



January 2, 2008

Mrs. Ellen Stemler
St. Theresa School
5810 Cara Carpenter Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50311

Dear Principal Stemler,

Attached is the report of findings from the Comprehensive School Improvement Site Visit held at St. Theresa School on November 8-9, 2007. The report is based upon interviews conducted with administrators, teaching and support staff, parents, students, school improvement advisory and school board members, as well as a review of St. Theresa School documents.

The site visit was designed to assess progress with the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), provide a general assessment of educational practices within the St. Theresa School, make recommendations for improvement, and determine compliance with accreditation standards and federal program requirements. The report reflects consensus of the following team members:

Department of Education Representatives

Holly Barnes, School Improvement Consultant
Joe Herrity, Consultant

Area Education Agency Representatives

Matt Cretsinger, Program Assistant for Special Education
Jeri Gustafson, Reading Consultant

It is our hope that this report will provide guidance to enhance student achievement in your St. Theresa School and support continuing conversation among staff and community members about the local education system, how and what students are learning, and how *more* students can learn at higher levels.

If areas of noncompliance were identified, the St. Theresa School must submit a plan of correction and/or evidence that corrections have already been completed. These should be submitted to the team leader within 45 business days from receipt of this letter. If a plan of correction is submitted, include the actions the St. Theresa School intends to take and the anticipated timeline for completion of these actions (see final pages of this report). Once received, the team leader will evaluate the St. Theresa School plan and evidence and provide feedback.

As part of the St. Theresa School continuous improvement process, it must review its current CSIP and provide revisions as needed. These revisions should be based on St. Theresa School needs assessments (including the attached report), student

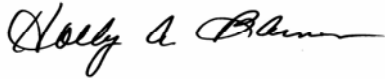
achievement data, stakeholder input, and established priorities. Recertification of the CSIP must be completed by **September 15, 2008**. The directions for revision and submission of the CSIP can be found at

<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/blogcategory/61/897/>

As part of the Department's efforts to continuously improve the Comprehensive School Improvement Site Visit process, we ask that you provide us with feedback based on your visit experience. A short online survey has been developed and posted at the following site <http://tp2.aea11.k12.ia.us/004/leasvsd.tp4>. Please click on the link to complete the survey. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses are confidential and shared only in aggregate form to members of the Department's School Improvement Team.

The visiting team again extends its gratitude to you and the St. Theresa School staff and patrons in preparing for and showing courtesy during the visit. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,



Holly A. Barnes
School Improvement Consultant
Division of PK-12 Education
Iowa Department of Education



Del Hoover
Deputy Division Administrator
Division of PK-12 Education
Iowa Department of Education

cc: Site Visit Team Members
School Board President
Iowa Department of Education Official File
AEA Office

Comprehensive Site Visit Iowa Department of Education



**St. Theresa School
Des Moines, Iowa**

**Team Findings
November 8-9, 2007**

Iowa Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

Vision, Mission, and Goals

The vision, mission, and goals are clearly articulated in the school and community. Stakeholders express an understanding of and share a commitment to the school/district goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The vision guides allocations of time and resources.

- Clearly articulated mission established collaboratively with stakeholders
- Vision and mission guide teaching and learning
- Philosophy, beliefs, mission, or vision; major educational needs; and student learning goals based on input from stakeholders and a comprehensive needs assessment (at least every 5 years)
- Staff leadership is encouraged
- Analysis of academic and academic-related data to determine prioritized goals

Areas of Strength

1. The site visit team noted the belief statement was evident in school documents, stating that students attending St. Theresa School “will learn the value of human dignity and concepts of peace and justice. The foundational belief will prepare students to participate in a global society.” The students at St. Theresa School recognize the importance of cultural diversity and this belief statement demonstrates respect for diversity and recognition of a changing and evolving world.
2. The school displayed a shared vision of education (both academically and faith-based) and what it needs as a group to get there. The administrator actively discusses and presents information to the community, student body, and diocese regarding the vision of the school.
3. The school’s commitment to its students, mission, and philosophy was apparent to the site visit team through the initiative to revisit and revise the mission statement to keep it accurate with current goals and vision.

Suggested Areas of Improvement

4. None noted

Leadership

Leaders communicate a shared sense of purpose and understanding the core values. They have a visible presence, provide resources and ensure two-way communication between the educational system and stakeholders. Leaders provide encouragement, recognition, and support for improving student learning. Leadership is committed, persistent, proactive, and distributed through the system.

- Clear expectations for students and staff
- Leadership distributed across central office and schools
- Effective two way communication established by leadership

Areas of Strength

5. Leadership was clearly evident as a component of St. Theresa School's success. All interview groups spoke of the leadership skills of the principal. Interview groups reported the following. The principal
 - is visible in the classrooms.
 - is supportive of teachers' efforts and student accomplishments.
 - has clear expectations for teachers and students.
 - assures clear communications with all stakeholders and has an "open door" policy to address needs.

6. In addition to the principal having a presence in the building, leadership at St. Theresa's is shared among teachers, parishioners, the Diocese, and families. All stakeholders are vested in doing what is best for students. Teachers are committed to differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students, the school board revisits policy decisions, and parents are involved in events at St. Theresa. There are also various leadership opportunities for students at St. Theresa. Some of those opportunities include the following:
 - Participation in "Exchange City"
 - Leadership retreats in Panora
 - Mock Trials
 - Future Problem Solvers Club
 - Drama classes/opportunities
 - Book/Math Buddies

Suggested Areas of Improvement

7. Interviews with the School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC) indicated most of the group were relatively new to the process or had not attended a meeting at all. The school is encouraged to consider developing the role and responsibility of the SIAC to include the interconnectedness with the school's other committees. As the committee transitions with new members, consider the following suggestions:

- Provide new member orientation
 - explain the role and responsibility of the committee, provide a list of frequently used terms
 - provide training in data analysis
 - use data and committee member input to identify top priorities for exploration
- Establish a rotation for membership
- Provide a mentor for new committee members
- Once tasks are identified, engage committee members in actively seeking out information and establishing connections with administration, teachers, students, parents and the community
- Provide shadowing opportunities for adult committee members with students to learn more about the factors impacting student success
- Recognize retiring members for their contributions

Consider contacting Lori Pearson, Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant with Heartland AEA at 641-842-2719 extension 436 or lpearson@aea11.k12.ia.us for further assistance in this area.

Collaborative Relationships

Stakeholders express an understanding of, and support the basic mission of the school. Stakeholders have meaningful roles in the decision-making process that promote a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership. They also play *important* roles in helping the school to achieve its mission. Educators in the system develop and nurture a professional culture and collaborative relationships marked by mutual respect and trust inside and outside of the organization. The system works together with balance between district direction and school autonomy.

- Vision established collaboratively with stakeholders (i.e., parents, community, students, and educators)
- Staff members involved in decision-making and activities to achieve the vision
- Parents involved as partners in the educational process
- Decision-making processes and responsibilities defined

Areas of Strength

8. The statement was made, “the whole facility is a shared resource.” Examples included the following:
 - Mock trial held in parish offices
 - Faith Formation Director working with students from the public school
 - St. Theresa gym used by the public school
 - Preschool program shared with Des Moines Public Schools
 - Strong connection between the school and church community
9. Multiple interview groups stated the strong sense of family support and “sense of family” has been created as part of the school culture and climate with teachers, administration, support staff, and parents.
10. Interview groups reported numerous opportunities and avenues for open communication and participation. Examples included the following:
 - Time reserved on school board agenda for public questions and concerns
 - “Breakfast with the Board” (starting in December)
 - Surveys sent to parents
 - Open door policy of the principal
11. St. Theresa School, along with St. Augustin School, St. Joseph School and Holy Trinity School participate in professional development opportunities together throughout the school year.
12. Interview groups recognized the active connection with the school’s business partner, HyVee Store. Last year the school was awarded \$5000 by the store.

Suggested Areas of Improvement

13. None noted

Learning Environment

The school climate is conducive to teaching and learning. The environment is safe, orderly, purposeful, and free from threat of physical, social, and emotional harm. Teachers are familiar with students' cultures and know how to work in a multi-cultural setting. Classrooms are integrated with various types of learners (i.e., gender, race, special needs, gifted).

- Materials and resources, including technology available to all students
- Clean, inviting, and welcoming environment
- Staff recognizes visitors in a friendly manner
- Buildings and classrooms accessible to persons with disabilities
- Rules are clearly understood and consistently enforced

Areas of Strength

14. Multiple interview groups reported St. Theresa School as being a safe and caring environment, which is family oriented and conducive to learning.
15. Students reported they feel comfortable talking to staff members regarding concerns they may have of a personal and academic nature. They reported the atmosphere was encouraging and engaging.
16. Based on surveys, as well as academic and non-academic data, school stakeholders decided to extend the school day in order to have additional class time for all academic areas, and to add Spanish to the curriculum.
17. Support staff and student interview groups reported looking forward to stories written by a support staff member who writes short stories. Students reported a favorite being about "Leonard the Chicken." In addition, interview groups spoke favorably of the school's mascot, Herb, which is a live turtle. Teacher and student groups reported students reading books to the turtle. Staff commented students enjoyed reading to the turtle and found the experience to be positive.

Suggested Areas of Improvement

18. Multiple interview groups reported the school has had an increase of Hispanic, Sudanese, and other ethnic groups within the past five years. It is expected these numbers will continue to increase. The site visit team recommends the school explore professional development opportunities in order to increase understanding of the cultures served. In addition, the site visit team recommends the school continue providing all students with culturally diverse opportunities to increase the students understanding of these new cultures entering the school.

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19. Teacher and student interview groups reported frequent discussions regarding student learning expectations, including standards and benchmarks, at the beginning of the school year. However, they stated those discussions do not continue through-out the school year. The site visit team recommends the continued discussion through-out the school year to keep students aware of what they are expected to learn as the year progresses. Consider contacting Lori Pearson, Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant with Heartland AEA at 641-842-2719 extension 436 or lpearson@aea11.k12.ia.us for further assistance in this area.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum challenges each student to excel, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity. There is an emphasis on principles of good instruction and clear expectations for what is taught. Educators have a common understanding of quality teaching and learning. Instruction is designed to accommodate a wide range of learners within the classroom. Teachers have repertoire of effective strategies such as cooperative learning, problem-based learning, comparison and contrast, project based learning, research, use of instructional technology, and use of advance organizers. The staff accepts responsibility for the students' learning of the essential curriculum. Instruction time is allocated to support student learning.

- Students actively engaged
- Varied instructional strategies for diverse learners
- Application to everyday life (relevancy)
- Curriculum and instruction reflect contributions from diverse racial, ethnic, and personal background.

Areas of Strength

20. Numerous interview groups spoke about the school's curriculum and instructional practices as encouraging and challenging students to excel in both their academic and faith-based studies. The small class size, instructional programs, and commitment of the staff encourage student's achievement. The staff utilizes differentiation of instruction to reach the needs of each student, as well as other modalities for effective learning. Teachers utilize a repertoire of effective teaching strategies such as:

- Cooperative Learning
- Instructional technology through the use of the computer lab
- Interdisciplinary learning

21. Numerous interviewees reported when students are consistently displaying academic challenges; the school is proactive in attempting to identify the necessary changes they need to make, and effectively utilize 504 plans.

22. The school provides opportunities for career exploration through the Choices program, job shadowing opportunities, and the Exchange City program.

Suggested Areas of Improvement

23. The school has consistently produced high achieving students in all academic areas. The site visit team suggests, however, students may benefit from utilizing instructional programs with more group discussion/interactions; such as literature circles, book clubs, and current event groups, within the language arts curriculum. This could promote more group discussion and group learning rather than focusing on independent work.

Professional Development

Staff are qualified for assignments and engage in ongoing learning opportunities to improve effectiveness. Student achievement data are used to set goals for professional development. The district uses a framework for professional development that includes theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching (i.e., Iowa Professional Development Model).

- Focus on instruction and curriculum
- Staff time to collaborate regarding implementation
- Supported by time for effective implementation and evaluation
- Based on analysis of student performance data and review of selection of research based strategies
- Directly connected to instruction and student learning in the context of classrooms
- Formative data to adjust professional development and guide instructional decisions
- Initiatives sustained over time

Areas of Strength

24. There are 7.5 days dedicated to professional development with two of those days devoted to faith formation related material. There is a theme approach to the content of professional development opportunities (e.g., student achievement data, differentiation of instruction, etc). Teacher interviewees commented on the quality of professional development activities.
25. Teacher interviewees reported elementary and middle school teachers coach each other, observe each other, work as “teaching partners”, and have informal reflective conversations about recent professional development opportunities.

Suggested Areas of Improvement

26. Interviews with staff indicated an active professional development program; however, the school is encouraged to develop a method to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development activities. The school may want to review information on the Iowa Professional Development Model at <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/232/1191/>. With an evaluation of professional development effectiveness, the school will be better able to determine what is effecting achievement. Consider contacting Lori Pearson, Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant with Heartland AEA at 641-842-2719 extension 436 or lpearson@aea11.k12.ia.us for further assistance in this area.

27. As new teaching strategies are implemented, the site visit team recommends the school ensure data collection occurs in order to monitor the impact of strategies on student achievement. Formative teacher implementation data could be collected and analyzed to ensure fidelity to the teaching strategies utilized. These data can help determine the effect of professional development on student achievement by considering the following questions:

- How will the school evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional strategies introduced?
- Will implementation be monitored to determine effectiveness and/or fidelity to the strategy being used?
- Has there been any impact on student achievement?
- How can the school sustain this effort when moving to the next area of focus?

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Monitoring and Accountability

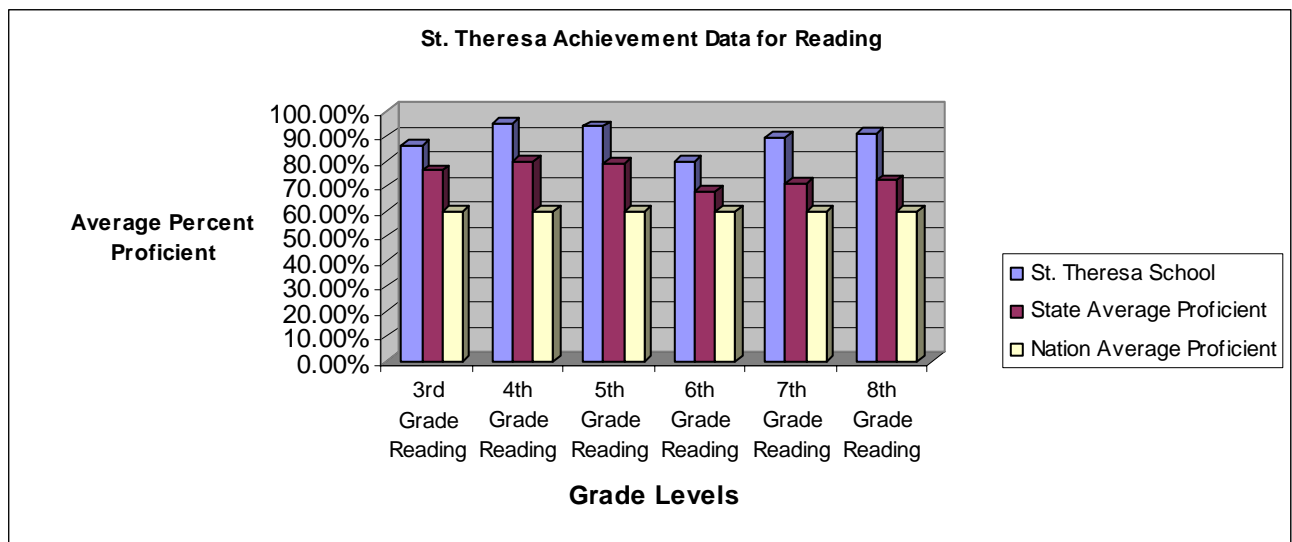
School/District establishes a comprehensive system that monitors and documents performance of student progress, instructional methods, curriculum, and programs. Results from assessments drive the goal setting and decision-making processes. Leadership supports a system that regularly analyzes student performance and program effectiveness.

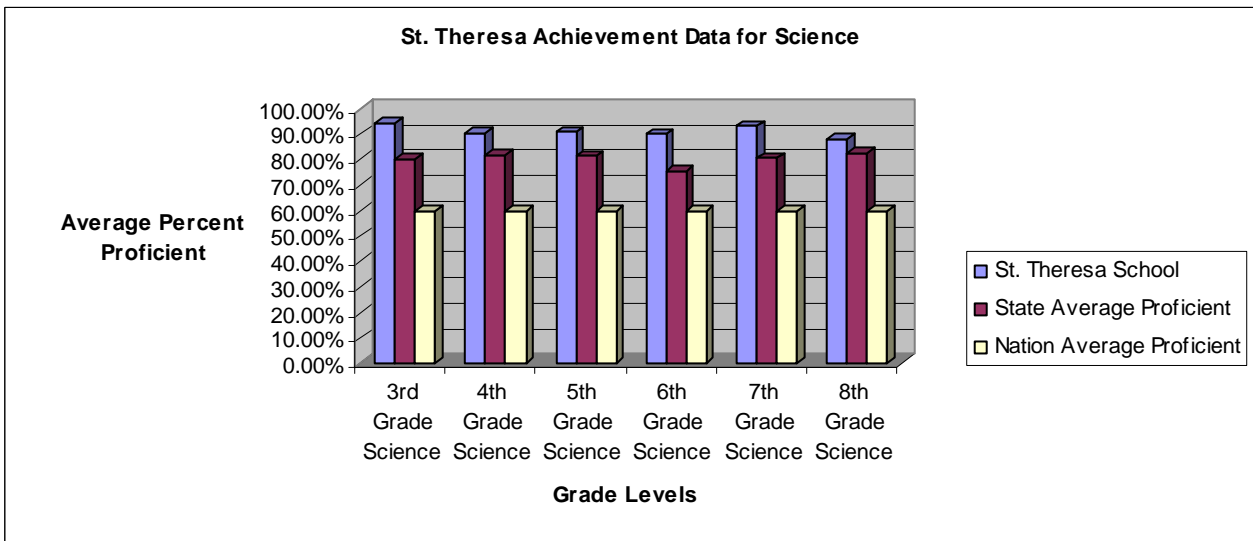
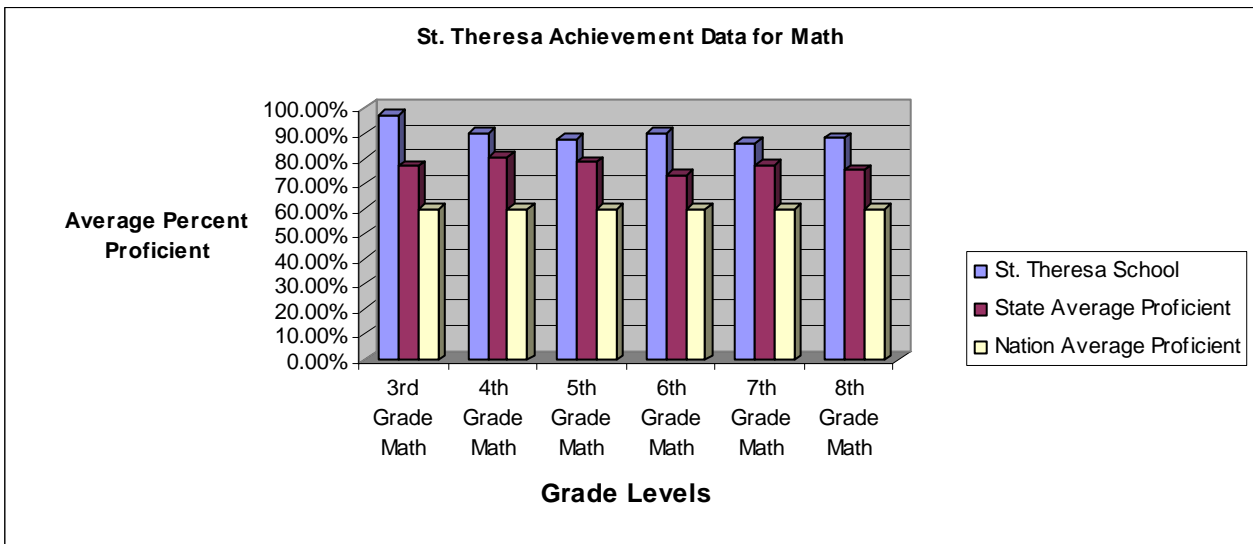
Instructional decision-making utilizes a process of gathering, summarizing, and analyzing data.

- Establishes multiple measures to evaluate student achievement and programs
- Trend line and comparative data to evaluate effectiveness of student achievement and programs
- Communicates results of assessments and other data with stakeholders
- Decision-making process includes academic and academic-related data

Areas of Strength

28. According to data reported in the school's 2006-2007 Annual Progress Report (APR), the percentage of St. Theresa students in grades 3 through 8 achieving at the proficient level or higher in reading on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) exceeded the state and national averages in reading, mathematics, and science.





29. Administrators and teachers interviewed stated, and documents reviewed revealed, that multiple data sources are used to monitor student achievement. Sources identified included the following:

- ITBS
- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)
- Constructed Response Survey (CRS)
- Math Exemplars
- State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)
- Strategic Intervention Model (SIMs)
- Accelerated Reader (AR)
- Formal and Summative assessment and observation data

Suggested Areas of Improvement

30. None noted

