The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team

Ashley Valley Education Center

559 North 1700 West
Vernal, Utah 84078

April 27, 2011

Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

Ashley Valley Education Center

559 North 1700 West
Vernal, Utah 84078

April 27, 2011

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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FOREWORD

The purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase the quality of instruction and student achievement. In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes in a three-step evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 27, 2011, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Ashley Valley Education Center is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Andrea McKea is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Ashley Valley Education Center and for their professional attitude which made it possible for them to see weaknesses and strengths and to suggest procedures for improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is most important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Ashley Valley Education Center.

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*Board of Regents Appointments
** UCAT Representative
*** CMAC Representative Appointment
**** USBA Advisory Representative Appointment
***** Charter School Representative Appointment

12/28/2010

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ASHLEY VALLEY EDUCATION CENTER

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Andrea McKea ..... Principal

Counseling

Mindy Deets ..... Counselor

Support Staff

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Vernie Heeney
Loretta Karen
Cassie hays
Rebecca Halverson
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Christine Labrum
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Faculty

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Nikki Sorenson
Ingrid Smith

ASHLEY VALLEY EDUCATION CENTER

MISSION STATEMENT

We are committed to creating opportunities for success by accommodating the unique learning styles of every student.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- A safe and comfortable environment promotes student learning.
- Every student can learn.
- Students learn in different ways and should be provided with a variety of instruction.
- Teachers, administrators, parents, and the community share the responsibility for helping students succeed.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Credit Recovery
2. Critical Thinking Skills
3. Effective Communication Skills

Date of visit*:* April 27, 2011

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Robert Stillwell, Utah State Office of Education/Northwest Accreditation Commission, Visiting Team Chairperson

Mary Ellen Kettle, Duchesne School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

ASHLEY VALLEY EDUCATION CENTER

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Ashley Valley Education Center provides alternative high school, adult education, adult ESL, Youth in Custody and K-12 home school services for the Uintah School District in Vernal, Utah. The school provides an adult education teacher at the county jail and the education staff for Split Mountain Youth Center, a state-owned juvenile detention center.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

By writing its self-study, the school became aware that many of the standards for accreditation were already in place in its programs. After the process for the alternative high school's self-study was underway, the district directed the school's programs to seek their accreditations together.

b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

In future self-studies, DRSL indicators will have to be defined for each program. Credit recovery is a primary focus for the alternative school, but has less emphasis in other programs.

c) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The self-study represented a lot of hard work on the part of the team that led the process. It is an honest effort to tell the school's unique story.

<u>Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:</u>

- Define DRSL indicators.
- Expand school profile to include demographic data on students served.

CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION (NORTHWEST) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

a) *To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?*

There was a high degree of collaboration on the school's mission, beliefs and DRSLs. All the staff members have a shared vision for helping their students experience academic success.

b) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?*

There is strong alignment and support for the mission and beliefs to support the DRSLs.

c) *Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.*

The main indicator for the Alternative High School program is the quantity of credits earned. Course completion is tracked weekly. For Critical Thinking, the Apex software uses all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. For Effective Communicator, the Six Traits of Writing are used on all writing assignments.

d) *To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school, and appear evident in the culture of the school?*

The school is very well organized, and there is clear coordination between programs. The staff members are very caring, and all are there to help their students succeed.

Curriculum:

a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah* Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success*?*

The staff at Ashley Valley Education Center appears to work closely among themselves and with the students, united by the common purpose of helping students achieve needed credits for graduation. It is apparent that students are studying at their own pace and level, but within that study, the support of the staff is vital for student success. The Utah Core Curriculum is offered to students in the form of credit recovery or an acceleration program that allows students to move forward at their own pace.

b) *To what extent does the curriculum engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills?*

All students are engaged in the learning process and are working at a self-chosen pace. In one lab students were working on financial literacy, which required much problem solving and incorporating higher-level thinking skills. The questions being asked caused students to reflect and connect to real-life situations. Students in the science lab were also working at a self-chosen pace, but with less student interaction.

c) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's DRSLs?*

The staff is very much aware of the chosen DRSLs and how they apply to each department. Each staff member is focused on student achievement and progression. Student achievement is regularly charted and monitored, keeping the students informed of their progress.

d) *How does the staff use assessments to drive curriculum to ensure that all students can reach the intended learning outcomes?*

There are many assessments administered to students to guide the staff in decision making for student placement and instruction. Screening and diagnostic tests are given to students upon entry to the school so that little time is wasted in selecting an educational pathway.

Instruction:

a) *To what extent do teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning?*

Numerous instructional strategies are being used to enhance the educational experience for students; these include, but are not limited to, whole-class lecture, direct instruction, individual tutoring, and electronic programs or tutoring.

b) *To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?*

Many students are in the program for credit recovery. The tracking system is specifically tailored to students, and allows them to track their own progress. Several programs are available to students, such as Avanda, Star, and A+, that give them opportunities to gain needed credits.

c) *To what extent is the school’s professional development program guided by identified instructional needs, and how does it provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning?*

Ashley Valley Education Center has a wide variety of technological programs that enable students and teachers alike to access professional development for the teaching staff.

d) *To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?*

Some teachers are proficient within content areas. Some instruction given to students is from certified teachers teaching in their content area, and some are teaching in areas other than their expertise, with support staff available to students who need additional help.

e) *To what extent does the school effectively implement a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction, and assessments?*

The program at Ashley Valley Education Center has a well-defined plan for implementation of technology into the instructional delivery of content. Students are able to use technology to learn specific Core Curriculum content.

Assessment:

a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments with performance standards based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The development of school-wide assessments is in its infancy. However, there is an expectation for students to master content-area information and demonstrate needed exit knowledge in order to receive recovery credit points.

b) *To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?*

The student performance tracking system is well defined and widely used by both students and teachers. The system informs teachers and students of progress being made.

c) *To what extent does the professional staff use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its academic expectations?*

Ashley Valley Education Center uses data to track credits earned and courses completed, and to track progress for graduation and graduation rates. This use of data enables the school to make decisions with regard to instructional practices.

d) *To what extent does the school's professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?*

Teachers are learning to collaborate on student achievement issues; however, there was little evidence of this with regard to developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.

e) *To what extent is there organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSL?*

There is no school-wide scoring tool; however, the Credit Recovery DRSL focuses teachers and students on the same goal and allows them to move toward achieving it together. This DRSL unites the school's purpose, teacher instruction and student learning into a common goal.

CHAPTER 3: NORTHWEST SUPPORT STANDARDS

Leadership and Organization:

a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?*

The principal promotes a very positive learning environment that supports student learning.

b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?*

The school has developed detailed tracking methods for credit recovery. The staff has a clear sense of where students are in terms of accumulating their credits.

c) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?*

The principal has developed an integrated set of programs that support a safe, efficient and effective learning environment. The school is continuously looking for ways to improve.

d) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?*

Teachers were empowered to lead the accreditation committee. They have participated and collaborated to form a highly cohesive working environment.

e) *To what extent has the school established a formal system through which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?*

The staff at AVEC knows the students. It is commendable that such a high degree of mentoring and advocacy is in place for all students.

School Services:

This standard is dealt with in the school's NAAS Annual Report, which requires specific responses and information regarding student support services, guidance services, health services, library information services, special education services, and family and community services.

Facilities and Finances:

This standard is addressed in the school's annual report to Northwest, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

Culture of Continual Improvement:

a) *To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using* Collaborating for Student Achievement*, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process, that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?*

The school went to USOE training for preparation of the self-study. The staff is committed to continuous improvement.

b) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through an aligned and ongoing professional development plan focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

The school staff has worked together to complete the self-study. Much teamwork is evident in the integration of the programs.

c) *To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

The Visiting Team has recommended that further work be done on the action plans. (see below).

d) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

The school has improved as it has changed. The staff is open to learning new ways to help the students succeed.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

There is a high degree of teamwork and collaboration in place within the school.

b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

AVEC uses many resources and strategies to meet the needs of its diverse student population.

c) *To what extent has the school engaged the school community in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The school did a commendable job on its first self-study. The leadership team delegated responsibilities, and the study was a team effort. All staff members are committed to helping students find academic success.

d) *How are results of school improvement identified, documented, used, and communicated to all stakeholders?*

The school shares information with all staff members, parents, and its district.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Ashley Valley Education Center (AVEC) for building an integrated, multi-faceted program that meets the needs of a wide variety of learners.

- The Visiting Team commends AVEC staff for its teamwork and collaboration.

- The Visiting Team commends the AVEC staff for knowing its students, where they are, and where they are going in terms of academic progression.

- The Visiting Team Commends the AVEC staff for committing to continuous improvement by establishing a leadership team, attending USOE accreditation training, and having staff members volunteer to assist other schools by being on Visiting Teams.

- The Visiting Team commends the AVEC staff for providing students with a positive, caring, clean and safe learning environment.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that AVEC define DRSL indicators. The indicators need to be applicable to all AVEC programs, and must point to student progress on achieving DRSLs. For instance, the Credit Recovery DRSL needs to include grade level achievement, and the Critical Thinking DRSL needs to show indicators for making appropriate choices. Students can be asked to internalize and reflect on the progress they are making. The Effective Communicator DRSL needs indicators for reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy. Define what will be measured. Assessments may include teacher-made tests and observations.

- The Visiting Team recommends that AVEC rework its action plan to include a plan for implementing each DRSL. Action plans should include timelines, resources needed, persons responsible and methods for evaluation of effectiveness.

- The Visiting Team recommends that AVEC not use student names in the self-study. Information needs to be extrapolated and analyzed to show general trends, but not the personal records of students.

- The Visiting Team recommends that AVEC expand its school profile to include demographic data on students served. It is important to know where students come from academically, and where they end up academically after they have spent time at AVEC. Breaking down data by age, gender, and ethnicity all helps tell the school's story. Future AVEC student profiles need to include all programs.