

SELF-STUDY VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FOR

RIDGECREST CHARTER SCHOOL

**325 S. Downs Street
Ridgecrest, CA 93555**

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PREFACE

The Visiting Committee would like to thank the staff, students and parents of Ridgecrest Charter School for their hospitality and for openly sharing their programs, feelings, and plans. As fellow educators we recognize the difficulties of making systemic changes in response to changing populations, accountability legislation, and economic constraints. The school community of Ridgecrest Charter School has honestly reviewed programs and processes and developed plans to address areas identified for improvement.

Parents shared their pride in the academic success of Ridgecrest Charter School and their appreciation of the support and guidance that staff members provide their children. Students expressed their appreciation of the opportunities offered by Ridgecrest Charter School. Both the certificated and classified staff felt that the school atmosphere was supportive of student success.

As we return to our individual schools, we will remember the respectful and friendly students of Ridgecrest Charter School and the staff commitment to supporting students.

Chapter I: Student/Community Profile

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The Community

The City of Ridgecrest, incorporated in 1963, is located in the high desert of Kern County. It is located east of Bakersfield, California, with an elevation of approximately 2,400 feet. Ridgecrest is surrounded by four mountain ranges, principally the Sierra Nevada to the west. There is a variety of recreational activities: hunting, fishing, skiing, mountain climbing, rock hounding, horseback riding, white-water rafting and 4WD sports. The Motor Sports Complex at Desert Empire Fairgrounds offers several different types of tracks for bike enthusiasts.

One predominant feature is that Ridgecrest is located next to the China Lake Naval Weapons Station. The station hosts the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division (NAWCWD) which has a workforce of about 3,100 civilian and 950 military personnel. NAWCWD, at China Lake, founded in 1943, is the nation's largest in-house defense research, development, test and evaluation facility. China Lake is known worldwide for developing the famous Sidewinder Missile and a variety of other missiles and rockets used in combat since World War II. The private enterprise side of the community is a housing and retail trade center for employees of China Lake and various defense contractors. Searles Valley Minerals, located 25 miles east of Ridgecrest, employs about 700 people.

One notable piece of information that makes Ridgecrest unique from other small towns is in the mid-1990s, Ridgecrest had the highest per capita percentage of PhD's, home computers, and Internet users in the entire country. This may be due to the Naval Air Station known as China Lake.

Sierra Sands Unified School District

Ridgecrest Charter School is located in the Sierra Sands Unified School District. SSUSD denied the charter from RCS, so their authorizer is the State of California. One notable difference between SSUSD elementary school and RCS is class size reduction. SSUSD has eliminated class size reduction; therefore, RCS is the only public school in Ridgecrest offering small class sizes. Additionally, SSUSD laid-off more than 42 teachers for the 2009-10 school year, forcing many classes to become combinations. Without Ridgecrest Charter School, students that would want a free, public education in the Ridgecrest area would be forced to attend the Sierra Sands Unified School District. Ridgecrest Charter School offers a more intimate educational environment with smaller class sizes on a smaller school campus.

Ridgecrest Charter School was created when a group of passionate parents reviewed the educational opportunities available in the Ridgecrest community. Other than private, tuition-based schools, the community offered few educational alternatives.

The effort began in 1992, during the same time the State of California was enacting new charter school laws. This provided opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently from

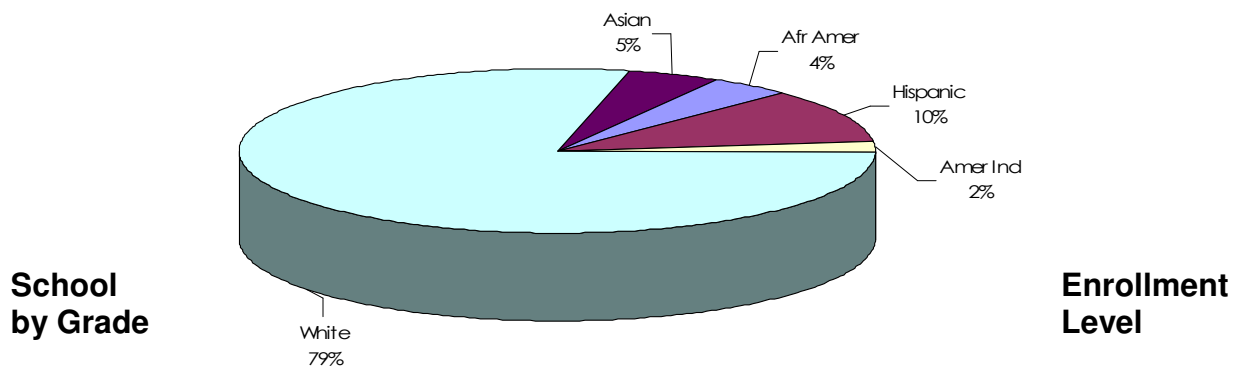
the existing school district structure. In 2001, through a series of negotiations and appeals, a charter was granted to the Ridgecrest Charter School. In 2004, the school's charter was renewed for an additional 5 year term. Its sponsor is the State Board of Education. The charter was renewed in June 2009 for an additional five years.

Demographic Data

School Enrollment Data

Year	Opening Day Enrollment	CBED Enrollment	June Enrollment
2006-07	224	211	202
2007-08	215	219	179
2008-09	176	179	211
2009-10	277	261	

School Enrollment by Ethnicity



School by Grade

Enrollment Level

Grade	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
K	15.5	19	15
1	14.5	18	17
2	16.0	14	14
3	20.0	12	20
4	22.0	21	25
5	23.0	25	15
6	20.0	26	20
7	12.0	Combo with 8 Average 17	20
8	22.0	Combo with 7 Average 17	10

Special Education Enrollment

Year	
2006-07	24
2007-08	26
2008-09	31
2009-10	36

Percentage of Students on Free/Reduced Lunch

Year	
2006-07	31.3
2007-08	39
2008-09	39
2009-10	31

Student Achievement Data

Academic Performance Index

Year	API Base	All Students Growth
2001		
2002		774
2003	777	768
2004	764	725
2005	725	717
2006	714	721
2007	721	736
2008	736	841
2009	841	

API Statewide and Similar Schools Ranks

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Statewide Rank	7	7	5	4	3	3
Similar Schools Rank	5	6	1	1	1	1

CST Results

Percentage of Students At Proficient or Advanced Levels						
	Ridgecrest Charter			California		
Year Tested	06-07	07-08	08-09	06-07	07-08	08-09
English Language Arts	39%	43%	70%	43%	46%	50%
Mathematics	45%	56%	65%	40%	43%	46%
Science	29%	29%	37%	38%	46%	50%
History- Social Science	5%	*	14%	33%	36%	42%

Percentage of Students by Subgroup scoring at Proficient or Advanced Levels				
Group	ELA	Math	Science	History
African American	*	*	*	*
American Indian	*	*	*	*
Asian	*	*	*	*
Filipino	*	*	*	*
Hispanic	40%	56%	*	*
Pacific Islander	*	*	*	*
White	42%	55%	24%	*
Male	35%	56%	30%	*
Female	49%	57%	29%	*
Economically Disadvantaged	30%	50%	*	*
English Learners	*	*	*	*
Students with Disabilities	17%	*	*	*
Migrant Education	*	*	*	*

Staff Data

Teachers	06-07	07-08	08-09
With Full Credential	8	9	12
Without Full Credential	5	3	1
Misassignments	0	0	0
Vacant Positions	0	0	0

Chapter II: Progress Report

Major Changes or Developments since the Last Visit

Changes at Ridgecrest Charter School since the last accreditation visit include:

- Revision of the vision, mission and ESLR's
- Added a Dean of Studies position
- Continuity of Leadership and Teachers (2 years)
- Developed an afterschool program
- Instituted benchmark exams in core subject areas
- Improved relationship with SSUSD
- Implemented a standards-based curriculum
- Developed and implemented a systematic and directive intervention program

Follow-up Process

The Principal, the faculty and UCLA closely monitored the student achievement during the last term. The objective was to consolidate the common critical growth and improvement areas in their WASC and Charter Renewal documents. The purpose was to address the critical growth areas within the last WASC report which would lead to increased student achievement at Ridgecrest Charter School. RCS outlined in depth steps taken to address each of the eleven areas. Major changes in curriculum, instructional strategies and organization led to tremendous growth in student achievement data. The RCS Board and UCLA supported the school site in monitoring progress of their critical growth areas.

Progress Made on Accomplishing School Wide Action Plan and Previous Recommendations

The last full self-study developed a school wide action plan that addressed ten of the eleven growth needs. The school administration with the assistance of their board and UCLA Management Team has worked diligently to address each of these needs.

1. The school needs to develop strategies to improve teacher retention.
2. All stakeholders need to be involved in the effort to create additional electives, co-curricular, extracurricular and enrichment programs.
3. The administration needs to protect the valuable time that is currently allowed on the bi-monthly minimum days which is often consumed by activities that do not allow teacher collaboration.
4. The administration and staff need to revise all outcomes, including those related to academic achievement, to provide measurable benchmarks against which to assess outcomes.
5. The school needs to develop formal methods for screening adult volunteers.
6. The Board and administration need to continue the current efforts made to improve the relationship between RCS and SSUSD.
7. The Board and administration explore ways to provide a wider range of ancillary services: guidance, counseling, etc.
8. Standards Based Curricula
9. Specific actions, which follow from the goals and examination of student data, the School will take to improve student achievement in the area(s) identified as needing improvement, including changes to curriculum, instruction, assessment, governance, and organization.
10. Diagnostic assessments that will be used to enable the School to monitor the effects of proposed changes on student performance.

The only area that the school did not fully address was:

1. The administration incorporates a second language into the curriculum.

RCS is currently looking into ways to infuse second language instruction into their curriculum. One of the options is the Rosetta Stone program. Since they only have DSL line they do not have the bandwidth to run the program on 28 computers at one time.

Chapter III: Self-Study Process

Expected School Wide Learning Results

Proficient communicators who:

- Are active and critical listeners
- Read, write, and speak effectively
- Develop a relationship with the written and spoken word

Research and technologically proficient students who:

- Apply research skills for academic purposes
- Use technology competently
- Adapt to emerging technology

Investigative problem solvers who:

- Set challenging academic goals
- Ask critical thinking questions
- Apply logic and reason to solve problems

Diligent scholars who:

- Demonstrate proficiency in English and mathematics
- Demonstrate proficiency in social studies and science
- Demonstrate proficiency in art and physical education

Ethical and honest students who:

- Exhibit personal and academic integrity
- Embrace and celebrate diversity
- Show honesty, ethics, and responsibility toward themselves and others

Accomplishment of the Five Expected Outcomes of the Self Study

1. The involvement and collaboration of all staff and other stakeholders to support student achievement.

The faculty and staff were involved in the development of the self-study. There was limited involvement of parents, students and community members. Parents had the opportunity to review achievement data, and provide suggestions for supporting and improving student academic achievement. It was very evident that support staff and UCLA were informed, involved and supportive of student achievement in academics and activities.

2. The clarification and measurement of what all students should know, understand, and be able to do through expected school wide learning results and academic standards.

RCS created new school wide expectations that are listed in many rooms and in locations around campus. Staff members report that the ESLR's are reflective of the school's overall expectation. It is clear, as student matriculate through RCS; they will be proficient communicators, research and technologically proficient, problem solvers, diligent scholars, and ethical and honest students.

3. The gathering and analyzing of data about students and student achievement.

Student data is collected and analyzed. Teachers have access to the data and to the analysis. Teachers are also asked to analyze their own data. There is a need for continued staff development to help teacher utilize the data directly to influence decisions related to instructional strategies, and pacing that will lead to improved student achievement in identifies demographic groups.

4. The assessment of the entire school program and its impact on student learning in relation to the expected school wide learning results, academic standards, and WASC/CDE criteria.

RCS self-study addressed all components of the school program. The criteria sections described the current program and provided evidence for each of the findings. The critical academic needs identified by the school were verified by interviews and observation.

5. The alignment of a long-range action plan to the school's areas of need; the development and implementation of an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the plan.

The long range action plan developed as part of the self-study and charter renewal process. The plan addresses the critical academic need to improve the percentage of students mastering grade level standards that will be demonstrated by the number of students proficient or above on the end of course exams and California Standards Tests. The greatest focus is placed on improving achievement data in the middle school program at RCS, particularly in mathematics. Additionally, it is critical that the School, the Board and SSC develop and implement a process to annually monitor their WASC Action Plan to goals are met and/or revised.

Chapter IV: Quality of the School's Program

CATEGORY A. ORGANIZATION: VISION AND PURPOSE, GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND STAFF, AND RESOURCES

A1. *To what extent does the school have a clearly stated vision or purpose based on its student needs, current educational research, and the belief that all students can achieve at high levels?*

Teachers, staff and the Governing Board worked together during the 2008-09 year to define the school's ESLRS. RCS was not identified as needing improvement in governance and organization; however, with the help of UCLA and Brown Act trainings, governance has improved. Vision, Mission, Philosophy, Goals and ESLR's have all have been revised over the past 2 years by administration, staff, teachers, parents and students. The process was fully collaborative, resulting in a common understanding in the areas of curriculum development, school climate, resource allocation and professional development.

The school's newly revised vision is:

We seek to establish an educational environment that is creative, academically rigorous and emotionally nurturing. Ridgecrest Charter School will provide a safe and supportive environment that empowers students with the strategies and tools to become life long learners and informed, responsible citizens to function effectively in the 21st century global environment.

The schools' newly revised mission is:

The mission of the Ridgecrest Charter School is to provide an experience-centered, lifelong learner based environment that enables each student to meet the academic challenges and develop the social, emotional, and physical understanding necessary to succeed in life.

To what extent is the school's purpose supported by the governing board and the central administration and further by expected schoolwide learning results and the academic standards?

The Mission and Vision Statements and ESLRs emphasize the importance of all stakeholders in a collaborative process to create an educational environment that provides for the needs of all students. The overriding goal is to prepare students to become productive citizens of the world.

The school's vision was developed with stakeholder involvement and is supported by the board. With the new school leadership in place, the school has plans for monitoring and review of the vision.

The staff's vision of what students should know and be able to do upon exit from the school is now consistent with state standards. All students are taught using the same standards-based textbooks.

A2. To what extent does the governing board have policies and bylaws that are aligned with the school's purpose and support the achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results and academic standards based on data-driven instructional decisions for the school?

The governing board has adopted a comprehensive list of policies, including policies for budgeting, audits, personnel, student discipline, instruction, student compliant, and community relations, filling Board vacancies, and school visitation.

The board policies support the school's mission in so much as the policies provide for effective school functioning with regard to the education code. The school board, administration, faculty, students and community work cooperatively and collaboratively in developing policy and making decisions. Board and site policies are reviewed in an on-going process that involves all stakeholders and that uses the above documents as the basis for these decisions and policies.

To what extent does the governing board delegate implementation of these policies to the professional staff?

The school has a functioning governance board, with active participation. The governing board includes community members and has a parent and teacher liaison. The board's role focuses on policy, finances, and school vision. Governing Board delegates authority for daily decision making to the administrative team. Decisions regarding the daily operations of the school and the education program are made collaboratively with the administration and the teaching faculty. Recent decisions in this arena have focused on the purchase of standards-based curriculum. Governing Board has also approved an outside assessment company to create benchmarks.

The school leadership team maintains open and effective communication within the school community .

To what extent does the governing board monitor regularly results and approve the single schoolwide action plan and its relationship to the Local Educational Agency (LEA) plan?

SPSA (Single Plan for Student Achievement) was developed by the school and approved by the Board. Reports on progress are written and presented annually to CDE, Charter School Division and Site council.

A3. To what extent based on student achievement data, does the school leadership and staff make decisions and initiate activities that focus on all students achieving the expected schoolwide learning results and academic standards?

The school's leadership team works closely with the teaching faculty to promote the school's culture and vision. The leadership team communicates regularly with the members of the school community and supports collaboration and standards-based curriculum implementation.

Ideas and input from the school community are valued and considered by the school leader and changes in school practices are made based on this input. For example, teachers have input into professional development and helped to choose the current standards-based curricular materials.

Grade levels develop and monitor common assessments and delivery of course materials. Teachers have worked with UCLA's School of Management to develop a collaborative learning community among teachers. This has led to open communication among teachers, sharing of strategies, and classroom walk-throughs. Teachers have attended several workshops and professional development seminars to understand and meet the needs of all students and their desired learning modality. Teachers work with UCLA to improve their instructional strategies. Teachers attended a workshop lead by the Resource Specialist teacher to better meet the needs of their special education population.

For the 2009-10 school year, teachers again came in one week prior to the start of school to work with one another on identifying the essential knowledge and skills that all students need to learn. Teachers analyzed the CST data from their previous year's students to identify areas of improvement in their own instructional program. Teachers also reviewed the CST data for their new students and collaborated with the former teacher on teaching strategies and the individual student. Teachers filled out a Student Plan for every child in their class and attached the students CST data, any former benchmark testing and IEP (as applicable).

Newly hired teachers participated in a Lesson Plan Writing workshop led by the principal.

To what extent does the school leadership and staff annually monitor and refine the single schoolwide action plan based on analysis of data to ensure alignment with student needs?

Reports on progress are written and presented annually to CDE, Charter School Division and Site council.

A4. To what extent does a qualified staff facilitates achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results through a system of preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development?

Currently 92% of teachers are fully qualified for their assigned areas. Teacher retention and qualifications were issues in the past, but the school is making real progress on this front.

The principal does one formal evaluation of each teacher each year in addition to informal observations throughout the year. Monitoring includes BTSA work with new teachers. Peers visit classrooms through the classroom walk-through process initiated with UCLA's support last year.

Within the last two years, professional development has become more formalized with bi-weekly staff development training and professional development for teachers. UCLA facilitates these sessions.

A5. To what extent are leadership and staff are involved in ongoing professional development that focuses on identified student learning needs?

The teachers review CST data in the beginning of the school year. *All teachers on-site have a Certificated Mentor Teacher for peer support and development.(Haven't heard about this yet).*

All teachers participate in the Peer Observation and Dialogue Process as well as the classroom walk-through's from UCLA. New teachers participated in training for Aeries and Success Maker. New teachers also participated in a workshop led by the Resource Specialist on English Language Development, Differentiated Instruction, and working with RSP and IEP services.

All teachers participated in number of professional development sessions including a ZOOM (Data Director) workshop led by two on-site coordinators with a focus on analyzing student progress data and HSP Excursions training, the school's newly adopted ELA program.

In the future, 7th and 8th grade teachers will participate in McGraw Hill Glencoe training (the newly adopted ELA program) and all teachers will participate in an Assessments by Design workshop (the newly adopted benchmark testing system) led by the Director.

Additional future workshops include: professional development in vocabulary development, strategies that promote inquiry, questioning, reasoning and thinking, and strategies for checking for understanding and that promote summarizing, inference and comprehension

A6. To what extent are the human, material, physical, and financial resources sufficient and utilized effectively and appropriately in accordance with the legal intent of the program(s) to support students in accomplishing the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results?

The school is developing a systematic approach to data collection and analysis oriented toward long-term program planning focused on student learning. The school has very little discretionary money and has put this money toward the funding of UCLA's professional development, maintaining reduced class size, new standards-based text books, computer intervention programs, funding a reading intervention aid and yard staff.

The school has developed a process to analyze STAR test data alongside student progress data generated from intervention programs, textbook tests, and report cards.

The school has received a \$15,000 grant for kitchen renovation and a \$6,000 grant for a Mentorship Program. The Board is not a fund-raising board, and the school operates

primarily from state and local funds. With state budget cuts, the school has projected a new operations loss for the current school year and subsequent years.

The classroom and administrative space is ample and the campus is clean and graffiti-free. The school is well-maintained, functional, and supports the safety of all students. There is space for student learning and adult collaboration. The school supplies are available and there is an adequate supply of textbooks. There is a computer lab and 1-2 computers in each classroom.

The school is able to afford to continue its partnership with the UCLA School Management Program for half as much time as last year. The school is able to afford continued class size reduction despite state budget cuts.

A7. *Has the charter school's governing authority and the school leadership executed responsible resource planning for the future? Is the charter school solvent and does it use sound and ethical accounting practices (budgeting/monitoring, internal controls, audits, fiscal health and reporting)? [FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS ONLY]*

The school hired a new back office provider to support for the school's finances. This has allowed the school to develop sound and ethical accounting practices for budgeting, monitoring, internal controls, audits, and reporting. Budgets are approved by the Governing Board at the beginning of each school year. All requisitions of \$5,000 or greater require two signatures before submission to the Governing Board.

The school recently completed a multi-year budget projection and shows a negative balance each year. Due to the state budget cuts and deferrals, the school obtained a line of credit through the Kern County Office of Education. This line of credit will allow the school to maintain positive cash flow throughout the school year. Given the state financial crises, having a current and accurate budget would benefit all stakeholders in short and long-range planning.

A8. *Has the charter school developed policies, procedures, and internal controls for managing the financial operations that meet state laws, generally accepted practices, and ethical standards? [FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS ONLY]*

The school has developed policies, procedures, and internal controls for managing financial operations that meet state laws and generally accepted practices. While last year's audit did include a number of findings, there were no material findings reported.

The school will submit an interim financial report to CDE by December 15th reflecting changes through October 31st.

Areas of strength for Organization: Vision and Purpose, Governance, Leadership and Staff, and Resources (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

The change in leadership has led to a collegial culture among teachers, staff, students, parents, and board members. The environment is supportive, warm, and the teachers have high expectations for their students.

RCS has an active Board that is involved in all aspects of the school and is willing to make decisions that meet the needs of the school program.

The UCLA partnership has led to the creation of a PD program that focuses on creating a collaborative culture.

Key issues for Organization: Vision and Purpose, Governance, Leadership and Staff, and Resources (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

Promote higher levels of student achievement by providing meaningful and relevant development opportunities for teachers at RCS.

Continue to find ways to reduce the fluctuation of enrollment. The changes in enrollment can affect the long term strategic plan both financially and instructionally.

Explore the use of a development plan for long range fundraising opportunities to enhance the programs at RCS.

Important evidence from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

Classroom observations
Focus group discussion and interviews
WASC self-Study
Financial Documentation
Leadership team and teacher interviews

CATEGORY B. STANDARDS-BASED STUDENT LEARNING: CURRICULUM

B1. To what extent do all students participate in a rigorous, relevant, and coherent standards-based curriculum that supports the achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results.

Ridgecrest Charter School has adopted and utilizes current standards aligned textbooks. The school utilizes California blueprints and staff developed pacing guides to deliver curriculum. Time is allocated for grade levels to meet horizontally and vertically to ensure that the needs of all students are met . EL and RSP students fully participate. RCS has developed programs that provide rigorous, relevant, and coherent standards based curriculum.

Students who attend RCS receive a curriculum that is aligned to California State Standards.

There was significant growth in the school's API in 2008-09. The one significant sub group showed a 108 point gain. API growth for the school and sub group in previous years was minimal. The percent of students scoring at or above proficient on the English Language Arts portion of STAR this past year increased significantly at most grade levels. In mathematics this was not the case and remains an area for concern.

To what extent are the expected school wide learning results accomplished through standards-based learning (i.e., what is taught and how it is taught)?

Resources have been allocated for technology. RCS uses technology as a vehicle to ensure mastery of essential grade level standards. Analysis of data by staff helps align instruction and content of lessons to ESLRS. Proficiency level as measured by CST increased last year especially at Elementary level.

B2. *To what extent do all students have access to the school's entire program and assistance with a personal learning plan to prepare them for the pursuit of their academic, personal, and school-to-career goals?*

Each student who attends RCS has an Individual School Plan. Students who are eligible for additional services and or support (EL< RSP) receive it. Access to technology lab and library enhances student learning. Community partnerships are in place. Counselors from the High School that RCS feeds into meet with incoming students.

Special Education students are part of mainstream school activities. Per their IEP they receive support in the classroom or through a pull out model. School personnel have identified school-to-career goals as an area in need of attention. Students experience research skills and knowledge of information systems for future use.

B3. *To what extent are students able to meet all the requirements of graduation upon completion of the high school program?*

Not Applicable. This is a K-8 School.

Areas of strength for Standards-Based Student Learning: Curriculum (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

Use of data has allowed the school to proactively identify individual, classroom and grade level areas of strength and where additional curriculum alignment is warranted.

Flex Fridays allow for horizontal and vertical articulation. Staff also use this time for data analysis and to design assessments.

Technology lab has Success Maker that allows for remediation and extension of lessons.

Consistency in leadership and support from UCLA during the past two years has greatly benefitted the school.

Special education students are encouraged to, and do participate in mainstream school activities.

Key issues for Standards-Based Student Learning: Curriculum (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

Continue professional development on good teaching practices. Review middle school math program including pacing guides and delivery of content.

Increase the communication to students about career and college pathways.

Increase articulation with Burroughs High School so students can have a seem less transition

Important evidence from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

Classroom observations
Focus group discussion and interviews
WASC self-Study
Student work posted on the walls
Student interviews

CATEGORY C. STANDARDS-BASED STUDENT LEARNING: INSTRUCTION

C1. *To what extent are all students are involved in challenging learning experiences to achieve the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results?*

RCS has expected school-wide learning results that are student friendly and are based on academics. The acronym PRIDE is used to identify the expected school-wide learning results and is posted in most classrooms. This acronym describes the goals of what each student aspires to be.

RCS is implementing a variety of learning experiences that challenge the students to achieve academic standards. The Science fair is one example. The fair has a timeline where students work for three months on the components of the scientific method. This event is school-wide and each grade level scaffolds the project so that all students produce quality work. Rubrics are used to grade projects and are given to the students prior to the project encouraging high expectations.

Other activities that stretch the students' thinking are student contests; Geography Bee, Spelling Bee, Art contests, and Essay Contests. These contests encourage students to use their knowledge to compete against other students for awards.

Students have access to a computer lab one hour a week. This lab houses the software “Success Makers” which is used for Math and English Language Arts. This software can be used for enrichment or intervention and tracks the progress of every student. Teachers are able to access the data of each student and assess the next steps of their progress.

Instructional strategies are characterized primarily by whole class instruction, teacher-directed instruction, and lectures. Some teachers use other resources such as county of education videos, internet based resources, fieldtrips filled with hands-on activities and games which push higher level thinking.

Teachers collaborate whenever possible including Flex-Fridays. The teachers get together at lunch, before, after school and on weekends to share ideas and come up with focused plans to increase the rigor of instruction.

C2. *To what extent do all teachers use a variety of strategies and resources, including technology and experiences beyond the textbook and the classroom, that actively engage students, emphasize higher order thinking skills, and help them succeed at high levels?*

Students have access to a computer lab one hour a week. This lab houses the software “Success Makers” which is used for Math and English Language Arts. This software can be used for enrichment and intervention and tracks the progress for every student. The teachers and students also have access to the software provided by the textbook company. This software is used to create standard based exams, quizzes and worksheets. The software is also used to guide the students on various tutorial lessons.

RCS uses standards based textbooks. This is a recent adoption, Houghton Mifflin and McGraw Hill Glencoe. Teachers refer to the textbooks and course outlines to prepare daily lessons. Some classrooms demonstrated innovative methods of teaching; where others were characterized by whole class instruction.

Some teachers use other resources such as county of education videos, internet based resources, fieldtrips filled with hands-on activities and games which push higher level thinking. Teachers comment that the most impactful activity for the students are the fieldtrips since they live in a very small city in a rural area.

RCS has implemented a flex-Friday where teachers collaborate and receive professional development trainings from the UCLA management program. These trainings include writing across the curriculum, benchmark and rubric development and specific SDAIE strategies that can be used in the classroom.

Keeping content standards in mind, teachers are given the freedom to be creative and think outside the traditional scope of teaching, they are encouraged to be creative and flexible when creating lesson plans. This is evident in some classrooms; however, when interviewing the teachers, all of them said that this was regular practice.

Students actively participate in various activities that push their thinking. These activities some of which are competitions are school-wide and are celebrated with recognition such as awards or special presentations at the morning assembly. Some of these activities include Spelling Bee, Geography Bee, Science Fair, History Fair, Constitution Day, Art contests, and Essay Contests.

RCS has implemented Character Counts and has weekly touched on the Pillars of Character. These pillars create high expectation for the students in personal and academic growth.

Areas of strength for Standards-Based Student Learning: Instruction (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

Continue the relationship with UCLA to enhance the use of varied instructional strategies in daily lesson.

Classroom environments are positive and supportive leading to high academic achievement.

The teaching staff, including paraprofessionals has the ability to balance caring and nurturing with academic rigor.

Key issues for Standards-Based Student Learning: Instruction (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

Develop a stronger mathematics program school wide with particular emphasis on middle school.

Increase the use of the new instructional strategies, particularly differentiation acquired in PD in everyday delivery of instruction when there are varying ability students.

Important evidence from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

Classroom observations
Focus group discussion and interviews
WASC self-Study
Student work posted on the walls
Student interviews

CATEGORY D. STANDARDS-BASED STUDENT LEARNING: ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

D1. *To what extent does the school use a professionally acceptable assessment process to collect, disaggregate, analyze and report student performance data to the parents and other shareholders of the community?*

Although teachers do not have an outlined protocol for looking at student data, teachers collaborate to discuss results of assessments, CST data and other forms of achievement. Teachers collaborate in the summer to analyze CST data; as a result prior to the beginning of the school year, teachers are able to prepare for the strengths and weakness of the students entering the grade.

In order to keep parents aware of their child's progress at RCS, teachers send home progress reports on a weekly basis to inform parents of their grades. To ensure that parents are receiving these reports, students are required to return them with a parent's signature.

RCS has implemented Assessments by Design to align benchmarks to the curriculum and provide instant feedback. RCS is in a pilot program called ZOOM which allows access to Data Director. Data Director, an on line data management solution provides a decision support system for the classroom teacher. This is designed to help teachers meet the needs of every student and improve student performance. Once all the data of the student is entered in Data Director, teachers can evaluate the next steps of each student to achieve success in all content areas.

It is common practice at RCS to assess the students weekly to ensure students are grasping the standards. Each teacher assesses students and gathers the information that needs to be re-taught the following day or week. The teachers also use this data to place students in an intervention. Those students who are not meeting the standards are tutored after school, before school or at lunch. The computer lab is also available to the student to use the intervention software provided; "Success Maker".

D2. *To what extent do teachers employ a variety of strategies to evaluate student learning?*

Teachers developed benchmark exams and rubrics to track the progress of the students. Teachers administer the exams once per quarter.

RCS has implemented a flex-Friday where teachers collaborate and receive professional development trainings from the UCLA management program. These trainings include writing across the curriculum, benchmark and rubric development and specific SDAIE strategies that can be used in the classroom. These trainings also include ways to create exams that include the higher order of thinking to push students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.

At RCS teachers use assessment to gage the degree of their students' learning. Teachers assess students in a variety of ways; multiple choice, criterion referenced type tests like the CST, and open-ended exams. The classroom observations revealed project based assessments, science labs, oral and group presentations, essays and

portfolios.

This computer lab software “Success Makers” is used for Math and English Language Arts. This software can be used for enrichment and intervention and tracks the progress for every student. This software gives a diagnostic to begin the process of remediation or enrichment and benchmarked the students throughout to gage the individual progress of each student related to the content standards. The data from this program, serves as a reflective tool for the teacher, student and parent to analyze the growth of the student and set goals for future tutorials. The teachers and students also have access to the software provided by the textbook company. This software is used to create standard based exams, quizzes and worksheets. The software is also used to guide the students on various tutorial lessons.

To what extent do students and teachers use assessment results to enhance the educational progress of every student?

Teachers collaborate to discuss results of assessments, CST data and other forms of achievement. Teachers collaborate in the summer to analyze CST data; as a result prior to the beginning of the school year, teachers are able to prepare for the strengths and weakness of the students entering the grade. Some teachers do goal setting with their students to individualize the student’s learning, others use portfolios to analyze student growth.

D3. *To what extent does the school, with the support of the district and community, have an assessment and monitoring system to determine student progress toward achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results?*

Students have access to a computer lab one hour a week. This lab houses the software “Success Makers” which is used for Math and English Language Arts. This software can be used for enrichment or intervention and tracks the progress of every student. Teachers are able to access the data of each student and asses the next steps if progress.

RCS uses a standards based report card combined with grades. Grades indicate the achievement in the classroom, and numbers indicate the progress on the standards. Report cards are sent out with each quarter during the trimester and parent conferences are implemented mid quarter one and after quarter two.

D4. *To what extent does the assessment of student achievement in relation to the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results drive the school’s program, its regular evaluation and improvement and usage of resources?*

Teachers are beginning to increase the amount of data they analyze. The CST data, benchmark data, chapter tests, quizzes, projects, rubrics, are aligned to the standards. The standards based report card continues to address students who are not meeting the standards. Grades indicate the achievement in the classroom, and numbers indicate the progress on the standards. Report cards are sent out with each quarter

during the trimester and parent conferences are implemented mid quarter one and after quarter two.

RCS reports its School Accountability Report Card SARC to the community

Areas of strength for Standards-Based Student Learning: Assessment and Accountability (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

RCS uses data to determine individual and group academic needs.

RCS is focused on data analysis as a tool to guide and monitor student achievement.

Key issues for Standards-Based Student Learning: Assessment and Accountability (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

Create protocols to enhance the analysis of data as an instructional tool.

Increase the use of informal assessment to differentiate instruction daily.

Important evidence about student learning from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

Classroom observations

Focus group discussion and interviews

WASC self-Study

Student work posted on the walls

Student interviews

CATEGORY E. SCHOOL CULTURE AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENT PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC GROWTH

E1. *To what extent does the school leadership employ a wide range of strategies to encourage parental and community involvement, especially with the teaching/learning process?*

Ridgecrest Charter School has a comprehensive system for communicating with parents and community members and regards them as partners in improving achievement for all students. They utilize a broad range of strategies that offer parents opportunities to become active members of the Ridgecrest Charter School community ensuring student success. Parents participate in school leadership teams such as School Site Council and PTO Board. Ridgecrest Charter School offers opportunities to assist parents in supporting their child's development and learning through such events parent education nights, back to school night, and parent conferences.

Ridgecrest Charter School uses a variety of tools to communicate with parents. School-to-home communications are made via the automated telephone-messaging system allowing for information to be sent out regarding attendance, events, programs, and services to parents. All teachers have a class website so that parents can have immediate information about class assignments and homework. Teachers are

encouraged to communicate with parents via email on a regular basis, especially in cases where students are struggling to succeed in their classroom. Ridgecrest Charter School Parent Newsletter is mailed to students' homes monthly, designed to provide communication and important information about school goals and programs. Additionally, parents are encouraged to participate in evening and weekend activities.

There is a willingness by the entire staff to work together as a motivated team to assist all students to achieve the academic standard and achieve the mission and character attributes stipulated in Ridgecrest Charter School's new vision and mission.

E2. *To what extent is the school a safe, clean, and orderly place that nurtures learning?*

The school environment is safe, secure, clean, and orderly. The climate is nurturing and caring. The campus includes yard staff, carts to provide mobility, a campus walkie-talkie system for communication, and a campus PA system. The school arranges for regular security drills, including Code Red drill and lock down procedures. The school has a safety plan and all classrooms have fire extinguishers and a first aid kit.

The school has a visitors' procedure through the main office and a policy for screening parent volunteers in the classrooms. The school has a zero tolerance for bullying (cyber-bullying included).

The school has campus clean up days, has recycling, and campus beautification. The Service Master company maintains clean classrooms and office areas. The Business Manager keeps the campus clean and in good repair, as well as making the campus visually appealing.

To what extent is the culture of the school characterized by trust, professionalism, high expectations for all students, and a focus on continuous school improvement?

Staff expertise is highly valued by the administration and board. The staff has started a process to share innovations across classrooms and learn about new research-based ideas through their partnership with UCLA. Teachers share their ideas afterschool and during the flex Friday professional development sessions. Teachers and administrators work together very well to identify and solve problems related to teaching and student learning. All staff receive both support and encouragement as they increase their effectiveness in helping students reach academic standards. The staff share a common sense of purpose to improve student learning. The staff have high morale and are dedicated to their school.

E3. *To what extent do all students receive appropriate support along with an individualized learning plan to help ensure academic success?*

Ridgecrest Charter School implements various support programs to ensure academic success for all students. All students have Individual Learning Plans, developed in collaboration with their parent/guardian and teacher. RCS has mandatory parent conferences in which there is an honest and open discussion of the student's progress

and goals in their class. When needed teachers will arrange alternate times to meet the parents work schedule.

For the most part, the WASC team observed whole group instruction with limited evidence of differentiation. The teachers report that they receive support from the RSP teacher when they have students with special needs. Additionally, special education students receive support outside their classrooms from the resource teacher, reading specialist, and RCS reports they are working closely with their SELPA to add a speech component.

RCS has developed and implemented a professional development program that addresses the student academic needs on their campus. The teachers and administrators need to continue to work on the implementation of these strategies in the classroom.

E4. *To what extent do students have access to a system of personal support services, activities and opportunities at the school and within the community?*

The school has on-site support for students in need. The personal support services includes an on-site Resource Specialist for Special Education students. The resource teacher engages students in pull-out support, afterschool support, as well as push-in support in the classrooms. This staff person is also a School Psychologist and is able to conduct testing for students who may need an IEP. The school also offers counseling services for students with mental health needs. The teachers also create Individual Student plans which include testing data, teacher concerns, homework consistency, and parent concerns.

Classes follow a full-inclusion model and all students are encouraged to take part in the general education program. Teachers are knowledgeable about their students' learning needs and modify their approaches to maximize the learning potential of all students.

Students are offered tutoring afterschool by their teacher and the school keeps a list of at-home tutors available to students. The school has a school library and computer lab which students visit on a regularly scheduled basis. Services are provided in a manner that respects students.

The teachers and staff know the students well and provide support and guidance. They use a collaborative process for identifying and finding solutions to student personal, academic, and behavior challenges.

The school has started to work with Character Counts and is teaching different character traits (6 weeks for each trait) throughout the year. Teachers are using positive reinforcement to encourage students to demonstrate the character traits. The school also uses CHAMPS and Too Good for Drugs.

The teachers create Individual Student Plans for all students in order to identify challenge areas and increase communication with parents. Teachers regularly communicate with parents, have on-line information regarding their daily, weekly, and monthly schedules of activities, and have conferences with parents to discuss student challenges.

In terms of activities and out of school opportunities, teachers set-up field trips for students, like travelling to the Getty Center and the local Community College. The school also hosts academic competitions, like a science fair.

The students participate in student leadership opportunities (e.g. Student Council, Kawanis-Kids, Youth Advisory Council) and students sit on Governing Board and other community boards. The student handbook has been revised and is now included in the student planner.

The school hosts a number of community events throughout the school year including dances, assemblies, Harvest Festival, and rallies. Teachers host an afterschool club once a week.

Areas of strength for School Culture and Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

RCS is a safe, clean and welcoming community. RCS has created a family atmosphere for all students.

RCS has regularly scheduled community activities on weekends and evenings so that parents can be involved in the community.

Key issues for School Culture and Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students.

Establish an RTI intervention program that directly targets matriculating students in grade 6-8.

Strengthen the support services available for students particularly in the areas of counseling, college awareness and RTI program.

Important evidence about student learning from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

Classroom observations
Focus group discussion and interviews
WASC self-Study
Student work posted on the walls
Student interviews

Part B: Synthesis of Schoolwide Areas of Strength and Schoolwide Critical Areas for Follow-up

Schoolwide Areas of Strength (list numerically)

1. The change in leadership has led to collegial culture among teachers, staff, students, parents, and board members. The environment is supportive, warm, and has high expectations for their students.
2. The UCLA partnership has led to the creation of a PD program that focuses in creating a collaborative culture.
3. Use of data has allowed the school to proactively indentify individual, classroom and grade level areas of strength and where additional curriculum alignment is warranted.
4. RCS is a safe, clean and welcoming community. RCS has created a family atmosphere for all students.

Schoolwide Critical Areas for Follow-Up

1. Continue to develop a stronger middle school with an emphasis on mathematics.
2. Promote higher levels of student engagement by providing meaningful and relevant staff development opportunities for teachers at RCS.
3. Establish an RTI intervention program that directly targets matriculating students in grades 6-8.

In addition, the Visiting Committee has identified areas that need to be strengthened

1. Increase the use of the new instructional strategies, particularly differentiation acquired in PD in everyday delivery of instruction when there are varying ability students.

Chapter V: Ongoing School Improvement

Summary of the school wide action plan:

The schools action plan was developed as part of the self study and focuses on three major components. These components and rationale are:

Promote higher levels of student achievement by providing meaningful and relevant staff development opportunities for teachers at RCS.

Rationale: Professional development is the linchpin to targeted school improvement. With the assistance of UCLA, RCS developed a yearlong professional development plan which includes:

Promote technological literacy among all RCS students.

Rationale: Since the school is located in a community that is rich in technology and science it is important that they provide meaningful curriculum in that area. Students in the future will be asked to compete in these arenas and it is important they have the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful.

RCS will expand upon its student services program to better meet the needs of our student population.

Rationale: There has been a change in the student population that requires greater outside support services.

Continue to develop a stronger mathematics program in the middle school.

Rationale: CST results reveal a large drop off of proficiency in mathematics at RCS. There needs to be a comprehensive program to keep the levels of proficiency as seen in the elementary students.

Establish an RTI intervention program that directly targets matriculating students in grades 6-8.

Rationale: RCS has noticed a greater influx of students with behavior problems or IEPs with ED or ADHD placement so the administration and faculty are looking to develop a program that will address the behavioral needs of these students. Additionally, a sound RTI program can help all students regardless of their designation.

Adequacy of the school wide action plan

As part of the WASC process, Ridgecrest Charter School revised their action plan to meet our criteria. Their plan addresses the three critical areas identified by the school and the WASC team encouraged further revision of this plan to address one additional critical area. The action plan is clear and organized which the WASC team believes will lead to full implementation of the plan.

Potential impediments to improvement that the school will need to address

- The current economic condition and its effect on education may lead to some difficulty in carrying out all components of the action plan.
- Time and training for professional development to address the critical needs of the action plan.

Existing factors that support school improvement

RCS is a community of learners with a school wide focus of improving student achievement. The administration and staff work in conjunction to create learning experiences that support specific student needs. The additional support from UCLA will lead to continued and sustained student achievement.

Soundness of Follow-up Process

The leadership team has outlined the follow up process that they will utilize to ensure that the action plan is revised and all documents are filed with the WASC office.

The follow-up process the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appears to be adequate. The leadership team, UCLA and the RCS Board has the responsibility for the monitoring of their action plan goals. The school is committed to ongoing professional growth that focuses on the improvement of the learning environment and increasing student achievement.

In summary, the school is looking forward to reaching their API goal by increasing student learning with respect to their critical growth areas. Their focus on meeting the needs of their middle school student population will lead to greater API growth.