

NWAIS

Northwest Association
of Independent Schools

The Sage School
January 22-25, 2017

NWAIS Accreditation Visiting Team Report

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School Profile

Name of School The Sage School

City Hailey

Grade Range 6-12

(6/7, 8/9, 10/11, and 12)

Founding Date 1 June 2009

Size of Board 10

Date of Appointment October 2015

Current Head Harry Weekes

State Idaho

Division Structure (if applicable) We have Bands

Current Board Chair Molly Prekeges

Length of Term 2 Years

Date of Appointment July 2009

Brief Description of Campus, Facilities, and Surrounding Community:

The Sage School occupies 3 buildings with 7 classrooms and a greenhouse, which sit on 4.2 acres of land in Hailey, Idaho. Hailey is the largest of 4 towns in the Wood River Valley, one of which is Sun Valley, an internationally known ski resort. The Wood River Valley is a resort community nestled in the mountains of central Idaho.

Total Number of Employees (full-time) 15 (part-time) 1

In completing the following items, count each employee only once.

- Administrators (full-time) 2 (part-time) 0
- Teaching Staff (full-time) 12 (part-time) 1
- Non-teaching staff (full-time) 1 (part-time) 0

Total Opening Enrollment 88 for Academic Year 2016-2017.

Enrollment at last accreditation visit: N/A (This is our first accreditation visit)

What is total budget \$1,658,626.00

What percentage of total revenue comes from: (percentages should add up to 100%)

- Tuition 83%
- Annual Gifts 15%
- Investment/Interest Income 0%
- Other 2%

Provide Tuition Range for the academic year of the Self Study: \$15,000.00

Tuition Reductions (include financial aid, tuition remission, and merit awards)

- Amount of Tuition Reductions awarded in the academic year of the self study: \$278,850.00
- Tuition Reductions as a percentage of gross Tuition Revenue: 21%
- Percentage of students receiving tuition reductions: 48%

NWAIS Accreditation Visiting Team Members

Name	School
Matt Culberson, Chair	Charles Wright Academy
Patti Hearn, Vice-Chair	Lake Washington Girls Middle School
Kristin Knopf	Billings Middle School
Joshua Klaus	Cascades Academy of Central Oregon
Melanie Battistone	The McGillis School
Jordan Siegel	The Delphian School
Chaya Keefe	NWAIS

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School Mission Statement/School Philosophy

The mission of is to honor adolescence as a critical developmental window for learning essential academic, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. The Sage School creates a thriving environment for students through a challenging, authentic curriculum centered on human ecology and engaging experiences designed specifically to promote self-awareness, community responsibility, and a sense of place.

Broadly speaking, The Sage School is built on a philosophy that students are naturally inquisitive, curious, caring, thoughtful, and engaged people, and that the school's job is to maintain, uncover, remember, and push this by creating real-world educational experiences that both address their current developmental levels and attend to the culture and environment of the time and foreseeable future. Well-rooted in their relationships with caring teachers who understand adolescent development, students use these secure attachments as a foundation from which to "push off" to explore and learn, returning to them consistently for grounding and encouragement. It is the goal of The Sage School to embody its mission, not just in writing, but also in the form and function of all that they do. Community Action is incorporated into the weekly schedule, Field Studies punctuate the year, the focus of the core projects is human ecology and ecological and humanitarian issues, and the school does its best to actively ask what is the best way for teenagers to learn.

The Sage School is intentionally designed by the faculty to 'close the gap' between students and their learning experiences—to borrow from John Dewey, it is designed to 'unite child and curriculum.' Students at Sage are engaged in important and meaningful work, work that matters not only for individual development, but for community and planet. In order for this system to work, all of the teachers at The Sage School must be Adolescent Anthropologists.

The Sage School community spends their days immersed in the culture of adolescents. They discuss, at length, the differences observed between 6th graders and 9th graders. As they enact new programs or simple changes to the schedule, they step back and become observers of the classroom culture. They listen to the students, but they also listen 'beyond' their words. They draw from the social and biological sciences to inform and enrich understanding. One of the central concerns at The Sage School is to construct a school that is responsive to the needs of their students. The intention of this design is to reinvent education for adolescents in the modern world- both for the students at the school and to serve as a model of how learning during adolescence can be focused on local and global human challenges. As David Orr pointed out in his book *Earth in Mind*, "It is not education, but education of a certain kind, that will save us...The goal of education is not mastery of subject matter but mastery of one's own person."

In that spirit, The Sage School sees their task as creating and sustaining a thriving environment for adolescents to build their identity, connect to their community, and understand their sense of place. To the extent that they can understand and articulate the adolescent experience, they will succeed in their roles as adolescent anthropologists and teachers: they will assist students in their own constructions of self while also constructing a model of education designed to address ecological and humanitarian problems.

Introduction

Nestled near the mouth of the Wood River Valley, just south of the Sawtooth Mountains, The Sage School is a bustling locus of energy, ideas, and possibilities. The school buildings vibrate with excitement generated each day - not dampened a bit by the six feet of snow on the roof! With a mixture of modulars and large high-ceiling, open classroom central building (with enormous attached greenhouse), the facility serves the 88 students and 16 staff well.

The Sage School is the organic product of two career teachers (now the the Head and Assistant Head - who still teach daily), both of whom felt a driving need to address the learning and developmental needs of kids with a different kind of educational model and philosophy. With doses of Dewey's educational philosophy, Plato's Academy of discourse, and the founder's desire to engage students as anthropological investigators of themselves, their surroundings, and their place and responsibility in the world, The Sage School utilizes community partnerships, intensive field studies, and the study of interdisciplinary human ecology as the foundational blocks of how they deliver an educational experience to adolescents.

The school community warmly welcomed the Visiting Team into their world, with all constituencies participating enthusiastically in candidly sharing their experience of The Sage School with the Team.

Overview of the Team's Findings

Founded in 2009 with 16 students, The Sage School's very healthy growth trajectory in a small population environ is a reflection that the model and philosophy for education resonates for many.

The faculty, students, Board, and parents agree that the school has a healthy, welcoming, inclusive culture intentionally shaped by traditions, the structure of the schedule, the hiring of dedicated faculty, and the curriculum. Faculty frequently reference the aspirational vision of a founding Head, and they talk about their delight in working with adolescents navigating the transition to adulthood. An intimate teaching community provides both a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for students and the environment. Colleagues regard each other with respect for their intentionality, intellect, and transparency. Growth among faculty is both personal and professional, and many see their teaching role as beneficial to their own learning and development. They enjoy a climate of freedom and hard work infused with playfulness. Though each faculty member carries multiple teaching and administrative duties, they laud the sense of responsibility and ownership generated by their sharing of the administrative work of the school.

Parents and trustees believe in both what is happening now at Sage School and what can happen in the future. Their commitment and trust is built on a knowledge of what the school is doing for students and how this model can provide an extraordinary experience of learning and growing. The vision of the founding Head continues to evolve and grow as more acolytes join the joyful project of growing an educational idea that raises healthy young people.

The Sage School's mission honors the developmental phase of adolescence, creating a thriving learning environment through an authentic, challenging curriculum grounded in human ecology and experiences that develop self-awareness, community responsibility, and a sense of place. The School characterizes its culture as one that purposefully and thoughtfully maximizes a period of rapid growth and development in adolescents. In many ways, the period of accelerated growth in the School is mirrored in the rapid development of the students it serves. From the structure of the schedule to a curriculum designed to maximize interactions between faculty and students, teaching and learning at Sage is vibrant and authentic.

As with any young organization, challenges abound - some predictable, some from left field - but the collective growth mindset makes the school agile and responsive. The strength of retaining young, energetic, and thoughtful faculty is juxtaposed with the challenge of compensating them well enough so that they can afford to live in a resort community, thus building and sustaining continuity in faculty and program. The strength of a creative and visionary Head is a continually evolving vision that responds to immediate needs and long term possibilities. However this creates the challenge of aligning long term planning and even shorter term strategic initiatives, with available resources. The progressive thinking and high degree of resource capacity, which often exists in a resort town culture, runs the risk of unexamined implicit bias that risks unintentionally excluding some community members, both within the school community as well as the greater community. Because the school believes so strongly in an inclusive environment, choosing to exclude any one person or group would be an anathema to their very ethos.

All of these opportunities, challenges, and tensions are the healthy byproduct of intentionally growing something vibrant and important. The support of the community; the belief and commitment of the faculty; the thoughtful stewardship by the Board; and the evolving and remarkable thinking and energy of the founders make this enterprise a beacon of hope that creating a new paradigm of educating adolescents is possible. While the task is daunting, the potential is enormous and the rewards are rich.

Major Commendations

The Visiting Team commends:

1. The extraordinary manner in which the faculty own the execution of the mission of the school, every day in every corner of the classroom, and in furthering the vision of possibilities for Sage School.
2. The love, care, responsibility and ownership the students take for their school community, and the work and learning they do.
3. The vision, drive, and execution of the enormous work completed by the founders to bring the dream of The Sage School to healthy and vibrant life.
4. The dedicated work and stewardship of the Board of Trustees to help grow and carefully attend to the health of this young educational enterprise, even as they expertly balance supporting a truly visionary Head with the pragmatics of important fiduciary duty.
5. The School for the creation of an exemplary Diversity Statement that demonstrates its intention to create a culture of inclusion.
6. The founders and faculty for their development of a cohesive philosophy of teaching and learning, grounded in rich study and understanding of the developmental stage of adolescence.
7. The entire school community for embracing and embodying the spirit of the Self Study and accreditation process.

Major Recommendations

The Visiting Team recommends:

1. The School re-evaluate the evaluation and compensation systems to both grow pedagogical skills and to better recruit, train, and retain well-qualified faculty. (Human Resources, Indicator #2)
2. The school develops goals and measures for progress that prioritize actively pursuing the vision articulated in its Diversity Statement to 'expos[e] students, faculty and staff to a wide range of ideas, experiences and cultures, examining and challenging preconceptions'. (Commitment to Diversity, Indicator #1, #3)
3. The Board take the steps necessary to revise its Long-Range Financial Plan to ensure it more accurately supports the school's evolving strategic plan, articulates their understanding of the real financial costs of its strategic goals, and includes realistic sources of revenue for funding. (Finance, Indicator # 2)
4. The Board consider creating a Board Growth/Development plan to systematically lay out the areas of growth that includes a Leadership Succession Plan, and develop a timeline and plan for achieving it. (Institutional Leadership, Indicator # 6)

NWAIS Self Study Process

The school has conducted a self study that provides for reflection and for broad participation of the school community in a way that illustrates the school's commitment to continual school improvement.

Observations:

The Sage School conducted an organized, reflective, and inclusive self study process. Faculty, trustees, parents and students spent two and a half years engaged with the standards and indicators. The school began the process by reviewing and revising the mission with all constituents. The mission was even included at the top of each program question as committees considered their responses.

The school used the Self Study as an opportunity to gather more frequently, share perspectives and reflect upon the school. There were monthly Monday afternoon meetings for parents and faculty to discuss self study topics for the two years the school was working on its Self Study, in addition to the many faculty meetings. The Board has been closely accompanying the process by attending some parent/faculty meetings, developing the required policies, articulating practices, and responding to self study questions.

The school engaged in extensive surveying of alumni, teachers, families, and current students using questions clearly linked to the Self Study questions. The Self Study includes thoughtful and extensive analysis of the results of the survey, as well as the description of some of the actions already taken in response.

The school took great care in hosting the Visiting Team from the nutritious and delicious food to the centralized and spacious work space on campus. Faculty and staff were welcoming and open to the Team's questions during the visit.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. Using the Self-Study as an opportunity for guided reflection, collaboration, and community-building.
2. Self-identifying areas of strength and areas of growth.
3. Designing and implementing such a thorough self study process for a school of its size.
4. An approach to the Visiting Team that was open and transparent, with the intent of becoming an even healthier and thriving school.
5. Using the surveys and the results to affirm its strengths and actively address opportunities.

Recommendations: None

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Remove the "neutral" option in the survey responses.
2. Continue their commendable work of reflection and gathering feedback through annual surveys of constituents.

School Mission

The school's mission is understood and supported by all constituencies.

Observations:

The school led a lengthy and inclusive process to review the mission, engaging faculty, parents, and students to reflect upon, help craft, and use the new mission statement as a guide for the writing of the Self Study. The addendum to the mission, created to minimize potential confusion in interpretation, is helpful to community members and prospective families in elucidating the mission. While the Visiting Team did not see the mission posted widely or prominently on campus, faculty report and the Visiting Team observed that the "mission reflects the day to day experience" of the school and that the writing of the new statement allowed them to "match mission language to the lived experience."

The school included questions regarding the revised mission in its surveys of alumni, Board, faculty and parents. Responses from all groups indicate a high degree of understanding and support for the mission. Respondents universally felt the school is meeting the mission well or very well.

The school went to extraordinary measures to assure the mission guided the writing of the Self Study. Faculty and staff used the process to develop familiarity with the mission and to build greater consensus around how to better deliver it.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. Conducting an inclusive and comprehensive review and revision of the school's mission statement.
2. Developing the addendum of the mission to define and explain key words in the revised mission.
3. Truly using the mission to guide the self study process.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school:

1. Find ways to ensure the mission remains clear and visible to the school community, such as posting the school's mission in all of the classrooms and/or in circulation areas in the building. (Indicator # 2)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school:

1. Continue its exploration of the distinction between its own mission and the missions of local schools, so as to best define the niche of Sage in its market.
2. Consider the possibility of including 'action' or 'social justice' in the mission or its addendum, as these ideas seem present in the planning and implementation of programs.

Overall School Program

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

The Sage School mission is reflected through its program in a way that is highly consistent and intentional. The daily, weekly, and yearly structure and curriculum are constructed with a sophisticated understanding of adolescent learning, and at the heart, an appreciation of its unique developmental stages. Activities, themes, and increased student independence mirrors the school's philosophy. Self-awareness, community responsibility, and a sense of place are taught through Human Ecology, Community Action, Field Studies, Wellness, Writing, Spanish, and Math. Overall, the curriculum is comprised of a foundational spine of themes, whereupon teachers extend and build according to both student interests and teacher knowledge.

The Visiting Team observed a small, intimate learning environment built on warm relationships with teachers, which naturally cultivated a place where students could express their voice, explore, and inquire. Although students do not have flexibility in their schedule, student choice is a prominent feature of the program, and their voices are heard in venues such as community meetings and in the design of their independent study (projects ranging in length from one class to full-year study). Diverse perspectives are represented through an intentional use of experts in the community, most notably through Field Studies, Community Action, and Human Ecology.

Students are organized into band levels based on grade and a philosophy of the developmental stages of adolescence (6/7, 8/9, 10/11 and 12). Teaching groups are also organized by band, and each band teacher serves as an advisor for a subset of their band. Teachers dialogue and collaborate around and with students, in a way that models the problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration that will be essential in the future. The Team observed a number of conversations and meetings when teachers shared their personal opinion on subjects where there are multiple perspectives (e.g. politics). The Visiting Team heard about and heard from students who spoke confidently, with authenticity, and who were able to meet a stated curricular goal of teaching students how to interact effectively with adults in a variety of settings. Students value the relationships they have with their teachers and the Team was able to see how these strong relationships positively impacted learning.

The school uses "authentic assessments" to provide real-world evaluations of student work and growth. Students are given rubrics, along with open-ended and more definite expectations at the outset of a project. The school's assessment methods are built around its mission and are an intrinsic part of their holistic view of the student. Teachers write narrative assessments that evaluate the students' process and product at the end of each trimester. Formal student self assessment is a core piece of assessment across subjects. Students benefit from a low student teacher ratio and are able to receive ample feedback on their learning. In the math and Spanish programs, students are assessed using external, online instruments.

While the school has a written curriculum guide that aligns the themes of the bands and correlates to the stages of development of adolescents, the Visiting Team did not see a scope and sequence of required or expected skills for all units of study to gauge how students were progressing and developing through the bands. Teachers have frequent formal and informal faculty meetings to plan and discuss students. Sage School teachers are extraordinarily collaborative, reflective, and welcome

feedback from peers. Teachers also self-assess and collaborate to calibrate their shared academic expectations of students, consistently demonstrating a willingness to be flexible and responsive. The Visiting Team heard from faculty that new teachers would benefit from greater professional development on instruction, and clarity around behavioral expectations of students.

Technology is used as a tool for learning in classroom settings. It serves as a means to an end, wherein skills are learned and applied as needed in authentic ways. Multiple students expressed appreciation for the hands-on learning approach.

The school determined nothing within its curriculum was co-curricular in nature, as everything taught was key to the school's mission and approach.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. A program that is consistent with the School's mission through its hiring, schedule, curriculum, and space.
2. An approach to teaching that is organic, messy, student-driven—all highly facilitative of adolescent learning and development.
3. Helping create students who leave The Sage School well prepared to live purposeful, healthy and constructive lives as a result of the strong foundation they receive at school.
4. Creating and maintaining strong, warm relationships with students.
5. Implementing a wide variety of programmatic elements and learning experiences on campus, within the local community and greater region, despite limited school resources.
6. Cultivating a whole system, holistic and authentic approach to teaching.
7. Effective use of real-world, or “authentic assessment”, in a way that supports the school's mission and educational approach.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. Consider dedicating professional development budget to effective team teaching, identifying student needs, classroom management, and instructional strategies. (Indicator # 13)
2. Consider developing a clear curricular scope and sequence of skills and knowledge that spans the stages of development and works to provide a cohesion between bands (Indicator #6)
3. Evaluate as a faculty how a teacher's perspective, as the strongest voice in the room, may affect free and open inquiry when engaging with subjects where there are multiple perspectives. (Indicator # 2)
4. Review the science program over the six years to determine if it sufficiently covers scientific practices and concepts that cut across different scientific disciplines. (Indicator # 14)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Develop familiarity with the scientific and engineering practices and crosscutting concepts within the Next Generation Science Standards when conducting the review of the science program.

Human Ecology

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

Human Ecology is defined on Sage School website as, "The study of the relationship between humans and their natural, social and built environments." In practice this is blending of what might traditionally be called history, social studies, and general sciences and in some cases rhetoric; Human Ecology is the focus of the week. All students spend 6.5 - 8.5 hours per week in Human Ecology.

- The 6/7 band covers Understandings of Self and the Ancients.
- The 8/9 band covers Social Systems and Ecological Systems.
- The 10/11 band covers the American System and the Modern System.
- The 12 (Senior) band covers the Global

Instruction methods observed by the Team were direct instruction, work time for students to research and make headway on their chosen projects, discussion and then presentations by the students. In the instruction segments, three to four teachers were present (excepting the Senior band, which has fewer students).

Teachers said guidance was given to students regarding their projects, assignments, benchmarks and assessments. Assessments, often both oral and written, are given to students on a mostly weekly basis. Students are given opportunities to revise and re-work projects/assignments/papers. Teachers use rubrics as guides for themselves and their students. Some are more defined and others are intentionally open-ended. "Authentic assessments" are used by the school, which essentially means using professionals in a particular field, where possible, to critique and using more open forums where the school and community are invited to observe. An example is the Senior year, "salon" where students study and then play the role of a famous scientist or philosopher and discuss questions. At the senior level they have used midterms and finals in the past two years to help transition students into college in the following year. This was prompted by feedback from the alumni.

The Visiting Team observed students who were engaged on the whole, were asking questions and were curious. It was an inviting atmosphere, and the students seemed to feel a lack of pressure to be "right" or be tested. The Team observed a good rapport between the faculty and students. The faculty were using Human Ecology to forward key aspects of their mission as stated in their Self Study.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. Meeting the Human Ecology aspect of their mission through their focus, curriculum, and approach.
2. The enthusiasm of the teachers instructing Human Ecology.
3. The openness, inquisitiveness, and collaboration amongst the faculty, which sets a positive precedent for student learning.
4. The positive interaction between the students and between the students and faculty.

Recommendations: None

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Continue and expand on the concept mentioned by some faculty of a relevant “summer reading list” to better prepare for the following year. This might be useful at all bands to support efforts to stay current on world views and help diversify views and the curriculum.
2. Consider if adjusting the workload of Human Ecology could improve both the effectiveness of the class and the efficiencies of human resource allocation.

Writing and Literacy

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school’s mission.

Observations:

The Sage School approaches Writing and Literacy at each band level by creating a scope and sequence that is in accordance with its view of the stages of adolescent development. The school states that writing “is an extension of our Human Ecology curriculum,” and is a skill that, “is best served with frequent practice.” They also incorporate a “skill-based approach.”

Assessment is done on a regular basis, and a culture of revision is created by asking students to regularly re-work and resubmit assignments until the passing standard is met.

The Visiting Team observed teachers using discussions and lessons to tie in earlier or upcoming lessons, projects, and writing assignments from both the Writing and Literacy Programs and from Human Ecology.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. Using the writing curriculum to continue its mission to provide an authentic curriculum and approach and to support its interdisciplinary approach.
2. Engaging students effectively in discussions and assignments that are authentic.
3. Providing assessments to create an intentional culture of revision.

Recommendations: None

Spanish

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

The Sage School utilizes the 'OWL' or Organic World Language curriculum which promotes full immersion in Spanish. Students and teachers are expected to communicate in Spanish 100% of the time during class, make inferences and circumlocute, and actively participate in the Spanish classroom community. The Visiting Team observed these elements in practice in the Spanish classrooms.

The Team observed a variety of activities geared toward practicing and reviewing vocabulary, some of which involved kinesthetic activities designed to connect specific vocabulary words with particular movements. In addition to whole group activities, students worked with partners, taking turns conducting informal interviews, and then reporting back to the class about what they learned. As students spoke to each other, they were observed to be comfortable producing the language.

Students are assessed using a computer based Oral Proficiency Interview at the end of their 9th and 11th grades years to determine their proficiency within ACTFL levels. Teachers also reported periodic use of different written assessments that help teachers assess student progress in writing. The scope and sequence provided to the Team referenced different assessment strategies, some of which were reported to no longer be in use.

Teachers identified potential improvements to the program, which could include helping students develop reading and writing proficiency, giving students more opportunities to engage with authentic reading materials, and teaching grammar and verb skills more explicitly. Additionally, teachers reported that teaching to a wide range of skill levels within one classroom creates a need for effective differentiation strategies in order to provide the appropriate level of challenge for all students. Finally, teachers acknowledged that the program could improve if the school were able to effectively interact with the local Latino community.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. The exemplary extent of student usage of Spanish in the classroom. Spanish was the only language spoken by students and teachers during the observations of four different Spanish classes.
2. Teaching to multiple intelligences in the classroom including kinesthetic, auditory, and visual.
3. Developing a safe language acquisition community in which students feel empowered to take risks, make mistakes, and speak Spanish with other members of their classroom community.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school:

1. Consider dedicating professional development budget to training on differentiation in order to best leverage and respond to the data collected in the formal oral assessments in an effort to improve differentiated instruction. (Indicator # 4)
2. Identify and pursue opportunities to engage with the local Latino community in order to provide students with interactions with native speakers to enhance students' cultural competency and exposure to diverse perspectives. (Indicator # 2)
3. Develop and utilize consistent written assessments in alignment with ACTFL performance descriptors to better evaluate program effectiveness and increase assessment consistency within the department. (Indicator # 5)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Revisit the ACTFL world-readiness standards for learning languages (the 5 C's) in an effort to help develop student competency beyond oral communication.
2. Investigate and utilize authentic texts designed by and for native speakers (including songs, poems, movies, or TV commercials) to help students improve their interpretive listening skills while also providing increased access to the Latino culture.
3. Consider expanding the school's definition of proficiency beyond just oral proficiency as outlined by the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.
4. Engage students in practice and discussion of the primary modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) instead of treating them as distinct isolated skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing).

Math

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

The Sage School's math program utilizes ALEKS, an online, adaptive math curriculum that is particularly suited to developmentally appropriate and individualized learning. A sequence of seven year-long classes provides a progression from Middle School Math 1 to Pre-Calculus. Within classes, 1-2 teachers are available to students for tutoring should any questions arise. Students must demonstrate full (100%) mastery in order to move forward in the curriculum. The student-centered class structure also affords the opportunity for students to remain highly engaged in their learning and to share their knowledge as "experts." The school has identified one challenge of this curriculum—that the self-directed learning of students can impede an overall understanding of overarching concepts. One response to this has been to utilize math mini-lessons to provide this.

The Team observed students to be engaged in individual math learning according to their level. When students encountered some difficulty, the teacher offered appropriate encouragement, and then after some observation, stepped in to provide needed instruction. Students expressed that they appreciated this program because they were able to go at their own pace and have conversations that were specific to their questions. Teachers enjoy the agility that this format demands of them, as they must be able to shift quickly to ascertain the topic as well as the nuances of the individual learner, which is made possible through individual learning portfolios.

Although the Team was unable to observe a Friday Math Superblock, teachers describe this weekly period as a time for students to engage in a 'real world math' class. Students are grouped by ability and work on a trimester-long project to complete. The Math Superblock was recently designed as a complement to the skills-based ALEKS curriculum. The school identified an interest in expanding this program and developing benchmarks for applied mathematics.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. Providing a structure in which teachers can move with agility to provide support to students in a variety of conceptual ways and in meeting the needs of the individual learner.
2. The identification and thoughtful response to specific programmatic challenges of the math program, and the solutions that have been developed to address those.
3. Delivering a program that is consistent with the mission of the school.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. Consider collecting data regarding the preparation that the ALEKS program provides for students who have graduated. (Indicator #4)
2. Pursue the self-identified goal of writing benchmarks for the Math Superblock to support teachers and students in measuring progress. (Indicator #5)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Continue exploring how to support students in developing note-taking techniques and identifying and extracting key information within the context of both ALEKS as well as in authentic learning situations.

Field Studies

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

The Field Studies program is quintessentially Sage. Goals for the program include community bonding, leadership development and 'authentic' experiences within an extended classroom. Over the course of their Sage School career, students spend the equivalent of a school year in the field. The school has developed a program that includes broad participation of experts in the field.

In preparation for the Self Study, The Sage School had an independent peer review done of its Field Studies program in April, 2016. The Self Study indicates that the school is in the process of responding to many of the recommendations and considering the extent to which it will respond to others.

Discussions by the Visiting Team with faculty indicate that students participating in the Ecuador Field Studies Program spend a significant amount of time in homestays with host families. The Self Study states that one faculty member will travel to Ecuador several days prior to student arrival to undertake some extent of homestay vetting.

The Self Study indicates that facilitation and leadership of the Field Studies Program is divided among many faculty members, but that plans are in place for the upcoming school year to have one staff member oversee and coordinate the program among bands.

Faculty described different informal assessments used during the Field Studies Program, and the Self Study describes two faculty processes used to assess the program and its effectiveness, in terms of logistics and achievement of program goals. Faculty reported that additional authentic assessments were used to assess culminating projects in the Human Ecology Program, some of which involved knowledge acquired during the Field Studies Program.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. Allocating significant time and resources to providing students with educational experiences within the greater region that are in alignment with the school mission and values, and congruent with other elements of the school program.

2. Dedicating the entire winter Field Study to school-wide participation, community development, and integration.
3. Engaging and involving students in the Field Studies program planning process including menu creation and food shopping.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school:

1. Collaborate with professionals within the risk management community to develop a process for vetting host families or hire a third-party vendor with expertise in this area. (Indicator # 1)
2. Consider developing formal assessment strategies to use with students to determine the curricular effectiveness of the Field Studies Program independent of other school programs in order to ensure that it is achieving its desired results. (Indicator # 4, 5)
3. Develop a specific administrative position to oversee the Field Studies Program in order to maximize program effectiveness, improve communication among bands, and ensure adequate redundancy in pre-trip review to manage risk effectively. (Indicator # 7 and Health and Safety Indicator # 1)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school:

1. Carry out regular peer reviews of the Field Studies program in an effort to help the school improve its practices and expand its network of professionals utilizing best-practices within the industry.
2. Consider defining and adding a skills progression to the Field Studies curriculum as a means of helping students better understand the progress they make throughout their time at the school, and in an effort for the school to better assess the wide array of program outcomes.
3. Identify and collaborate with a physician advisor (or other medical professional) who can help develop medical screening practices and procedures when reviewing student medical and health information in advance of the Field Studies Program.

Community Action

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

The school has cultivated partnerships with a number of nonprofit organizations within the Wood River Valley. Community service or "action" is an integral part of a Sage School student's week. Each band level spends a weekly two-hour block engaged in community action. This program fits squarely into the mission of the school as it serves the goal of providing "engaging experiences designed specifically to promote self-awareness, community responsibility, and a sense of place."

The Community Action program is designed to meet the students at their stages of development and to teach students how to communicate and network effectively with professional adults. Students begin the program in 6th grade participating in pre-defined group projects that involve the whole class. These projects tend to be "behind the scenes" work rather than direct contact with the the community served by the nonprofit. The 8/9 grade band works in smaller groups. The 10/11 grade band learns how to write grants, and the 12th grade band designs and conducts their own community actions.

The Community Action Coordinator described the program as moving from a focus primarily on doing to one that demonstrates a balance between doing and reflecting. There is an interest in having students further explore the definition of community service and embedding a sense that 'everyone needs help' within the program. She expressed an interest in learning more about service learning to better facilitate these conversations and integrate them with the active service. Although the Self Study and many teachers cited the Community Action program as a key component in the school's diversity work, some teachers expressed a desire to talk more with students about equity within the context of their community actions.

The Community Action Coordinator is actively pursuing partnerships with more nonprofits and looking for ways to align community actions with the Human Ecology curriculum.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. A sustained and ongoing commitment to community service as demonstrated by the time dedicated in the weekly schedule to Community Action.
2. Dedicating the time and energy to develop meaningful relationships with local nonprofits.
3. Faculty that are passionate about the class and what it brings to the overall school program.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. Consider targeted professional development for faculty, especially the Community Action Director. This might include workshops and observations at other schools. (Indicator # 13)
2. Continue to look for ways to leverage the Community Action program to pursue diversity goals. (Indicator # 7)
3. Continue to look for ways to leverage the Community Action program to increase alignment with

Human Ecology themes. (Indicator #7)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Consider exploring with students how and why nonprofits are started.
2. Consider inviting trustees to speak to students about their experience of trusteeship as a form of community action.

Creativity Workshop and Independent Study

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

Review of the Self Study indicates that the Creativity Workshop and Independent Study are designed to allow "students to explore various modes of self expression." All students participate in a two-hour Creativity Workshop on Friday afternoons during the school year. The Visiting Team was unable to observe one of the workshops, but students communicated to the team that each trimester, teachers offer a variety of courses related to creativity. Students indicated that this trimester's offerings include courses such as painting, YouTube - DIY projects, fly tying, a blog project, and the Elephant Project (a larger initiative focused on removing elephants from circuses). The Self Study describes additional offerings such as Glee Club, Digital Video Production, and Yearbook Creation. Review of the school's scope and sequence lists other past offerings such as mountain biking and trail building, exploring fall flora, and scrapbooking.

Students in the 10/11 band are required to work in the greenhouse during at least one trimester during both their 10th and 11th years during Creativity Workshop, and all other courses are open to any student within any of the other bands. Students are also able to propose their own independent study projects to execute during this time if there are projects they'd like to complete that aren't offered during in the Creativity Workshops. During their final trimester, students in band 12 work on an Independent Study project in lieu of a Creativity Workshop. All groups are required to present their work to the school community at the end of the trimester.

Students spoke enthusiastically about the Creativity Workshop, expressing appreciation and excitement about the ability to participate in projects involving art skills and other creative expression. They also communicated to the Team that throughout their time at The Sage School they are able to participate in whatever Creativity Workshops they chose, even if it means participating in similar offerings every trimester.

As the school has grown, so too has the diversity of course offerings and community partnerships established as part of the various Creativity Workshops and Independent Study offerings. As a result, the Self Study indicates that the school could do a better job defining clear expectations for students and community partners about what's entailed in executing a successful project. The Self Study

indicates that there is room for improvement within the final presentations of the projects in terms of more explicitly teaching students the hallmarks of quality presentations.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. Allocating time and resources within the schedule to allow students to explore creative expression guided by their own personal interests and talents.
2. Encouraging and supporting students in self-directing parts of their education by initiating their own Independent Study projects even if the school staff can't provide the necessary expertise.
3. Engaging community experts working in a variety of fields to help instruct students, provide mentorship, and strengthen student and school connection to the greater community.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school:

1. Consider having the staff member responsible for overseeing this program maintain a centralized database of information about community partnerships, mentors, and organizations that have effectively worked with students in Independent Studies in the past in order to help facilitate the initiation of successful projects in the future. (Indicator # 7)
2. Establish specific presentation criteria appropriate for each stage of adolescent development in an effort to help students continue to refine their presentational skills while providing an additional layer of systematized, consistent program assessment. (Indicator # 5)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school:

1. Continue discussing how to balance the challenges presented when student athletes leave campus during Creativity Workshop in an effort to provide students with adequate opportunities to pursue creative expression.

Wellness

The school provides a mission-congruent educational program designed and implemented to promote the development of its students and in keeping with NWAIS core values. The program benefits from ongoing assessment and research, is supported by necessary resources and services, and provides for the assessment of student progress consistent with the school's mission.

Observations:

Wellness time can be characterized by joy, playfulness, and exuberance in students and faculty alike. The Visiting Team observed different Wellness classes, including the game 'Medic', played by the 10/11 band. Most Wellness activities take place outside in the parking lot in front of the greenhouse and the main school building. At the time, the parking lot was covered in snow and somewhat slick. At least three teachers joined in the game and play alongside their students. The Team observed students participating to a full extent, and all students who went outside were observed to be participating in the game.

Instead of playing the game, one student elected to work on a project in the greenhouse that was due the next day under the supervision of another teacher. She explained that if necessary, students could elect not to participate if they had other work to complete, or if they didn't feel physically well enough to participate.

Students participate in band-level Wellness on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. All bands and teachers participate in a school-wide Wellness on Fridays. On Wednesdays, students participate in different offerings led by teachers involving students from all bands. At the beginning of each trimester, teachers inform students of the choices, and students select their preferred option and participate weekly. Examples of these offerings include hockey, archery, basketball, slacklining, or 'winter walks' many of which take place off campus.

Wellness was positively referred to often by teachers and students. The team heard students' appreciation for the program as it allowed them to engage in "play" in spite of being in high school. Activities take place regardless of the weather. One teacher mentioned that there is discussion taking place about how to modify the program in mitigate challenges presented by inclement winter weather.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. Empowering students to take ownership for Wellness by taking leadership and exhibiting choice in the games they play on a daily basis.
2. Providing the school community - students and staff alike - with opportunities to participate in daily physical activity and exercise outdoors
3. Community building within band members, between bands, between students and staff, and across the entire school.

Recommendations: None

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Revisit options for modifying the program in the case of inclement winter weather or in the event that there continues to be a high incidence of injuries in the parking lot.

School Culture

The school has an intentional culture, which supports the school's mission and NWAIS' core value of free and open inquiry.

Observations:

The Sage School's mission honors the developmental phase of adolescence, creating a thriving learning environment through an authentic, challenging curriculum grounded in human ecology and experiences that develop self-awareness, community responsibility, and a sense of place. The School characterizes its culture as one that purposefully and thoughtfully maximizes a period of rapid growth and development in adolescents. In many ways, the period of accelerated growth in the School is mirrored in the rapid development of the students it serves. From the structure of the schedule to a curriculum designed to maximize interactions between faculty and students, teaching and learning at Sage is vibrant and authentic.

The faculty, students, Board, and parents agree that the school has a healthy, welcoming, inclusive culture intentionally shaped by traditions, the structure of the schedule, the hiring of dedicated faculty, and the curriculum. Faculty frequently reference the aspirational vision of a founding Head, and talk about their delight in working with adolescents navigating the transition to adulthood. An intimate teaching community provides both a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for students and the environment. Colleagues regard each other with respect for their intentionality, intellect, and transparency. Growth among faculty is both personal and professional, and many see their teaching role as beneficial to their own learning and development. They enjoy a climate of freedom and hard work infused with playfulness. Though each faculty member carries multiple teaching and administrative duties, they laud the sense of responsibility and ownership generated by their sharing of the administrative work of the school. There is a great deal of consensus-building and shared decision making in The Sage School community.

Faculty report that they learn about school culture on the job, and that expectations become clear over time. There is an expectation of first year teachers they they will somewhat organically acclimate to the school culture. Responsible risk-taking and mistake-making are modeled as acceptable. Similarly, the Self Study notes that expectations for student behavior are not always clear, but become elucidated through discussion and deliberation, resulting in deeper understanding of the concepts behind the expectation or rule.

Parents described the culture as dynamic, responsive, and nurturing attachment and compassion. They appreciate an approach to teaching that envelops their children in an environment that is developmentally appropriate, engaging, and embraces the whole child. Parents see teachers as partners and appreciate the shared role of raising their children to be community-minded individuals. The school is seeking ways to more effectively welcome new parents into the culture, as well.

Students described the culture using the following words: compassionate, positive, community, family, loving, curious, independence, confidence, and home. The Visiting Team noted a school culture that reflects the mission. Students demonstrate great respect and warmth toward their teachers; one 11th grader noted that Sage teachers "maintain their sense of wonder," allowing them to connect well with adolescence.

In several places in the Self Study and in meetings with faculty, faculty members noted that the wider community views The Sage School as an "alternative school" or a "progressive alternative." They believe there appears to be a discrepancy from this outside view and how faculty and families view the school. Students also noted that there are "negative stereotypes" of the school. With fair frequency,

the parents, administration, and Board described Sage School as vastly different from the other schools in the valley, referencing it with respect to others rather than simply speaking about the merits and strengths of Sage School itself.

The Self Study notes that the school's structure encourages students to consider diverse viewpoints and free and open inquiry. However, the Team heard faculty identify areas of growth in sharing, representing, and considering diverse viewpoints and perspectives. Students expressed that their teachers "promote diversity of thought," though the Visiting Team heard faculty describe instances in which diverse viewpoints were not necessarily openly discussed or promoted.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. The palpable love for the school culture among students, faculty, and families.
2. A healthy culture of warmth, play, shared responsibility, and respect.
3. Dedicated and invested faculty who give generously of their time and care for the student community.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends:

1. The school actively seek outside training and views that will help it achieve the inclusive diversity of thought it values.

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Consider new ways to enculturate families new to the community.

Commitment to Diversity

The school has created a program, culture, and inclusive community of students, families, trustees, faculty, and staff that reflects many perspectives and diverse backgrounds.

Observations:

The school developed a clear and strong Diversity Statement in preparation for the Self Study. The statement includes a values statement, a description of how diversity aligns with the school's mission, the "why?" of diversity and aligns with the NWAIS Commitment to Care. All faculty participated in discussions and a committee was charged with crafting the actual statement. The Visiting Team found that not all faculty had seen the final, Board-approved statement.

Discussions with faculty, parents, and students regarding diversity exposed a wide range of opinions and awareness within each group regarding the degree of diversity in the Wood River Valley, the degree of diversity among the student body of the school, how well the curriculum addressed diversity as well as the level of expertise of community members to address diversity. One example of this disparity of perception is that the Team heard some teachers describe the school as very diverse and other teachers describe the school as very homogeneous.

Many teachers and students referred to the diversity of thought that is encouraged in class discussions and the exploration of global perspectives in the curriculum. In conversations with faculty, the Team heard that although teachers talk about bias, equity, and privilege, they did not tend to use the terminology with students. A few teachers indicated an interest in learning more about how to explicitly talk about diversity and facilitate conversations with both students and families. The Team heard about a committee that is being formed by faculty interested in discussing issues of diversity and equity.

Currently, word-of-mouth is the primary way students have found the school and the school has not had trouble finding students who 'fit perfectly'. In discussions with the Assistant Head and Head, it was clear that increasing diversity in the student body and faculty would be welcome. The Team heard some possible strategies to reach out to the local Latino population including examining financial aid policies, and dual language advertisements, but did not hear an articulated or coordinated plan to achieve these goals.

Although the culture of the school is warm, and almost familial, it was not clear to the Visiting Team what explicit things were said or done to assure all families and faculty (especially those who might feel marginalized) that they are welcome.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. An exemplary and aspirational Diversity Statement.
2. An expressed sincere interest in being an inclusive community.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. The school develops goals and measures for progress that prioritize actively pursuing the vision articulated in its Diversity Statement to 'expose students, faculty and staff to a wide range of ideas, experiences and cultures, examining and challenging preconceptions'. (Major Recommendation #3) Possible avenues for achieving goals might include professional development on topics of equity and diversity, a review of financial aid policies and admissions outreach strategies.(Indicator #1,2, and 3)
2. Present the Diversity Statement to the full faculty as a launching point for conversations and the development a diversity plan. (Indicator # 1)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Increase the visibility of the Diversity Statement to help everyone on campus feel welcome. This could include adding it to the website and posting it on campus.
2. Review all printed materials to ensure there is not any bias (i.e. regarding gender identity, family structure).

Institutional Leadership

NWAIS schools are self-governing and self-supporting with an institutional leadership structure consisting of a governing board and a Head of School operating in a constructive partnership which provides for the effective oversight, planning, resource development, and day-to-day management adequate to sustain the school's mission and vision.

Observations:

The Board of Trustees and Head of School have a healthy partnership that jointly focuses their attention on the successful execution of the mission of the school. The Sage School is young (founded in 2009) and small (88 students in grades 6-12), but it is a thriving educational enterprise. The Board is just becoming aware that they sit at a nexus point of the opportunity to step away from the building of the immediate school community, to planning and working toward sustaining the school for the future. In that awareness they are beginning to ask the next iteration of the questions about how to achieve best practices of good governance. Board and Head leadership succession, bylaw review for alignment with practice, and conflict of interest management are all topics on the Board's plate.

With charismatic and talented founders filling the roles of Head of School and Assistant Head, the school and Board leadership are ready to move from micro to macro thinking, from viability to the sustainability of The Sage School. While not completed, the evolution and growth of their thinking in the last 18 months, and even the last six months on strategic and long range financial planning is indicative of this shift.

The Visiting Team met with most of the Board once, and then again with Board leadership. The Team also had several meetings with the Head of School and Assistant Head (the school founders) about institutional leadership. The Board is in the beginning stages of systematizing the process and tool for review of the Head of School. He just signed his first contract.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. Marshalling the talents of the early and current Board members to do much heavy lifting in the writing of policies, establishing of best practices, strong financial management, and raising funds to quickly get the school to be a viable enterprise.
2. The commitment of the Board in executing soundly their fiduciary duties from day one.
3. Identifying the need to grow the sophistication of Board operations to match the rapid growth of the school
4. The growth mindset of the Board leadership.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. The Board consider creating a Board Growth/Development plan to systematically lay out the areas of growth that includes a Board and Board leadership succession plan, and develop a timeline and plan for achieving it. (Indicator #6) Major Recommendation #4
2. The Board continue its work in developing a functional evaluation tool for the Head of School. (Indicator #10)
3. The School re-evaluates its practice of having the Head of School as a voting member of the Board due to the many explicit and subtle conflicts of interest. (Indicator #1)

Suggestions: None

Finance

The school practices sound financial management and its financial operations, resources, planning, and oversight are adequate to support the school's mission and vision and to sustain the school's long-term viability and stability.

Observations:

The Sage School is currently on sound financial ground. At the end of the 2015-16 school year Sage had approximately \$345,000 in cash, net of short-term liabilities. The School engages in solid financial management practices: The school prepares an annual budget in April that includes funding both operating and capital reserves. The school has contracted with a local CPA firm to prepare monthly financial statements on a modified tax basis of accounting (basically cash reporting), including a comparison to the annual budget. The income and expenses are analyzed by the Head of School and Treasurer to ensure the revenues and expenses are on target with the budget and to note where they are over or under budget and what needs to be addressed. Then the monthly statements are included in the Board consent agenda for each meeting. The Treasurer and Board Chair communicate multiple times a month with the Head of School regarding the school's financial status and the Treasurer reviews expenditures monthly. The Finance Committee meets between two and four times per year.

The Board has prepared a long-range financial forecast that covers school years 2016-17 through 2019-20. This forecast is partially based on historical data from the school's inception in 2009, with modifications for data considered as outliers. It also includes analysis of the revenue levers of tuition, enrollment and fundraising. The resulting financial forecast incorporates all three of these levers.

As part of its strategic leadership, the Sage Board of Trustees adopted the 2016-2020 plan in Spring 2015. The School has been diligent in discussing and identifying their main goals for the 2016-2020 Plan and the Board updated it September 20, 2015. The six goals are as follows:

- Ensure the short and long term financial success and stability of the school
- Enhance faculty compensation, retention, and development
- Develop and implement a campus plan
- Develop and maintain our community relationships
- Enhance the Learning Environment: Program Form and Function
- Support and advance an understanding of adolescent Human Ecology

As of late 2016, the Board determined which goals have highest priority, essentially recognizing that goals 1 and 6 were the regular work of the Board and the work of the school, respectively, and not strategic goals - leaving them with for strategic initiatives on which to focus:

- Faculty compensation, retention, and development
- Develop and implement a campus master plan
- Develop a plan for increased diversity and student access to a Sage School education
- Enhance the learning environment: Program Form and Function

The Board is currently establishing committees for each of these and setting strategies and indicators for the plan, including potential costs. Not all of these costs are reflected in the Long-Range Financial Forecast. It is important to note that the school has already set aside money for the next 18 months to begin to shift all faculty salaries up each of the next 5 years, as well as having the cash on hand to close on seven acres of land - worth about \$3million - for only \$250,000.

In a meeting with the Finance Committee, the Team heard that the Finance Committee believe these four goals are incorporated into the Long Range Financial Forecast. The Team discussed with the Head of School that the new campus plan is not included other than a small amount for architectural planning. The Board has made estimates on the costs of moving the campus and building with different phased costs, and anticipate that any phase of moving will require significant raised funds - \$1-5 million. A review of the Long Range Financial Forecast show that the forecast increases annual compensation budget by an average of 4.3%. This increase begins with an immediate bump of 7.2% (\$42,000) to be directly and fairly evenly at all faculty salaries to try and bump the bottom up. This will increase the average annual salary by \$9156 (about a 25% increase). The program enhancement initiative is mainly for the Field Studies program. There is still work to do to develop resources to execute on all the initiatives. The school leadership know what the levers are that create the possibilities for achieving these, and are equally attuned to the potential cost to the school community and culture if these levers are pulled too hard.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. Its sound financial management though the first nine years which has resulted in positive financial operations every year and a strong cash position.
2. For instituting clear and easy to understand monthly financial statements that provide sufficient (not too much or too little) information to the Board so that they have the financial information necessary to monitor the financial well being of the school. In the Team's observations, this is unusual in a school as young as The Sage School.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school:

1. Continue to rework its long range financial forecast to ensure it accurately supports the school's evolving strategic plan. (Indicator # 2)
2. Consider the advantages of adjusting its Finance Committee meeting schedule to meet more frequently than quarterly to provide oversight of the financial position and support of the Head of School in this analysis particularly in light of the strategic initiatives in front of the school.(Indicator #3)
3. Review its balance between the revenue levers of tuition, fundraising, and enrollment in light of its strategic needs, taking care to not overly rely "donor magic" as a panacea. (Indicator #3)

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school:

1. Have its Finance Committee, or a risk management subcommittee perform the annual review of the insurance coverages and report to the Board, rather than the Board as a whole performing the review.

Administration

The school has an effective administration that enables the school to implement the school program in accordance with its mission, to carry out school policy, and to comply with applicable laws and regulations.

Observations:

The Sage School's administrative structure covers the essential areas of school leadership, development, advancement, enrollment management, financial management, and academic leadership through a distribution of these roles among most of the 16 staff members. The staff meet regularly to reflect and plan administrative tasks. The Team observed no evaluation process for assessing the effectiveness of the administrative structure or individuals in their administrative roles other than the answer to the summative question, "Did it get done?". The Assistant Head of School has an almost full-time teaching load in addition to tasks of admission and curriculum lead, and the Head of School has significant teaching responsibilities....and the Office Manager position is the glue that holds the disparate peices of program, student experience, and operations together. Some faculty note that finding time to complete administrative tasks can be challenging and that "things can fall through the cracks." Overall, though, they report satisfaction with the structure as it allows them to grow their skills and gain a holistic perspective and additional ownership into the work necessary to run a school. In fairness, many of the "administrative" tasks assigned are the kind of work many faculty do as part of their committee assignments or secondary tasks at other schools.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. Its inclusive and transparent decision-making.
2. The alacrity with which faculty members embrace administrative and support duties.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school:

1. Review the administrative tasks that will be necessary to accomplish upcoming strategic initiatives and create an aligned staffing plan. (Indicator #2)
2. In the review, consider re-calibrating the thinking on what the "duties" for full time faculty are to be, and which administrative functions would be considered additional work load. (Indicator #1)
3. Consider exploring a shift in the number of teachers on a teaching team, in order to allocate more time for faculty to focus on support or administrative duties. (Indicator #1 and Human Resources, Indicator #1)

Suggestions: None

Institutional Advancement

The school has an institutional advancement program that sufficiently supports the mission and program of the school.

Observations:

The school has a Development Committee that oversees fundraising events and programs. The Community Action program, the greenhouse work, and the Independent Study program serve to build relationships with community partners and raise awareness about the school. The school has identified some advancement issues it is facing that include a plan for a new campus; the need for a capital campaign and the staffing necessary to implement it. Additionally, there is a community perception of the school's strengths and weaknesses that does not match the perception of the families and faculty. As the school has noted, "many of the Institutional Advancement activities are done by full time teachers after their teaching and higher priority administrative duties have been attended to."

The school notes in the Self Study the need to refine the annual giving program and is evaluating the feasibility of hiring a Development Director. As with most small and young schools, it is difficult to know when it makes sense to "pull the trigger" on investing the resources it takes to hire someone to raise money (when will they make their own costs back?).

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. For the wide reaching relationships they are building with the community by having a program that integrates student learning with community support and action.
2. Accomplishing successful fundraising efforts, including the \$15,000 earned annually through produce from the greenhouse, without having much focus on spent on fundraising.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. Consider developing a process to review the institutional advancement program as a whole, articulating a long-range plan for this program that incorporates the school's strategic and financial plans. (Indicator #1)
2. Explore ways to ensure the school has adequate resources (personnel, materials, equipment, and funding) for the advancement activities at the school. (Indicator #2)
3. In the enthusiasm to add additional fundraising events, carefully evaluate the cost/benefit of adding anything to shared school workload.(Indicator #2)

Suggestions: None

Enrollment Management

The school has defined what it means by a mission appropriate student and has an enrollment management program that sufficiently supports the mission and program of the school.

Observations:

Even in its early stage of development as a school, and without being fully enrolled, The Sage School's clarity and delivery on its mission is the strong evidence that the enrollment management program is supporting the mission and program of the school. Like most things at Sage, admissions and marketing responsibility are additional tasks and duties shared by the faculty. The Assistant Head, who teaches, has primary responsibility for the execution of the work of marketing, communication, and enrollment.

The school knows what it does, and that clarity has allowed it to understand well who is the student they can serve. In conversations with parents and faculty, both constituencies acknowledge the wide range of learners and personalities, and joyfully talk about how a wide range of students are supported in their Sage School education.

As a small and young school, Sage is just beginning to memorialize processes and practices in tracking data about enrollment. The smallness of the school means that there is goodwill about "what happened back then," and now the school is actively beginning to capture and record data of the retention and attrition of students. Likewise, financial aid data is being carefully gathered, and benchmark targets for financial aid percentages and the ratio of financial aid to tuition revenue.

The school has healthy enrollment and graduates its smallest grade level this year. The long range planning intending to add three or four students per year seems quite achievable. There are currently 88 students enrolled with a target of full being 100-105. Satisfaction surveys and interviews with parents and students show extremely high appreciation and satisfaction with school culture, program, and community.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. An entire staff who intimately understands and believes in the mission of the school and actively articulate and execute on it.
2. An Admissions Director who does an impressive job of managing admissions and marketing while teaching.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. Consider investing in creating more time or support for the lifeblood critical work being done by the Admissions Director during admissions season. (Indicator #5)
2. Continue to formalize the gathering of data to better understand The Sage School enrollment funnel to inform where there are shortcomings in the current process. (Indicator # 2)

Suggestions: None

Human Resources

The school has policies and practices in place to ensure that employees are well qualified, adequately compensated, appropriately supported through effective evaluation and strong professional development, and are sufficient in number to support the school's efforts to achieve its mission.

Observations:

The Sage School faculty are committed to the school, its mission, and the School's community. This was well articulated by the faculty when they met with the Visiting Team.

The School has 16 employees: 13 teachers, the Head and Assistant Head who both teach, and the office manager, who also coordinates independent studies. Most teachers have administrative duties in addition to a full teaching load. While longevity is, by definition, relative in a school in its eighth year, seven teachers are in their first or second year at Sage.

In the Team's meeting with the faculty, the question of "What would keep you here for 10 years?" was resoundingly answered by more pay. They spoke about younger teachers struggling to live on a teacher's salary, let alone raise a family and buy a house. (An average cost of a three bedroom house in the area has ranged from \$650,000 to \$329,000 over the last six or so months).

The Self Study also acknowledges that Sage's unique Human Ecology program is not easily understood until it is experienced. Therefore a teacher's first year is considered an extended interview and a chance to find out if the school is the right fit for the teacher and if the teacher is the right fit for the school.

The school is aware of the importance of addressing this issue. The Strategic Plan states, "Retention and development of faculty is fundamental to the school's success, especially as we are a school developing a new system of education. A robust faculty retention and development system is the way to acknowledge teachers as professionals, it is critical for family retention, and is the foundation for curriculum delivery and development." And at the Team's meeting with the Board, the Board said their first priority in the strategic plan is faculty retention and compensation. The average salary for 14 teachers is currently \$39,000. The Sage School starting salary with or without a Master's degree is \$35,000. The starting salary for a certificated teacher in the county is \$41,000 and \$51,000 with a Master's degree. Faculty compensation is below the 25th percentile of NWAIS.

The faculty compensation "package" includes other benefits including high quality health insurance for all employees, a wellness benefit, rotating Mondays off, discounts on ski passes and a robust professional development budget. The School is investigating adding a retirement plan.

The School implemented a new evaluation system this year. It is a peer review system designed for faculty to identify areas where they need support, areas of growth, and what provides motivation. Faculty reflect on these three areas through written answers to prompts at each weekly faculty meeting. Teachers identify areas where they need support, are observed by peers, and receive feedback both on areas of improvement and on areas of strength. The Head of School participates in the evaluation process through reading faculty reflections and the written evaluations. This is the first year of this system, and it is mostly peer-oriented. The Head of School shared that some faculty had been surprised to learn that he had been reading the self reflections and the peer assessments. Follow up meetings with the Head vary in length and frequency depending on the individual.

The Human Ecology Program represents the heart of the school program in terms of subject matter

covered and time allocated on the schedule. The Visiting Team observed that within three of the four bands, four teachers co-teach the Human Ecology Program, regardless of the band class size. The 8/9 band, the largest in the school, consists of 29 students. The 12 band, consisting of 9 students, is taught by three teachers.

The one non-teaching employee's job description includes facility manager, risk manager, office manager, reception, registrar, communications work, advancement (database and annual fund acknowledgement letters), IT management, construction project management (portables), and independent study coordinator.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. The strong dedication the faculty demonstrates to their students and school, as well as the palpable sense of community developed around its commitment to the school's mission and vision.
2. The creative, inclusive, collegial approach the faculty uses to reflect on their practice, share their strategies and teaching methodologies with one another, and engage in frequent discussions about how they can improve their collaborative efforts.
3. The commitment by school leadership to lean into faculty evaluation, compensation, and retention as the critical first strategy to support the success of Sage School's future.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school:

1. Consider exploring a shift in the number of teachers on a teaching team, in order to allocate more time for faculty to focus on support or administrative duties, or increase administrative positions. (Indicator #1 and Administration, Indicator # 1)
2. Consider refining the evaluation system to specifically include formal evaluation by the Head or Asst Head of School (Indicator # 2).
3. Follow through on its investigation into adding a retirement plan for faculty (Indicator # 2).

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Review and revise the Faculty Handbook on an annual basis so that it includes up to date, relevant information necessary for staff to understand essential human resource information.
2. Consider turning the first year teacher experience into a formal training program where these teachers are 'resident' or 'student' teachers with a different salary scale.

School Plant

The school's plant supports the mission and program of the school and is maintained over time in a manner that is sustainable.

Observations:

The Sage School is located in Hailey, Idaho, approximately 10 miles south of Ketchum and Sun Valley. The school consists of leased and owned property. The land, main building, and greenhouse are leased. The two modular buildings, connected by a shared deck and covered roof, are owned by the School. The lease runs through 2019 with three five-year renewal options available through 2034. The leased campus was formerly a plant nursery and then a Montessori-based preschool. Through creative remodeling of the main building and the addition of the modulators, Sage has created a campus that supports its program.

The school uses its spaces in a way that optimizes their functionality. There are shared spaces as well as dedicated spaces for programs such as Spanish and Math. There are spaces big enough for an entire band in Human Ecology and smaller for the few times the bands are split, e.g., writing. The greenhouse is used in Human Ecology where the students grow vegetables which are sold to local restaurants and grocers. The greenhouse provides space for other endeavors as well. The Team observed students constructing a steam engine in one end of the building.

Portions of the program encourage students to be off campus for things such as Creativity Workshops, Community Action, and Independent studies. Community resources are utilized when needed for school-wide events. This helps extend the campus into the community without requiring additional spaces. The School also makes use of an adjacent vacant lot Wellness and other outdoor activities.

The School has a campus master plan for its existing property.

Sage is actively engaged in long range planning which includes purchasing land and building a facility intentionally designed to fully meet the needs of the program. The land is currently under city and county review for zoning. Once that is approved, the school has the funds to purchase the land outright, for a discounted price of \$250,000. Building a new campus is further in the future and is being addressed as part of the school's Strategic Plan.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for :

1. Creating a facility that serves its program well and is well-maintained and cared for by both faculty and students.

Recommendations: None

Suggestions: None

Health and Safety

The school has established and effectively implemented policies and procedures that promote a safe and healthy school environment consistent with the mission of the school.

Observations:

Prior to the visit, The Visiting Team reviewed the school's risk management plan and the draft of a crisis management plan. Both of these documents contain information that will help the school in managing risks and providing adequate response during emergencies and crises - whether on or off-campus. The Self Study also describes the school's adoption of Standard Response Protocols for use in on-campus emergencies. The Team observed these protocols posted throughout the school. The Team discussed these documents and plans with the staff member tasked with their creation and dissemination. The school has not finalized its crisis management plan, nor does it have a documented, simple, codified emergency response or communication procedure. Staff reported that they discuss risk management and emergency communication practices before heading into the field, in addition to debriefing injuries and incidents after they occur and when trips are complete.

The Self Study reports that faculty are trained in "proper/safe driving" but the staff vehicle manager indicated that no formal driver training took place during the 2016-2017 school year, despite the addition of at least four new faculty.

The external review of the Field Studies Program included many recommendations for improvement regarding health and safety for both on and off-campus programming. Examples include improved vetting of host-stay families in the Ecuador Field Studies Program and providing students with the ability to communicate independently of the host families. Review of the Self Study and conversations with faculty indicates that some of the recommendations have been fulfilled, some are in process, and some are still under consideration.

Review of the Self Study and faculty meeting minutes indicates that the majority of campus-based injuries occur during the Wellness program. Inclement weather combined with the parking lot used for the majority of Wellness activities increases the likelihood of injuries and accidents resulting from the overlap between human and environmental hazards.

In speaking with the faculty member responsible for overseeing risk management, and as noted in the external program review, it became clear that there isn't a consistent process for documenting and communicating risk management related information in the Field Studies Program prior to trip departure.

Commendations:

The Visiting Team commends the school for:

1. Allocating time and resources to providing faculty with professional development in risk management including participation in the Wilderness Risk Management Conference, and trainings in advanced first aid including Wilderness First Aid and Wilderness First Responder.
2. Hiring third-party vendors when engaging students in activities that involve risks greater than the faculty can reasonably manage on their own, such as when rock climbing or whitewater rafting.
3. Making discussion of risk management and accident and injury prevention a regular part of faculty meetings related to the Wellness program and both before and after executing the Field Studies Program.

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team recommends the school :

1. Finalize all aspects of the on-campus Standard Response Protocol (including a specific plan for on-campus intruders) and the crisis management plan, and train staff and relevant Board members on all communication practices and emergency procedures. (Indicator # 1, 5)
2. Create a simple, one-page document that staff carry on vehicles and with them in the field that contains key contact information for school staff and Board members that includes a straightforward emergency communication procedure. Given the extent of time students and staff spend off campus in cities, international location, and wilderness settings, this will aid staff in taking timely and appropriate action in the event of emergencies. (Indicator # 1, 5)
3. Provide a driver training for all staff members in advance of the school year, including use and management of trailers (Indicator # 1, 2)
4. Revisit and attend to all recommendations related to health and safety within the external review of the Field Studies Program. (Indicator # 1, 4, 5)
5. Collaborate with professionals within the risk management community to develop a process for vetting host families or hire a third-party vendor with expertise in this area. (Indicator # 1 and School Program Indicator # 1) Field Studies Recommendation #3

Suggestions:

The Visiting Team suggests the school :

1. Continue the review of the Wellness program and activities, with the goal of decreasing the incidence of injuries while keeping students engaged.
2. Create or adopt a standard template or system in advance of all Field Studies that helps faculty prepare for all risk management considerations while simultaneously providing on-call staff with a consistent format containing reliable information in the event of an emergency.
3. Explore the possibility of using an electronic form when collecting certain medical and health history information from families in order to process information more efficiently and eliminate the need for manual data entry into the school's database. A simple Google form embedded on the school's website might be one option to consider.