations to ensure that they adapt to the changing needs of the students and the educational community.

## Curriculum

The curriculum is the formal plan designed by the school to carry out its mission statement and to meet its expectations for academic achievement and social behavior. The curriculum links expectations for student learning to instructional and assessment practices. The strength and effectiveness of the curriculum are dependent upon the commitment of the school and district to a continuous process of implementation, review, evaluation and revision of the curriculum which leads to improved student learning.

1. The school's formally written and implemented curriculum is aligned with the school's stated expectations for students' academic achievement and social behavior.
2. Each curriculum area has clearly articulated learning standards that support the school's academic expectations.
3. The content of the curriculum is intellectually challenging, respectful of diversity and allows for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.
4. The curriculum includes coursework, co-curricular activities and other school approved educational experiences which meet the needs of the middle level child.
5. Effective curriculum coordination, integration and articulation exist between and among all subject areas within the school as well as with all receiving and sending schools.
6. There is an ongoing process for curriculum review and revision which actively involves the school's faculty and takes into account the stated academic expectations and assessments of student performance.
7. The written curriculum incorporates classroom and school-wide library resources.
8. The written curriculum incorporates classroom and school-wide technological resources.
9. The school provides sufficient staffing, time, professional development, fiscal resources, materials, technology, and supplies to implement and support the written curriculum.

## **Instruction**

Effective instruction is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning. It is aligned with the mission statement and expectations for academic achievement and is the connection to curriculum and assessment, as well as student performance. It takes into account individual student needs, learning differences, interdisciplinary activities and student engagement in a variety of ways. Self-reflection and interactive dialogue with colleagues is necessary to ensure success.

1. Classroom instruction is based on current research and embodies the school's stated beliefs about teaching and learning.
2. Classroom instruction is designed to enable all students to meet the school's high expectations for academic achievement.
3. Instruction facilitates learning by including practices that are personalized, exploratory, self-directed, authentically based, reflective and integrated across the curriculum.
4. Instruction ensures the development and application of higher order thinking skills and problem solving abilities.
5. Instructional strategies incorporate various technologies to improve student learning.
6. The school provides sufficient staffing, time, professional development, fiscal resources, materials, technology, and supplies to support effective instruction.
7. Ongoing discussion of improving instruction as it relates to student learning is a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
8. Teacher supervision improves instruction and enhances student learning.

## Assessment

Effective assessment practices ensure that student progress is measured in relation to the school's stated academic expectations. Assessment also provides teachers with opportunities to evaluate and adjust instructional practices to improve student learning. Assessment and its analysis provide the opportunity to develop long and short-term strategies to improve curriculum and instruction across the school. Assessment results inform the school community about school progress.

1. The school utilizes an ongoing assessment system that embodies the mission statement and expectations for academic achievement and measures progress in meeting those expectations.
2. Classroom assessment strategies, reflective of current assessment research, are integrated with instructional practices.
3. Student assessment results are analyzed, discussed and used by the faculty and administration in the review, evaluation and revision of the curriculum and the improvement of instructional strategies.
4. Students are active learners who reflect upon and assess their own learning.
5. The assessment of student learning is communicated regularly to parents through a variety of procedures.
6. There are identified learning standards for each subject area which are the basis for grading and reporting.
7. The school provides sufficient time, staffing, professional development, fiscal resources, materials, technology, and supplies to support effective assessment procedures.
8. The school systematically interprets and reports assessment results to the community.

Support Standards

Leadership and Organization  
School Resources for Learning  
Community Resources for Learning

## Leadership

Leadership is the collaborative responsibility of administration, faculty and support staff to achieve the mission and expectations of the school. The manner in which a school organizes itself, makes decisions and treats its members affects the atmosphere in which teaching and learning take place. The school climate fosters mutual respect, as well as opportunities for reflection and growth among students and staff and welcomes the meaningful involvement of parents and community members.

1. The principal, in conjunction with the educational community, provides leadership by developing and maintaining a vision which ensures a focus on the academic and social growth of the middle level child.
2. Professional and support staff share the responsibility for implementing the school's mission and to maintain the academic and social expectations for students.
3. The principal provides meaningful opportunities for the staff to assume leadership roles.
4. Student grouping practices reflect an understanding of the unique learning and social needs of the middle level child and demonstrate an awareness of the diversity of the student body.
5. The school implements a process of clear, consistent and meaningful communication within the building, within the district and throughout the community.
6. The school establishes developmentally appropriate rules and consequences for student behavior that ensure the well-being and safety of students, which are understood and supported by the educational community.
7. The school has a climate that is positive, respectful, structured and safe. It is highly energized and encourages growth, change, renewal and constructive risk-taking among students and staff.
8. There is evidence of mutual respect, common purpose and support among all members of the school community.
9. The work, contributions and achievements of all students and school personnel are regularly acknowledged and celebrated and appropriately displayed throughout the school.
10. The school has a clearly defined process for the evaluation and supervision of faculty, staff and administration which is used to improve student learning.
11. The school has a planned orientation and program for administrators, faculty and support staff.
12. The school has clearly defined crisis/emergency response plans and all occupants are familiar with these procedures.

13. Parents, teachers and community members feel welcome at the school. They are encouraged and provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the school's decision-making process.
14. There is a planned program of professional development, collaboratively structured by administration, faculty and staff which supports the school's mission and expectations for academic achievement and social behavior.

## School Resources for Student Learning

Student support services and programs are designed to enable each student to participate in and benefit from each of the educational programs within the school and to meet the expectations for academic achievement and social development. The school provides a range of services which include guidance, library and media services, special education services, and health services.

### **All Student Support Services:**

1. The school provides student support services, programs and resources to ensure that each student has an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for academic achievement and social development.
2. The school's student support services are designed to support the learning and emotional needs of the middle level child and are consistent with the school's mission and expectations for academic achievement and social development.
3. Student support services personnel interact and work cooperatively with other school personnel and community resources to address the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of the middle level child and to enhance student learning opportunities.
4. The school's student support services programs are housed in areas which are appropriate to the support provided and ensure privacy and confidentiality.
5. There is an effective and ongoing system of communication with students and parents which keeps them informed and knowledgeable about available student support services.
6. All school support services for learning are regularly evaluated, reviewed and revised to support improved learning.
7. There shall be sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health and special education services.

### **Guidance Services:**

8. The school shall provide a full range of guidance services, including: individual and group meetings with guidance personnel; student course selection assistance; collaborative outreach with community mental health agencies and social service providers; and appropriate support for the delivery of special education services for students
9. There are opportunities for advisories, teams, and students to receive peer and adult support through small communities (i.e. teams, group counseling) and through various programs that instruct and/or counsel students in effective decision making.

### **Library/Media Services:**

10. The library and media services program is housed in an area with adequate physical space and is staffed by professionally trained and qualified personnel and supervised by a certified library/media specialist.

11. The library and media services program is readily accessible to students as an integral part of their educational experience, fostering independent and collaborative learning, and supporting the research needs of the students.
12. Library and media services personnel are knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation and integration.
13. A wide range of materials and information resources is available to students and faculty in a variety of formats, to meet the learning needs of the middle level child and to improve teaching and learning.
14. Policies are in place for the selection and removal of resources and materials and the use of technologies and the Internet.

**Health Services:**

15. The school's health services include:
  - preventive health services and direct intervention services
  - emergency response
  - ongoing student health assessments
  - appropriate referrals

**Special Education Services:**

16. The school provides special education services related to the identification, monitoring, and referral of students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws.

## **Community Resources for Student Learning**

The community supports the school by providing consistent and sufficient funding for programs, services, personnel, and facilities. It sustains a learning environment that ensures the safety and well-being of all students. Active community and parent involvement is essential for the achievement of the school's mission and expectations.

1. The community, through the district's school board, sets and implements district and school policy and ensures that an adequate and dependable source of revenue creates a framework for educational opportunity for all students.
2. The community, through the district school board, provides and maintains appropriate middle level programs, personnel, professional development, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials and supplies for student learning.
3. There is ongoing planning by the school and the school district to address future programs, staffing, facility and technological needs as well as capital improvements.
4. Faculty and building administrators have active involvement in the budgetary process including its development and implementation.
5. There are meaningful opportunities for parental involvement in the student's academic achievement and social growth as well as decision-making at the school.
6. The school seeks strong community relationships through productive partnerships with businesses, higher education and community groups and provides opportunities for mutual interaction between the students and the community.
7. The school site, plant and equipment support and enhance all aspects of the middle level educational program and support services for student learning.
8. There is a planned and adequately funded program of building and site management that ensures the maintenance and cleanliness of facilities and equipment as well as the health and safety of all who use the facility.
9. The physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health and safety regulations.
10. If food services are provided, the area, menus and equipment ensure that the well being of the students is a priority and is in compliance with state and federal regulations.
11. If transportation is provided appropriate procedures are in place to ensure the safety of the students.