

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Diamond Ranch Academy
1500 East 2700 South
Hurricane, Utah 84737**

March 22, 2012



**Utah State Office of Education
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Diamond Ranch Academy
1500 East 2700 South
Hurricane, Utah 84737

March 22, 2012

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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, March 22, 2012, 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 Diamond Ranch Academy 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 Bo Iverson, Academic Director, is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Diamond Ranch Academy 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 Diamond Ranch Academy School.

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State Superintendent
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*Board of Regents Appointments

*** CMAC Representative Appointment

*****Charter School Representative Appointment

**UCAT Representative

****USBA Advisory Representative Appointment

DIAMOND RANCH ACADEMY

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Ephraim Hanks.....Clinical Director

DIAMOND RANCH ACADEMY

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

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Bo Iverson..... Academic Director

Counseling

Jody Rich Consultant

Support Staff

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Herald Hinton
Doug Heideman
Ashley Riddle
Jodie Larson

Gary Dean
Rod Peterson
Beth Smart
Steve Force

Jason Hanson
Suka Fiaga

DIAMOND RANCH ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Diamond Ranch Academy is to help students become:
Responsible Citizens
Charactered Individuals
Life Long Learners

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- Physical and emotional safety is required to provide an environment that promotes personal change.
- Development of spirituality enhances personal development and growth.
- Academic excellence empowers students in all aspects of their lives.
- Therapeutic milieu assists in the process of becoming emotionally healthy by working on personal and family issues.
- Personal choice and accountability is the cornerstone of individual progress.
- Work ethic is the fundamental aspect of personal growth.
- Good physical health influences self worth and aides in the development of emotional health.
- Maintaining professional business practices is our duty to the families we serve and the employees that serve them.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Responsible Citizens
2. Charactered Individuals
3. Life Long Learners

Date of visit: March 22, 2012

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Robert Stillwell, Northwest Accreditation Commission and USOE Accreditation
Consultant, Visiting Team Chairperson

Joette Hayden, Educational Director, Falcon Ridge Academy, Virgin, Utah

Katherine Whitekind, Educational Director, Sunrise RTC, Hurricane, Utah

Kathleen Wagner, Counselor, Millcreek High School, Washington School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

DIAMOND RANCH ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Diamond Ranch Academy is a coeducational residential treatment center outside Hurricane, UT. The boys and girls have separate residences and school buildings. The school has joined the Utah High School Activities Association and competes in athletics with other schools. Diamond Ranch is building a new campus to the west of Hurricane that will have classrooms and athletic facilities for the boys' and girls' programs. The opening is planned for August 2012. The students will continue to be housed at the ranch and will be transported to the new school. The existing school facility will be used for observation and assessment.

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

Diamond Ranch Academy developed clear indicators for its DRSLs and identified specific action steps for action plans. The school has improved its reporting of data in the student profile.

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

As specified in the Visiting Team's recommendations, a pre- and post-assessment should be given to show student academic progress.

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

The process of the 2012 self-study was thorough and complete. There was much learned from focus groups and multiple short-term goals developed from the school's own recommendations.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

See the recommendations section below.

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?*

The school has a strong vision of where it wants to be. The mission is to develop "charactered individuals," as described by Taylor Hartman, and to develop emotional health and mastery learning of subject matter. The DRSLs are more therapy driven than collaboratively developed and revised.

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

The mission and beliefs of the school support the identified DRSLs, and departments work collaboratively to ensure success.

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

The indicators used to measure the school's progress in achieving the DRSLs are tied directly into the token economy developed to give the students a more real life experience.

- 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 mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs are evident in the school culture through the token economy system and the club/athletic programs implemented.

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 curriculum is based on the Utah Core Curriculum, and the Utah Life Skills indicators are evident in the life experiences incorporated into each classroom.

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

The use of mastery learning indicates the commitment to student engagement and success. The token economy also engages students in problem solving and thinking. There was evidence of teachers addressing the learning styles of students to increase involvement.

- 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 teaching staff needs more collaborative professional development to establish school-wide assessments and a focused curriculum.

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

Because of the mastery learning focus of the school, assessments are an integral part of the classroom curriculum. Students are tested, given practice, then retested. However, there are no school-wide assessments.

Instruction:

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

Some instructional strategies were observed during classroom visits, especially with the younger students. Hands-on activities enhanced learning in the science class, and experiments involved all the students.

- 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?*

The identified DRSLs are integrated with the token economy and mastery learning. Overall knowledge was apparent, but evidence of explicit teaching in the classroom was missing.

- 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?*

Professional development was based on the integration of the token economy. Teachers were also involved in individual knowledge pursuits and had access to current training. Departmental collaboration for professional development specific to the DRSLs was missing.

- 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?*

Teachers appear competent in their subject areas and the common core. They are also current in instructional methods and include a variety of classroom structures to engage students.

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

Technology in the classroom was limited to teacher use. Most of the observable technology was used by teachers to present lessons and keep grades. Because of the nature of the students, computer and Internet use is limited. Teachers researched topics and gave them to the students for research papers.

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?*

Class assessments for mastery learning were clearly evident. There were no observable school-wide assessments. A measurable academic achievement goal is needed. Other than the progress through token economy levels, there were no school-wide measures in evidence.

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

Student progress toward achieving academic expectations is assessed by moving up through the levels of the token economy. The higher the level of academic achievement, the more “pay” a student received.

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

Data is collected on each student through checklists.

- 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?*

Teacher professional development for creating student assessments was not apparent. Most of the school-wide assessment is tied to therapy. Classroom assessments and assignments provide grading components.

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

The development of school-wide scoring tools to assess the identified DRSLs was a recommendation of the Visiting Team.

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 academic director oversees the education program at Diamond Ranch Academy. Under his leadership, teachers are provided with an initial academic evaluation of each student's transcripts. The academic learning climate is a self-paced performance-based system that puts the responsibility for learning directly upon each student. For students' core academic coursework, there isn't "instruction" to a whole class as usually takes place in more traditional schools with direct instruction. The self-study mentioned that elective classes are teacher directed and "mini classes" are provided by core teachers. Teachers monitor and facilitate individual student progress for required assignments in a course, and give tutoring help as needed. The analogy was used that if a weightlifter desires to be able to lift properly with added weight goals, he/she can't accomplish it by just sitting on the bench doing nothing. The weightlifter (or student) has to push himself/herself to attempt to do more, with the teacher as the spotter. There is a great deal of structure in the outlined academic expectations regarding what assignments to complete, as well as how and when, in the sequential order of a course. It is up to the student to maximize his/her learning and the earning of credits. Students cannot progress until they have achieved an 80 percent or higher level on assignments, quizzes or tests. Credit is earned when students demonstrate mastery. To support their desire to do their best and complete their assignments in a timely manner with mastery, the students have a "token economy" system to earn "wages" as they complete course credit, which allows them to pay for room rent, benefits, and activities, or to pay fines for inappropriate behavior. Even though this isn't at all like a traditional academic learning climate, the leadership promotes this form of learning as part of the students' progress through their overall program.

- 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?*

To monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness, departmental/individual analysis data was obtained by surveying teachers and other academic personnel. It appears that the school leadership is aware of defined strengths and limitations, and has outlined plans to address the lowest limitation as it prepares to build a new campus that will include more technology in the form of math computer labs. Teachers shared that they meet weekly to collaborate, discuss student

needs, and participate in staff training using their own created workbook based on James Jones' book *Let's Fix the Kids*.

The faculty members also utilized the NSSE's Indicators of School Quality as a self-assessment and provided the results in the areas of instructional and organizational systems in their self-study book. From the NSSE data, the school's goal is to improve one of the defined limitations of data-driven decision making, and Diamond Ranch has outlined five action steps in order to accomplish this.

- 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 leadership at Diamond Ranch Academy appears to have a very organized program to include faculty and staff in addressing the academic, clinical and residential needs of the students. The list of staff members includes many employees who see to all the various needs in these three areas. The school has been efficient enough with its resources that it has paid off its debts and qualified to obtain financing for a second campus in Hurricane. This campus will be modeled as more of a traditional high school campus (with a basketball gymnasium and football field), where the school will compete with other 2A high schools in baseball and at the 1A level in other sports.

- 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?*

Diamond Ranch Academy has an overall school community commitment to student learning, as seen in the variety of components in its program. The token economy system reaches into all aspects of a student's day. Student behavior is addressed school-wide with citations, court, advancements, and demotions. The Youth Leadership Program allows students to be mentors as they progress. Athletics and activity clubs are also offered. The students' therapeutic experiences are an integrated part of the comprehensive program, which intertwines with the other components of Diamond Ranch. In order for all these components to be successfully carried out, there has to be collaboration and shared responsibility in the decision-making process regarding how the program is organized, how it is working, and whether it needs adjusting. One teacher shared that all faculty and staff members work together for the same goals, resulting in less conflict between teachers, staff and parents. There are little to no student manipulation because of the structure of the program. Students are working to meet their goals daily. The administration has also been open to faculty suggestions to explore new ideas. The girls' science teacher started a non-denominational Sunday church service for students who wanted to participate. Churches in the community come weekly to provide this service. He also helped start the 4-H activities.

- 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 formal system that Diamond Ranch Academy has in place to assist students in achieving the school-wide expectation for student learning starts with the Academic Director. He evaluates student transcripts and then provides to academic teachers a credit evaluation of sorts to allow proper placement in their self-paced course study. Students are expected to complete a specific number of assignments weekly. If a student wants to work more in one subject area than another, he/she can consult with the director about being allowed to do so. Every two weeks, students are given an update on their earned credits. Students must average a specific number of credits earned in a specific time period in order to move up into the next level. There are at least twenty-seven faculty/staff members who are involved in the instruction of students. This includes administration duties, the management of student records, group and individual therapy, supervisors of programs, program instructors, academic teachers, and paraprofessionals. Major duties and time spent in carrying out these duties are outlined in the school's personnel schedule.

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's administration and support staff are supportive of school improvement and professional development, as evidenced by the treatment team model and daily collaboration among residential, clinical, and academic staff. The school currently has

effective, ongoing action plans that contain improvement steps, timelines and accountability. The three DRSLs in the school improvement plan are aligned with school needs (identified by data collection) and are tracked on a continual basis to show growth and improvement.

All teachers appeared to be actively involved in supporting the school DRSLs and improvement plan, and the school improvement plan's progress could be seen in all areas of programming. The school improvement plan identifies the indicators necessary for supporting the DRSLs, and it is commendable that the data collection has been specifically matched to support each area. Strong leadership was evident and is encouraged to continue to motivate all staff and school stakeholders to be advocates for continuous school 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 Visiting Team observed evidence that indicates the school has desire for continuous improvement with the support of a professional development plan, but does not yet have a specific process outlined to ensure ongoing professional development. The ownership and administrative team should provide opportunities for ongoing professional development by making available time, resources, and opportunities for all teachers to participate in school-identified professional development activities, and require that it be aligned with the goals for improvement.

Professional development programs should be designed to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills by all staff members, and should focus on the knowledge and skills required to fulfill the performance expectations of staff members' roles and contribute to the achievement of the school's goals for improvement.

- 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 believes that the school-wide action plan is effective and on target in addressing the needs of the school as a whole. According to conversations with education staff, teachers and administrators, there is sufficient commitment to the action plans school-wide. Because of the lack of participation of parents and students in the development of the plan and its lack of implementation thus far, it is difficult to determine commitment to the plan system-wide. However, the Visiting Team believes that the involved daily team of teachers and administrators at the school are committed to the plan and has a strong, positive commitment to completing it. The continual need for follow up and data collection as it relates to the action plan is evident in the process and steps that are in place, and the commitment by the current leadership to continue this cycle is strong and consistent. The Visiting Team believes that this is one of the critical steps that must take place in order for the school to continue moving in the direction of its outlined goals and DRSLs

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

The school's structure and the strong positive role models provided by members of the faculty, support staff, residential staff and clinical team create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement. This is evidenced by the creation of individual student learning plans that identify the needs and goals of each student within the school.

The school allows for students to pace themselves with many classes, a feature well liked by students and staff alike. The school provides time for teachers to collaborate with each other and encourage staff to improve teaching and student learning.

School leaders model and encourage others to support both academic and personal growth. The commitment to help young people to be happy, productive, members of society is evident throughout Diamond Ranch, and there is an attitude of positive change and growth throughout the school and residential environment. The school is working on continuous improvement in the SIP by the development of the action plans and ongoing assessment measures that will help monitor school and student growth. The school staff and administration are committed to the norms of continuous improvement, and show evidence of the team making this a standard part of team discussions.

- e) *What significant progress has been made in implementing the original action plan since the last full visit?*

The Visiting Team found evidence that the school has made good efforts toward the implementation of the original action plan, with revisions made to that plan that better address the school's mission, vision, beliefs, and DRSLs. In addition, the Visiting Team found that the school has been somewhat successful in institutionalizing parts of all of the DRSLs, but that no one particular DRSL stands out as having been "institutionalized" at this point in time.

- f) *What significant progress has the school made in addressing the major recommendations of the previous Visiting Team and/or review team?*

The Visiting Team found evidence that the school has addressed all of the major recommendations from the previous visiting and review teams. Each recommendation was outlined in the self-study, along with progress and evidence of growth for all four original recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The teamwork among staff members is clearly evident. They work together to promote the success of their students.

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

Diamond Ranch Academy has worked with the Utah High School Activities Association to be able to have students participate in inter-school athletic competitions. This has shown the public how willing these youth are to work and improve their skills and self-worth.

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

The self-study process was spread out over at least two years. The staff was very accepting of the questions they needed to ask themselves in order to set a course for future improvements.

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

The on-site staff members were all knowledgeable of the accreditation process and participated in the work of the self-study. The owners were present on the day of the visit and expressed full confidence in the leadership of the ranch and school.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Diamond Ranch Academy for the integration of its therapeutic, residential and academic programs. The staff shows exceptional teamwork. There is a strong emphasis on Life Skills, study skills and careers.
- The Visiting Team commends Diamond Ranch Academy teachers for their commitment to excellence.
- The Visiting Team commends Diamond Ranch Academy for its implementation of mastery learning.
- The Visiting Team commends Diamond Ranch Academy for planning and building its new campus. The involvement of the Academic Director in the overall planning process is impressive.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that Diamond Ranch Academy monitor and report student achievement data. Pre and post assessment should be given to show student academic progress.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Diamond Ranch Academy provide teachers with professional development time to collaborate and to earn in-service credit for re-certification.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Diamond Ranch Academy develop school-wide assessments for all teachers to use to assess student learning. The school should have at least one academic goal.