

**SELF-STUDY VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

**WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES  
FOR**



**Grace Lutheran School**

**5172 Mc Fadden Avenue**

**Huntington Beach, CA 92649**

**March 30 – April 2, 2008**

**Visiting Committee Members**

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Technology Coordinator, Mission Parish School

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## **Chapter I: Student/Community Profile**

Grace Lutheran School was founded in 1982 as an educational arm of Grace Lutheran Church which belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). The school was originally started twenty-five years ago at the church campus on Edinger. In 1995 the school moved to a larger site on Waikiki Street. This site was leased from Ocean View School District. Then in the spring of 2006, Ocean View School District offered the church and school a larger campus located on McFadden Avenue. This site provided the church and school with a multipurpose room and a larger facility. This larger site has enabled them to start a mission congregation, hold joint events, and increase school enrollment.

The Grace Lutheran Church congregation annually elects a Church Council. The nine member Council is the governing body for the church and school. The Council is responsible for appointing and disbanding ministry teams. They appoint the School Board and also appoint an executive team member to work closely with the School Board and School Administrator. The executive team member is responsible for monitoring the activities and progress of the school and ensures that it continues to adhere to and follow the Christian and academic mission that is central to the school. The School Board is the primary policy making body for the school. It is responsible for establishing and protecting the vision of the school and providing oversight of the School Administrator. The School Administrator directs and monitors the planning and direction of the school and reports that progress to the School Board.

As an outreach arm of the Grace Lutheran Church of Huntington Beach, Grace Lutheran School teaches and practices the Christian religion according to the doctrines and practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Since the Christian faith is the focal point of their educational purpose, students and their families are encouraged to attend church and/or Sunday school on a regular basis. Grace Lutheran School is proud to be connected with two churches, Grace Lutheran Church and their new sister church, Robinwood Church.

The student population of Grace Lutheran School closely resembles that of Huntington Beach School District and Ocean View School District. Less than 1 percent of Grace Lutheran School's student body comes from economically disadvantaged homes, with less than three percent (3%), of the student body identified as English Language Learners. The ELL population of Grace Lutheran School is comprised primarily of Korean foreign exchange students. Typically the school will have between six and ten ELL students at one time. The household income level of Grace Lutheran School families is substantially higher than those found in the general Huntington Beach community; the parent's level of education is somewhat higher than that of the community at large; and the majority of the students live within a four mile radius of the school.

One of the primary resources of any school is its facility. The new school facility at 5172 McFadden in Huntington Beach, is a vast improvement over the prior location. Before the relocation to this new campus, Grace Lutheran Church embarked on a substantial capital campaign whose purpose was to fully refurbish all of the classrooms, install new equipment on the playground, improve the school office, and provide adequate parking at the new location. With the success of the capital campaign, the school was successfully moved and a new church was established on the new campus. The campus is fully fenced, providing a secure environment that has a complete, sophisticated security system with remote monitoring and video cameras.

The technology program at the school has been enhanced over the past few years largely through contributions from a local university, the PTL, the capital campaign, and volunteer efforts. The new campus has been professionally wired with a network to provide high quality internet and telephone access. The computers in the computer lab and in individual classrooms have been upgraded over the last two years. In addition to regular network access points in each classroom, network access points have been placed in all classroom ceilings to allow for future data projector installations and wireless network access throughout the school. Electronic whiteboards (ActivBoards) have been installed in three classrooms with plans to continue purchasing and installing these powerful teaching tools in all classrooms throughout the school. The new school facility far surpasses the prior one. Because of new equipment, classrooms, and playground equipment, there will not be a need for major remodeling for a number of years.

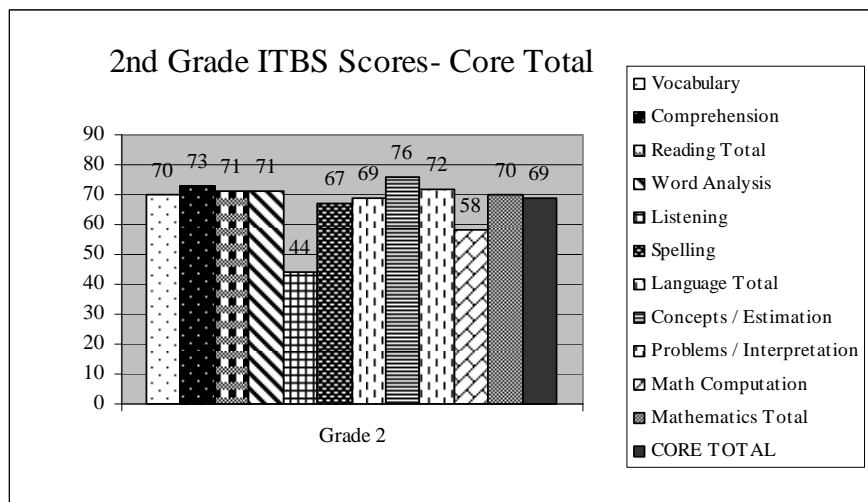
### ***Achievement scores - school performance***

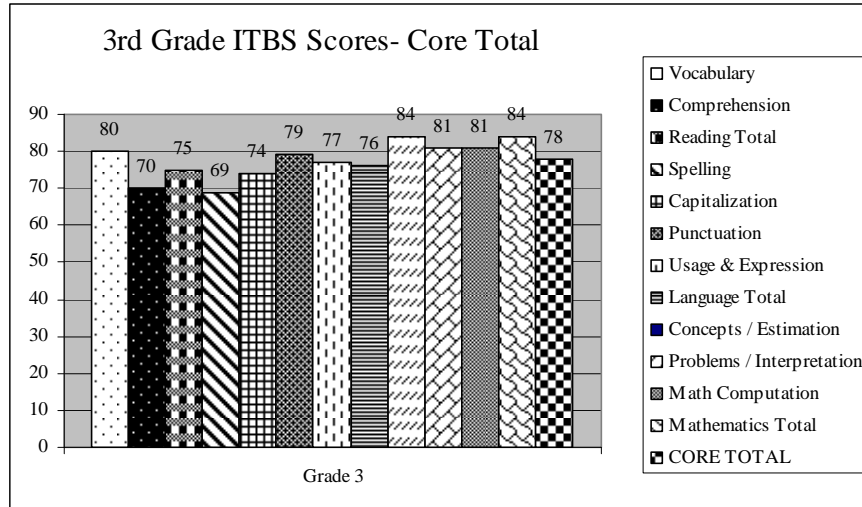
Grace Lutheran School's student population consists of students of all ability levels, from those with diagnosed learning disabilities to those who would be designated gifted and talented. The school takes pride in educating the whole child by providing a relevant, coherent, and rigorous curriculum differentiated for all student ability groups. Grace Lutheran School enriches the learning environment by providing for the needs of the whole child through specialty instruction in Spanish, physical education, art, MIND-Music/Math, band, and other elective subjects. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is administered to all students in grades 2-8 each spring. Noting the varied ability levels found in the student population, the ITBS scores for the Core Battery range from 65<sup>th</sup> to the 78<sup>th</sup> percentile. The range of ITBS scores for the Composite Battery range from a low of the 64<sup>th</sup> percentile to a high of the 74<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Composite ITBS Battery Charts follow:

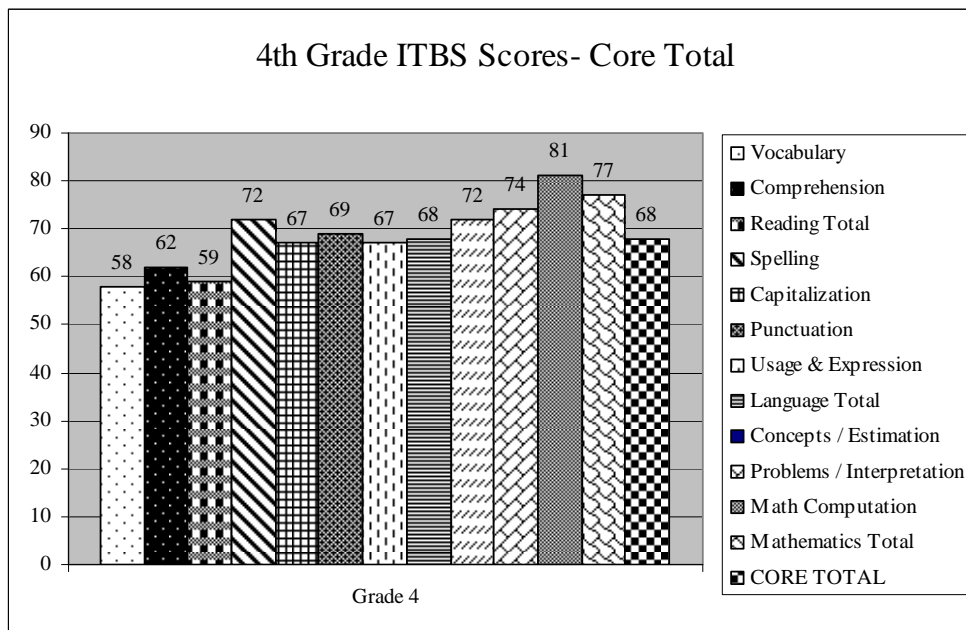
**Spring 2007 ITBS Scores for Core and Composite Batteries**

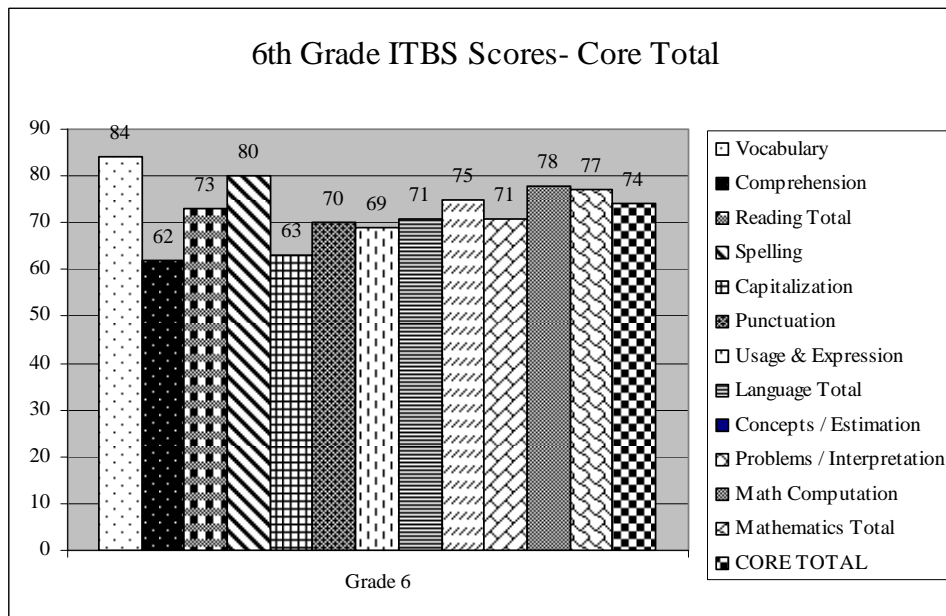
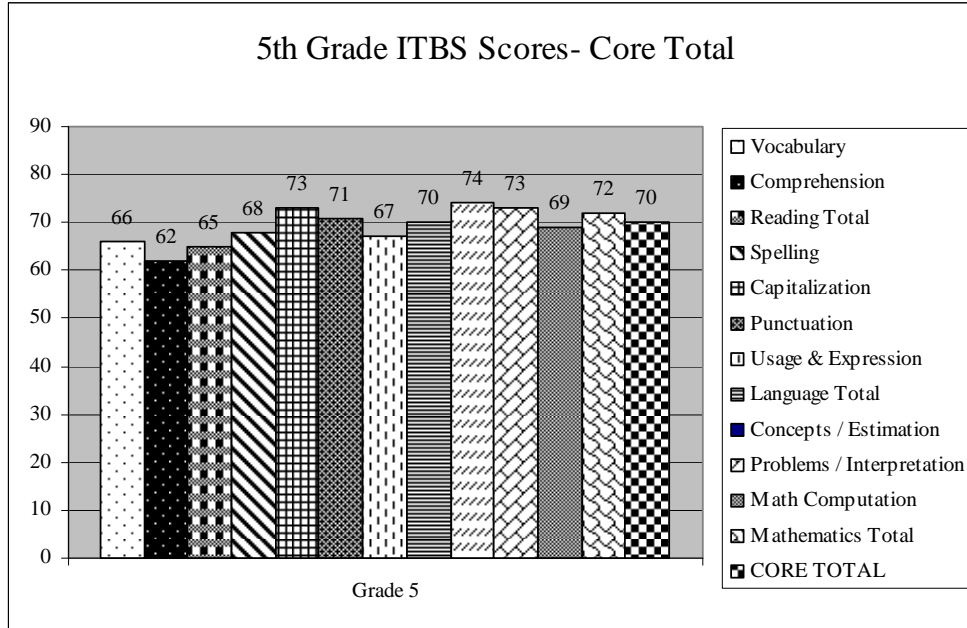
	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Reading Total	Word Analysis	Listening	Spelling	Capitalization	Punctuation	Usage & Expression	Language Total	Concepts / Estimation	Problems / Interpretation	Math Computation	Mathematics Total	CORE TOTAL
Grade 2	70	73	71	71	44	67				69	76	72	58	70	69
Grade 3	80	70	75	74	46	69	74	79	77	76	84	81	81	84	78
Grade 4	58	62	59			72	67	69	67	68	72	74	81	77	68
Grade 5	66	62	65			68	73	71	67	70	74	73	69	72	70
Grade 6	84	62	73			80	63	70	69	71	75	71	78	77	74
Grade 7	71	80	78			68	63	69	76	71	69	73	62	71	73
Grade 8	71	73	73			59	55	63	67	62	60	56	49	57	65



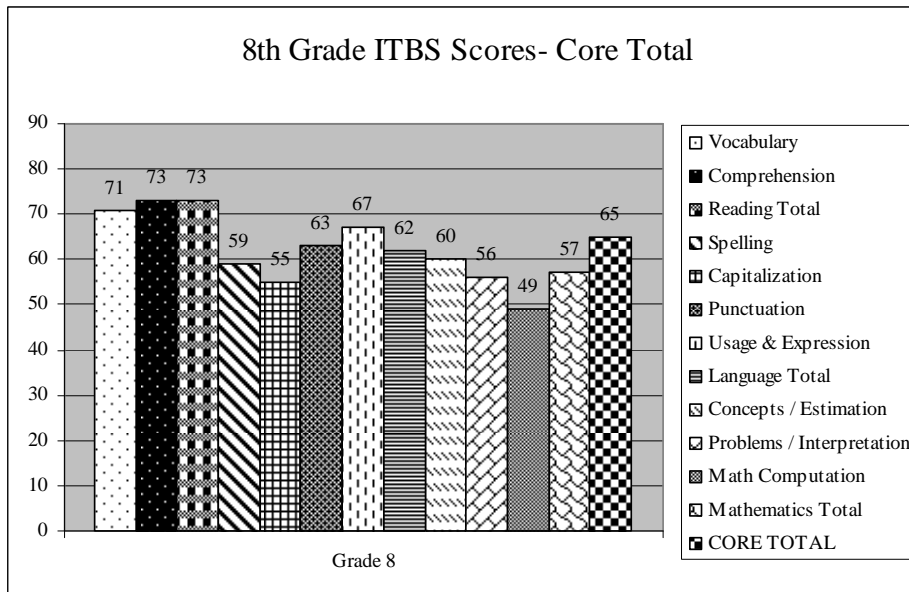
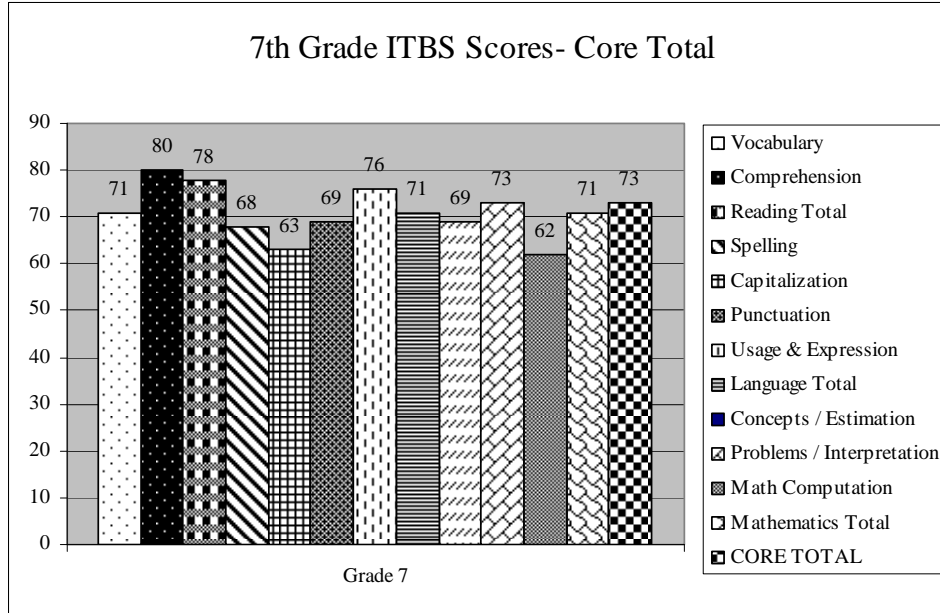


It is noted that for grade 2 the lowest scores in the Core Battery were found in the sub-test listening. This is an area that warrants additional investigation.





It is noted for grades 4-6 the lowest scores for the Core Battery were found in reading comprehension, they are in the 62<sup>nd</sup> percentile. While these scores are above the national average (50<sup>th</sup> percentile), comparing them to the group's scores for other subgroups in the test indicate that the group as a whole could score higher. This is an area warranting additional study.



It is noted for grades 7-8 the scores for capitalization were lower in general than those in the other subgroups. Because of these scores, the 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts curriculum was changed in the fall of 2006. Currently the language arts teacher is focusing on capitalization and punctuation to support student growth in this area. The school continues to refine the development and utilization of assessment tools to create measurable learning goals. Identified areas of academic need include listening skills and reading comprehension in the elementary grades, as well as capitalization

and punctuation at the middle school level. Looking at the ITBS report some areas that were not identified were vocabulary and reading total in the fourth grade and math in the middle school.

From the community profile, the school identified other areas to be addressed including academic and personal student growth and the retention of preschool students into the K-8 program.

## **Chapter II: Progress Report**

Since the 3-Year Term Visit in April of 2005 Grace Lutheran School has continued to address the key areas of follow-up identified by that visiting team. At that visit the most critical areas of follow-up had been addressed. The visiting team stressed that the progress report did not reflect a substantive use of the Focus on Learning Self-Study process. The WASC Focus on Learning Self-Study process is now a priority for the school.

The following identified areas for growth have been addressed:

- 1. Following the Focus on Learning Self-Study process more closely will result in a more complete and accurate document and a greater understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses. This will, in turn, lead to greater school improvement.***

In the fall of the 2006-2007 school year, the school began the self-study process by identifying a WASC leadership team. This team, in turn, developed a timeline for the self-study process.

On February 23, 2007, a staff in-service was held to introduce the process to the staff. In March the community profile group began their work, focus group teams were formed, and work began on chapter 4. This team attended the WASC Leadership trainings in the spring and fall of 2007.

- 2. Improvement of the clarity and accuracy of communication between the various levels of the church and school community is critical for the health and successful growth of the school.***

The 2005 report referenced attendance by key school staff at weekly church meetings, including school activities in the church monthly event calendar, as well as in church emails, and weekly bulletins.

Since that visit, additional strategies for improved communication have been developed and implemented. Through the re-focus process, Grace Church planted a church at the school site specifically to serve the families and children of the

school. The school leadership team works closely with this congregation in creating joint focused activities for school families.

Grace Lutheran Church has specifically designated a member of their executive committee to serve as the official school liaison. This person serves as the school's advocate and meets regularly with the school administrator and the school's leadership team. The school administrator attends the monthly church council meetings.

**3. *Increase opportunities for intentional involvement between church and school community to strengthen the ministry partnership.***

The 2005 report referenced the re-focusing process in 2004 which prioritized "Children and Family" as a main focus of the congregation. It also reported the hiring of a Director of Children's Ministry to focus on developing programs that connect both church and school families.

The Director of Children's Ministry and the Jr./Sr. High Youth Director from Grace Church participate regularly in school activities such as weekly chapel services, school events, and joining students on campus for lunch. The school, Robinwood Church, and Grace Lutheran Church participate in joint activities on a regular basis.

**4. *Grace Lutheran School needs to create an overall academic program measurement tool to identify and facilitate resource allocation.***

The 2005 report referenced the implementation and use of the ITBS test results in the allocation of resources for academic improvement.

Additionally, the school uses the ITBS to compare how students rank nationally compared to other schools. These scores are useful as a supplement to formal assessment and teacher observations about what students are able to do, as well as provide a starting point for monitoring year-to-year student development.

Starting in first grade and continuing every odd year (e.g. 1, 3, 5, and 7), students are given the Cognitive Abilities Test (*CogAT*). This test assesses students' abilities in reasoning and problem-solving using verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal (spatial) symbols. It helps teachers make important student placement decisions and can be used to expand the educational opportunities of all students.

Another standardized test used by Grace is the DORA (Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment), given three times per year in grades 2-4. The DORA test provides objective, individualized assessment data across eight reading measures to profile each student's reading abilities and prescribe individual learning paths. During the 2007-2008 school year this measure/program has not been implemented due to lack of fiscal funds.

**5. *Grace Lutheran School community needs to be more involved in the ongoing reflection upon redefining the expected school-wide student learning goals in order to attain student achievement of those Student Learning Goals.***

The Student Learning Goals were updated to include greater Christian emphasis. As part of this process differentiated Student Learning Goals were created for each department.

In 2005 the visiting team recommended that more stakeholders be involved in the Student Learning Goals review process; that one set of Student Learning Goals be developed for the school; and that the school looks to connect the Student Learning Goals to instruction. To that end, in the fall of 2006 the entire faculty and staff spent a full day reviewing and reconnecting to the Student Learning Goals.

**6. *Grace Lutheran School needs to develop and adopt an up-to-date and teacher-friendly Christian Studies program to reflect their commitment to their mission.***

This action item was completed at the time of the 2005 visit. The new curriculum was implemented and is still in use for grades K–5. The middle school adopted the same series in 2006 and in 2007; additional selections for grades 7 and 8 have been added.

**7. *Grace Lutheran School must create an updated Action Plan by incorporating the School-wide critical areas of follow-up. The updated action plan must then be implemented, monitored, and shared with all stakeholders to ensure ongoing school improvement.***

Most items on the original action plan were completed by the 2005 visit. The school has focused on the WASC self-study process and the involvement of as many stakeholders as possible since that visit. The staff is fully committed to this process as a tool of improvement in student learning.

**8. *School and Church leadership should be encouraged to promote school growth through marketing and development strategies that will increase enrollment and community awareness.***

Since the 2005 visit, the school has enhanced the school web-site as well as created professional marketing materials which include an event specific postcard and a brochure that serves preschool through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

In addition to developing the marketing pieces in 2007, the school created two events specifically focused on school recruitment: an annual “Kindergarten Preview” day for students currently enrolled in the preschools and a “Community Preview Day” for Huntington Beach families interested in the school. Both events were successful and will be annual events.

The senior pastor and school administrator visited all the ELCA and LCMS congregations in the surrounding communities to start building relationships. As part of that process, most agreed to view Grace as their school and share enrollment information with their congregations. Many sites also placed Grace School Enrollment Banners on their campus.

In the area of retention, physical education, Spanish and art instruction were added to the Jr. K and K programs. Joint PTL (school parent group) and POPS (preschool parent group) events are planned for the 2007 school year, and the preschool parents will now receive copies of the school's newsletter.

**9. *The Grace Lutheran School leadership should investigate the possibility of combining the ELEA and WASC accreditation into one self-study process for the better use of human resources.***

As of the 2005 re-visit, GLS had opted out of ELEA accreditation.

### **Chapter III: Self-Study Process**

The completion of the WASC accreditation process for Grace Lutheran School accomplished the five parameters of the self-study:

**1. The involvement and collaboration of stakeholders**

The process allowed for involvement and collaboration of faculty, staff, parents, congregation members, and students. Grace Lutheran School fully supports the mission and purpose of the school and sees the involvement of stakeholders in the accreditation process as a means to further enhance the effectiveness of the school program. The committees reflected the diverse interests of the school and included members of Grace Church, members of the Robinwood Church, parents, students, School Board members, teachers, staff, and community members.

**2. The clarification of the school's purpose and expected schoolwide learning results**

The self-study clarified the school's purpose and the student learning goals. In the fall of 2006 the student learning goals were reviewed by the faculty and staff. The student learning goals are published on the school's website, in newsletters, and in handbooks.

**3. The assessment of the actual student program and its impact on student learning with respect to the criteria**

During the 2006-2007 school year in-service days were utilized for training in the accreditation process, creating focus groups, and starting committee work. From August through May the focus groups assessed the actual student program and its

impact on student learning with respect to the criterion guide questions and the student learning goals.

#### **4. The development of a schoolwide action plan that integrates subject area/program and support plans to address identified growth needs**

In November of 2007 the critical areas for improvement were reviewed and prioritized to determine which were to be included in the school's action plan. On the basis of the focus group findings, an action plan has been developed to address identified needs in three major areas:

- a. Align curriculum from Jr. K through 8<sup>th</sup> in a formative way to ensure that instructional goals and individual student learning needs are met.
- b. Develop and implement a plan to address differentiated instruction as it relates to student learning and the identification of individual student learning needs.
- c. Develop and implement a plan to address technology needs.

#### **5. The development implementation of an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the action plan**

The final step involved the development and implementation of an accountability system which monitors the accomplishment of the action plan documented in the "means to access or evidence" and "means to report or sharing" columns of the action plan.

The self study accurately reflects the school's program for students. The observable evidence reflects a sampling of what ALL students are doing and producing with respect to the WASC criteria and the school's student learning goals. The observable evidence supports the school's identified areas for growth.

### **Chapter IV: Quality of the School's Program**

#### **CATEGORY A. ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

Grace Lutheran School has a clearly defined statement of purpose. The self-study report and Grace Lutheran School's web site clearly state the school's beliefs and philosophy. The self-study indicates that the mission statement for Grace Lutheran School has not changed since 1982.

There appears to be a logical correlation between Grace Lutheran School's mission statement and the expected student learning goals.

<b>Mission Statement</b>	<b>Expected Student Learning Goals</b>
Share the Gospel	Christian Community Participants Effective Communicators Collaborative Workers
Nurture students into a relationship with Jesus	Christian Community Participants Complex Thinkers Self Directed Learners Quality Producers Effective Communicators Collaborative Workers Complex Thinkers
Educate His children	Self-Directed Learners Quality Producers Effective Communicators Collaborative Workers Complex Thinkers

There appears to be a connected relationship between the governing authorities. The Church is involved in the election of the Council, who appoints the School Board. The reporting of the organizational structure, as documented in the school's self study, is misaligned to the Grace Lutheran Church's Organization and Ministry Program Chart. The governing authority delegates the running of the school to the hands of the School Administrator. Currently the scheduled meeting times are adequate, and meet the needs of the governing body, as well as allowing all stakeholders to stay well informed of any issues under review. The school board is extremely supportive of policies which are consistent with the student learning goals of the school.

The governing authority, through the Executive committee member, monitors the results of the effectiveness of the school administration and the executive council is responsible to evaluate the school administrator.

The school leadership works diligently to provide a quality Christian education to all students of Grace Lutheran School. The self-study outlines the existing structures to encourage commitment, participation, and shared accountability for student learning. There is a clearly identifiable administrator with a well established support team. Each of the team members has a well-defined job description. The leadership structure of the school encourages maximum participation and accountability.

The division of responsibilities allows the staff to be more efficient in their jobs. The established Department Chairs allow the staff an enhanced means to work with the administrative staff. The climate for shared leadership, trust, and accountability facilitates the establishment of a strong commitment in regards to student learning. The surveys, direct observations, and discussions with the staff show a strong support for

the leadership throughout the school. The leadership of the school works hard to encourage total participation and shared accountability for student learning.

The school has written policies and responsibilities in relation to the school staff members. The administration staff and the teachers at Grace Lutheran School are well qualified! There is a high level of formal education at all of the positions at Grace Lutheran School. The importance and the support of formal education are evident at all levels of staffing.

The staff and teachers at Grace Lutheran School are very committed to the school in many areas! They want to provide the best education for each student. They express the desire to develop and challenge each student spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically.

The administrator demonstrates her commitment to strong professional development, as seen on the school's web site, in her "Letter from the School Administrator." She comments and expounds on the importance for "Learning that Lasts."

Strong evidence of ongoing professional development that promotes student learning is present at the school. The school uses NCLB funds to help facilitate this development, as well as the commitment of the PTL to help provide funds.

Grace Lutheran School has a Parent-Student Handbook that defines the expectations of student conduct reflecting the school's vision. This assists in terms of discipline, safety, and nurturing expectations. The safety rules are posted and explained to both the parents and the students. The results of the Parent Survey also demonstrate that Grace Lutheran School is a safe and healthy learning environment.

The Parent Survey also supports a school characterized with trust and caring as well as a school that is doing a superlative job in educating and challenging the students of Grace Lutheran School. The school's small size allows for the opportunity of many personal affirmations to the students throughout the day by teachers, office staff, and support staff workers.

The parent-teacher organization provides outstanding on-going support for the student, faculty, staff and programs of the school. The parents are actively involved in fund raising, helping in the classrooms, chaperoning on field trips as well as coaching after school sports. The Parent-Teacher League offers a strong support base for Grace Lutheran School.

Communication at all levels greatly aids in the operations of any school. The better the communication the better the trust and ability for all stakeholders to invest in what is being asked and accomplished. Throughout the report, it appears that there is effective communication at Grace Lutheran School.

The schoolwide plan needs to include measurable academic goals based on summative

and formative data analysis. Currently, there is no formal plan for using data to improve instruction. It would benefit Grace Lutheran to develop measurable goals for the improvement of instruction. The use of their summative and formative data analysis should be the basis for this.

The school uses Gradelink which is a valuable tool in allowing the parents to monitor the progress of their students. Grace Lutheran School also utilizes Parent/Teacher conferences to help keep the parents informed and involved in relationship to their student's progress. This system allows for stakeholders to gain immediate feedback concerning the progress of the students in regards to their academic achievement. The regularity of this system goes beyond many schools.

Measuring or assessing the student progress towards the Student Learning Goals of the school is an area that the entire staff integrates schoolwide. At this time Grace Lutheran School monitors and reports student academic progress through GradeLink, progress reports, report cards and parent teacher conferences. Teachers use California Standards as their foundation for instruction.

The web site is a very valuable tool for reporting student progress and other important information. It is an effective tool for sharing student successes with the entire school community. Grace Lutheran School's web site does a very good job in displaying the school performance for their Student Learning Goals.

The school leadership has identified areas of strength that are characteristic of an effective school and has identified needs for improvement in the action plan. There is correlation between the action plan and enhanced learning. In the Grace Lutheran School self-study, it is well documented that the school planning process is broad-based, collaborative, and has the commitment of the stakeholders. Good communication and guidance exist within the school leadership. There is strong evidence of leadership effectively guiding the work of the school in a positive manner.

**Areas of Strength for Organization for Student Learning Category** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. The highly qualified faculty and staff
2. The commitment to care for the whole child
3. The leadership structure of the school that encourages maximum participation and accountability
4. The Grace Lutheran School Parent Teacher League and the strong support base they offer
5. The administrative support of ongoing professional development
6. The school's safe, comfortable, and nurturing environment
7. The effectiveness of the school's program in meeting the SLGs, especially in creating Christian Community Participants

**Key Issues for Organization for Student Learning** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. Review, edit, and revise policy and procedure manuals on a regular basis
2. Continue refining the procedures and protocol for the resource department to ensure individual student needs are being met
3. To develop a Professional Learning Community, continued efforts are needed to involve staff in an annual review in determining the schoolwide plan and subsequent implementation
4. The schoolwide plan needs to include measurable academic goals based on summative and formative data analysis

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

- Administrative Meeting Agendas and Minutes
- Chapel Schedule/Character trait documents
- Constitution and By-laws of Grace Lutheran Church
- Documentation of Continuing Education Opportunities
- Employee Policy Manual
- Faculty Meeting Agendas and Minutes
- Flyers and Documentation from Various Community Events
- FLS SLGs
- PTL Agendas and Minutes
- Report Cards
- School Board Meeting Agendas and Minutes
- School Calendar
- School Disaster Plan
- Student/Parent Handbook
- Summer Information Mailings
- Teacher Lesson Plans
- The GLS Web Site
- WASC Mid-Term Progress Report
- FOL Discussions

## **CATEGORY B. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

Grace Lutheran School provides a challenging, coherent, and relevant curriculum for all students. This is evident through the use of California State Standards, research-based instructional techniques, a variety of teaching styles, and regular assessment. The curriculum is reviewed every six years on a rotating cycle. This allows for regular updating of each curricular area. Language arts, mathematics, and social studies curricula are chosen from the California recommended textbooks. Science curriculum is chosen specifically to give students a Christian perspective while still following state standards.

Throughout the school, Grace Lutheran focuses on developing skills in core areas with enhanced enrichment through the use of specialty classes. Two significant specialty programs are the Spanish and the MIND-Music/Math programs. Students in the upper elementary and middle schools also experience more advanced uses in technology. The variety of special classes adds to the development of the whole child.

Students in grades 4-8 participate in outdoor educational experiences as follows:

- 4<sup>th</sup> grade – El Camino Pines
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade – Astro Camp
- 6<sup>th</sup> grade – Forest Home
- 7<sup>th</sup> grade – Catalina
- 8<sup>th</sup> grade – Washington, D.C./New York

In addition to these special trips for the upper grades, all grade levels participate in several field trips a year that highlight various units studied throughout the year. Some of these field trips include the Santa Ana Zoo, the public library, the water exhibit, and musical performances.

Research based learning is evident through the use of different techniques proven by research to be effective. The student learning goals are achieved through a variety of methods. Teachers address multiple modality learning methods across the curriculum. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop students' skills in most classes. Teachers develop a wide variety of strategies through the offering of professional development opportunities. They regularly attend seminars, professional conferences, and workshops. The school also sets aside five days out of the school year for in-service opportunities. The most common research based strategies used by the Grace Lutheran School staff are as follows: thematic instruction; identifying similarities and differences; summarizing and note taking; reinforcing effort; homework and practice; nonlinguistic representation; cooperative grouping; setting objectives; providing feedback; generating and testing hypotheses; cues, questions, and advance organizers; and simulations and games. Faculty members learn these research based strategies at in-service workshops and at conferences. They are encouraged to attend conferences that cover subject specific topics or special learning strategy topics. Teachers are enthusiastic, well-trained, and willing to go above and beyond curriculum basics to insure that each student maximizes his or her learning potential.

The Grace Lutheran faculty utilizes a variety of strategies to engage students in experiential learning which is consistent with the school Student Learning Goals which are believed to be intrinsic values embedded in the school culture. While there is no formal assessment in place for the Student Learning Goals, they have been validated through various means. Student, parent, and teacher peer observation surveys support their attainment. It would be valuable to develop a more measureable method of assessment for student achievement of the Student Learning Goals.

The school feels it is important for the students to take an active role in the learning

process through class discussions, small/cooperative groups, individual conferences, and a variety of exercises helpful for their learning. Students learn journal writing, the use of reference materials, oral questioning, and note taking.

Teachers use a variety of visual aids to assist in the learning process. These include PowerPoint presentations, video clips, dramatic presentations, written and oral reports, and creative projects. The middle school has the added advantage of the ActivBoard technology. Though the use of technology is apparent throughout the school, the school has identified the need to embed the technology curriculum into existing school curriculum, i.e. align classroom instruction with California Academic Standards and incorporate the technology component into subject specific instructional practices.

Outside of the standard curriculum, Grace Lutheran School offers a number of co-curricular opportunities. Special classes offered include study skills, band, drama, art, Spanish, and MIND-Music/Math.

Teacher and student use of assessment is a frequent and integrated part of the teaching/learning process. Three standardized tests are offered each year at Grace Lutheran School. Each spring the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is issued to students in grades 2-8. In the odd numbered grades (1, 3, 5, 7), the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) is issued to assess students' abilities in reasoning and problem-solving using verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal symbols. Prior to the 2007-2008 school year, the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) was administered in grades 2-5. Assessment needs to be a stronger driving force for curriculum development and planning.

Formal classroom assessment is given weekly and at the end of each trimester. Regular assessments are given in Bible memory, math, spelling/vocabulary, grammar, and language arts. End of unit tests are given in all of the core curricula areas.

Formal assessments are also used in co-curricular classes such as music, art, physical education and Spanish. Techniques as well as general knowledge are assessed in these areas. In physical education, fitness testing is done on a regular basis.

Results of the standardized testing are used for a number of purposes. Grace Lutheran School uses the scores to compare themselves nationally with other schools. The results are used in the curriculum review cycle as evidence of the effectiveness of curriculum materials. Data is also used to communicate progress to parents. Parents can access timely feedback through GradeLink.

**Areas of Strength for Curriculum and Instruction Category** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. Teachers are enthusiastic, well-trained, and willing to go above and beyond curriculum basics to insure that each student maximizes his or her learning potential.
2. Grace Lutheran School uses current, standards-based curriculum.

3. Parents can access timely feedback through GradeLink.
4. Teachers address multiple modality learning methods across the curriculum.
5. The variety of special classes adds to the development of the whole child.

**Key Issues for Curriculum and Instruction** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. The Student Learning Goals are believed to be intrinsic values embedded in school culture. It would be valuable to develop a method of assessment for student achievement of the Student Learning Goals.
2. There is a need for the faculty and staff to use the ITBS results to inform instruction.
3. There is a need to align curriculum, Student Learning Goals, and California Content Standards, to instruction and assessment.
4. The assessment needs to be a stronger driving force for curriculum development and planning.
5. The school identified the need to embed the technology curriculum into existing school curriculum, i.e. align classroom instruction with California Academic Standards and incorporate the technology component into subject specific instructional practices.

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

- California State Content Standards
- CogAT
- Curriculum Evaluation Schedule
- Student Learning Goals
- GLS Textbook List
- Gradelink Data
- ITBS results
- List of Staff Professional Development
- Mission Statement
- Report Cards
- Samples of Classroom Assessments
- School Handbook
- Teacher Interviews
- Teaching Strategies Questionnaire
- Teacher Strategies Tally Sheet
- Classroom visits
- FOL discussions

### **Category C. SUPPORT FOR STUDENT PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC GROWTH**

Grace Lutheran School students are supported by a variety of services, programs, activities, and opportunities at the school and within the community. The Expected

Student Learning Goals are supported through a variety of programs, technologies, and services that meet the challenges of the curricular and co-curricular programs. These include, but are not limited to Expressways to Reading, MIND-Music/Math, the computer lab, parent volunteers, reading buddies, community outreach, and chapel. These programs enhance personal as well as academic growth.

Students develop personal growth through different mediums. The FISH! philosophy is a program that the school participates in that creates a common language that helps improve the school culture by using four simple practices – Be There, Play, Make Their Day, and Choose Your Attitude. This program seeks to enhance character development by creating a caring, nurturing, and supportive culture.

The school also creates a theme for the year with monthly character traits paired with scripture that are addressed school-wide. These are Creative - Romans 12:2a, Faith - Hebrews 1:11, Gratefulness - Ephesians 5:20, Generosity - 2 Corinthians 7c-8, Ambition - Philippians 3:12b, Courtesy - 1 Peter 3:8, and Dependable - 1 John 3:16. Students are recognized for exemplary use of these traits.

The Director of Students/resource specialist handles disputes between students and in the process teaches the students conflict management strategies. Students are very comfortable talking to teachers about problems. When the problems are bigger than warranted, the Director of Students offers appropriate support. Examples of her support include regular small group meetings and one-on-one discussions. While this is all extremely beneficial, there is not formal plan or procedure for handling such situations. After speaking with the Director of Students/resource specialist, it was agreed that a formal plan, procedure, or program such as a Peer Mentoring program would be appropriate.

Parents are an integral part of the Grace Lutheran School community. They are extremely supportive of the school's overall programs. They participate in activities such as PTL, classroom assistance, Parents in Touch, church activities, and fundraising opportunities. They are kept informed of various school activities, announcements, and events through regular newsletters, GradeLink, the school website, classroom web pages, and online registration. The parents think very highly of the school and its programs; and the school faculty and staff members in turn think very highly of the parents and their support. The community is seen as a large family.

### **Areas of Strength for Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth**

**Category** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. The dedication of the parents and staff in providing a well connected support system for the students.
2. The wide variety of programs, activities, support systems, and community involvement available to support all Grace Lutheran School students on a daily basis.
3. The Rec Club/Homework Club Programs.
4. The specials that support student learning and are taught by highly qualified

professionals.

5. A full-time resource specialist to meet the needs of the students on campus.

**Key Issues for Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth Category** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. Implement Student Study Teams more effectively by developing strategies, policies, and procedures to more effectively support individual student learning and social/emotional needs.
2. Add a vocal component including choirs to the music program.
3. The school is fortunate to have a resource specialist on campus; however there is a need for more assistance in identifying and supporting individual student learning needs.

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

- Athletic Schedules
- Chapel Schedules for 2006-2007 & 2007-2008
- Character Traits Schedules for 2006-2007 & 2007-2008
- Community Outreach documentation, flyers, calendar
- Documentation from Director of Students- records and program information
- DORA Documentation
- Elective and Specials Syllabus
- Elective Schedules
- Emergency Plan
- Expressways to Reading Data
- Fire Drill Log Sheets
- FISH Book
- Gradelink Information
- Interviews with faculty and staff
- Library Schedule
- MIND Documentation
- Music and Band information
- No Child Left Behind – OVSD information
- Outdoor Education Field Trip information
- Performing Arts Camp Information
- PTL Agendas and Minutes
- Rec Club Flyers, Registration Packets
- Samples of Progress Reports and Report Cards
- Scrip Documentation
- Student Council Documents
- Summer Camp Flyers, Registration Packets, Field Trip Information
- VBS Information
- FOL discussion

## **Category D. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

Grace Lutheran School is one of the two main ministries of Grace Lutheran Church. The school maintains sufficient human, physical, and financial resources to sustain the school program, ensure student achievement of the Student Learning Goals, and effectively carry out the school's stated purpose: to teach academics, attitudes, and faith that shape the world of today and tomorrow.

The school fiscal year runs from July 1st through June 30th. The school's budget is prepared by the School Administrator with assistance from stakeholders. Financial reports from previous years are used to determine expenses for each new budget year. Funding for the school budget is primarily derived from school and Rec Club tuition. Additional sources include individual gifts, PTL donations, support from Grace Lutheran Church, and various fundraising efforts. Once the budget is prepared, it is reviewed by the school board. The budget is monitored and adjusted in accordance to the school's enrollment through the month of May. Final approval of the budget is the responsibility of Grace Lutheran Church's Council.

Grace Lutheran School employs a highly qualified educational staff which includes all credentialed teachers with the exception of the Jr. Kindergarten teacher who is certified in her grade level. Seven staff members have graduate degrees. The support staff at Grace includes a full time Resource Teacher, 4 teaching assistants, 3 office support employees, a Recreation Club director and recreation leaders.

The administrative team at Grace Lutheran School is comprised of the School Administrator, Director of Programs, Director of Operations, Director of Student Support, Director of Office Administration, Accounts Administrator, and two Preschool Directors. This team meets on a weekly basis to discuss various operational issues of the school. Department chairs are selected by the administrative team to gather and disseminate information. The chairs also are responsible for the monthly faculty meetings. Every staff member is expected to serve on one operational committee.

Academic curriculum is aligned to state standards and the school reviews textbooks on a six year cycle, adopting approved state curriculum. Instructional materials are funded through the school budget, Title V program funds, and the PTL.

Technology has shown great advancements through the financial support of the PTL, a local university, the capital campaign, and volunteer efforts. The new campus has been newly networked and furnished with new computers in the lab and classrooms. The school has three classrooms with ActivBoards and plans to continue to purchase this technology for all the classrooms. Currently a formal technology plan does not exist to support student learning. There is a need to coordinate the expenditure and allocation

of future technology resources through a comprehensive plan that supports the schoolwide measurable goals.

The PTL supplements the general budget by providing funding for the school library,

athletic program, annual teacher classroom start-up money, student scholarships,

MIND-Music/Math, and the technology program. Recently, the PTL purchased two new computer network servers for the school and the three ActivBoard systems.

Grace Lutheran's new campus was acquired in 2005 to meet the increasing needs of the students. Prior to relocating the school through Grace Lutheran Church's capital campaign, the new site was renovated. Currently a new church exists on this site. The new site affords a multipurpose room, as well as modular buildings in anticipation of increased school enrollment.

Grace Lutheran School's governing authority ultimately rests with the Church Council and Executive Team of Grace Lutheran Church. Further support to the school is provided by a school board selected and appointed by the Church Council.

Grace Lutheran Church identified three ministry focus areas: 1) Children and Families, 2) Mercy Ministries, and 3) Multiplying Christian Communities. As part of the re-focusing effort the church made a substantial financial commitment to the school in the form of capital improvement associated with the move to the new campus.

Prior to the school move in March of 2006, the preschool and school had combined financial reserves exceeding \$400,000. The cost of the move to the new facility was approximately \$1.3 million. Money for the move came from a capital campaign run by the church, cash reserves of the preschool and school, and a five year debt reduction plan being paid by the school. The debt reduction plan will be completed by the end of the 2010-2011 school years. Once finished, the funds currently being used for debt reduction will be available to provide for financial reserves of the school. Current plans include the establishment of an endowment fund for the school which will support the long-term growth and stability of the school.

***Areas of Strength for Resource Management and Development Category*** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. The leadership of the school is one of its greatest strengths, as it works in unison with all to ensure the school's purpose to teach academics, attitudes and faith that shape the world of today and tomorrow.
2. The parent-teacher organization, PTL, provides outstanding on-going support for the students, faculty, staff and programs of the school.
3. The school operates in strong partnership with the church and is supported by the Church Council, Executive Team, and School Board.
4. The current school facility was recently remodeled and is in much better physical shape than the previous campus. Furthermore, the facilities are kept in good repair with ongoing inspection and repairs provided as needed to maintain the campus.
5. The school has financial resources and support that are sufficient to continue a high-quality instructional program.

**Key Issues for Resource Management and Development Category** that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students:

1. Although there is tuition assistance in place, there is a continued need for more funding of scholarships.
2. There is a need to continue to develop third source funding to support the mission, as well as to ensure the long term solvency of the school.
3. In order to promote staff retention and the development of well-qualified teaching staff, there needs to be continued focus on efforts to improve salary and benefits in alignment with local private and public schools.
4. In order to support the continued integration of technology into curriculum and instruction, required resources need to continue to be made available.
5. In order to ensure students are prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a standards based technology plan is needed with appropriate skill building opportunities provided.
6. There is a need for resource allocations to support schoolwide goals developed through data analysis.
7. In continuing to meet the special needs of students (SPED, ELL, Gifted), additional allocation of resources will be needed.

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

- School organization and function chart
- Minutes and budget from PTL
- Annual church and school budgets
- Instructional materials, curriculum and supply invoices
- Salary schedules
- Capital Campaign funding
- Tuition assistance records
- Scrip records
- School 5 year projection plan
- FOL and stakeholder discussions
- Classroom Observations

***This Schoolwide areas and Strengths from Visiting Committee Report were restructured to separate strengths and growth areas identified by the school that the VC concurred with and highlight VC additions. There we no modifications made to the content in this section.***

**General Comments:**

The stakeholders are commended for the thoroughness in the preparation of the Focus on Learning document. All stakeholders assisted the Visiting Committee in the collection and clarification of data that was needed in order to analyze the existing status of the school. The administration provided direction, training and other resources to the school. The Visiting Committee found that students were extremely congenial and appreciative of the efforts made to improve the quality of educational opportunities at Grace Lutheran School.

### **Schoolwide Areas of Strength:**

The visiting committee concurs with the school's identified areas of strength:

1. Christian presence as evidenced by students, parents, and staff.
2. A highly qualified and committed faculty and staff.
3. Standards based curriculum.
4. A wide variety of programs, activities, support systems, and community involvement available to support all Grace Lutheran School students.
5. The high level of communication between staff, school, and home.
6. Before-school and after-school program provided by the Recreation Club.
7. Specialty classes offered in the areas of Spanish, art, physical education, music and resource.
8. The PTL's (Parent Teacher League) dedication and commitment in providing on-going support for students, families, faculty and staff.
9. The leadership of the school works in unison to ensure the school's purpose is met.

In addition the visiting committee has identified additional schoolwide areas of strength:

10. The teachers display nurturing and caring attitudes that permeate the school culture.
11. The acquisition and renovation of the new school site shows the commitment of all stakeholders to provide a safe and orderly learning environment.
12. The administrator's commitment to establishing a professional learning community at Grace Lutheran School.

### **Schoolwide Critical Areas for Follow-Up**

The visiting committee concurs with the school's identified areas that are outlined in the schoolwide action plan. These are summarized below:

1. Continue refining the procedures and protocol for the resource department to ensure individual student needs are being met.
2. The school is fortunate to have a resource specialist on campus; however there is a need for more assistance in identifying and supporting individual student learning needs.
3. Implement Student Study Teams more effectively by developing strategies, policies, and procedures to effectively support individual student learning needs.
4. The Student Learning Goals are believed to be intrinsic values embedded in their school culture. It would be valuable to develop a method of assessment for student achievement of the Student Learning Goals.
5. There is a need for faculty and staff to use the ITBS results to inform instruction.
6. There is a need to align curriculum, Student Learning Goals, and California Content Standards to instruction and assessment.
7. Embed the technology curriculum into existing school curriculum, i.e. align classroom instruction with California Academic Standards and incorporate the technology component into subject specific instructional practices.

In addition, the Visiting Committee has identified areas that need to be added to or clarified in the action plan:

8. It is recommended within the student personal and academic growth action plan that the inclusion of social/emotional health components be specifically addressed.
9. The action plan needs to support measurable academic goals based on data analysis.
10. Develop a technology plan based on the ISTE standards that include a learning plan for students, staff, administrators and allocation of resources.

## **Chapter V: Ongoing School Improvement**

The Visiting Committee finds that the action plans proposed by Grace Lutheran School are appropriately directed toward improvement of the school's performance with respect to the concepts contained in the criteria categories. The general themes of the action plan correlate to the growth areas identified by the Schoolwide Focus Groups. These include refining student learning goals to the action plan/instructional program; continuing to develop protocol and procedures in relation to meeting the varied academic and personal needs of the students; and develop a technology plan based on the ISTE standards that include a learning plan for students, staff, administrators and allocation of resources. For the most part the action plan sections address the critical areas for follow-up; however, the action plan needs to support measurable academic goals based on data analysis. It is also recommended within the student personal and academic growth action plan that inclusion of social/emotional health components be specifically addressed.

The action plan is displayed in a user-friendly manner with the inclusion of steps that enhance student learning. It is evident that the plan is feasible within existing resources and that there is a sufficient commitment to the action plan by all stakeholders.

The existing factors that support school improvement are as follows:

- A 26-year heritage of education at Grace Lutheran School.
- The commitment to the accreditation process and the Focus on Learning model.
- All stakeholders are involved in the school improvement process.
- The school leadership is united and committed to school improvement.
- There is a commitment to high levels of student achievement supported by a school culture that highly values academic and nurturing success.
- Grace Lutheran Church congregation and Church Council are strongly committed to the school ministry.

There appear to be no major impediments to the school improvement action plan. The follow-up process that the school intends to use for the monitoring of the accomplishments of the educational program appears to be adequate. The leadership and faculty are accountable to the School Board, the Executive Committee, and the Church Council.