

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Mount Vernon Academy
184 East Vine Street
Murray, Utah 84107**

April 16, 2012



**Utah State Office of Education
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184 East Vine Street
Murray, Utah 84107

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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 16, 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 Mount Vernon 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 Principal Michael Lambson is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Mount Vernon 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 Mount Vernon Academy.

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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*Board of Regents Appointments

*** CMAC Representative Appointment

*****Charter School Representative Appointment

**UCAT Representative

****USBA Advisory Representative Appointment

MOUNT VERNON ACADEMY

Owner of Record..... Mount Vernon Academy, Inc.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michael Lambson.....President and Secretary
Marty Lambson..... Member
Scott Lambson Member
Wes Lambson..... Member

MOUNT VERNON ACADEMY

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Michael Lambson..... Principal

Counseling

Brooke Larsen..... Counselor in training and Registrar

Faculty

Emily Bond
Samuel Dean
Cody Fritzier
Mollie Gonzales

Celeste Lara
Sheila Miller
Kelsey Mills
Mallory Murphey

Alison Smith
Noelani Wilkins

MOUNT VERNON ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

The uniqueness of the individual is the primary focus of the learning environment. Students are offered a stimulating and comprehensive educational experience designed to prepare them to be responsible and productive citizens.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- All students have the ability to learn and succeed.
- Education must have a personal focus.
- Students learn in different ways and are provided with an environment to meet their unique needs.
- Acceptance of peers and instructors is unconditional and based on mutual respect.
- Classroom size is small enough to allow time for individual expressions of thought and feeling.
- The development of character is as important as the development of intellect.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. We are respectful and responsible community members.
2. We are effective communicators.

Date of visit: April 16, 2012

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

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

Jonathan Jones, Discovery Academy Principal Emeritus

VISITING TEAM REPORT

MOUNT VERNON ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Mount Vernon Academy was founded by Jack Lambson in 1975. Since 1976, the school has been located in an historic building on Vine St. in Murray. Currently there are 78 students in grades K-12. The school benefits from a large number of foreign exchange students, mostly from Korea and China.

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

Since the last full team visit, Mount Vernon has seen a decrease in enrollment. The self-study attributes this to the economic recession experienced in the past few years, and to the emergence of tuition-free charter schools.

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

The Visiting Team has recommended that Mount Vernon Academy define measureable outcomes for the Respectful and Responsible Community Member DRSL.

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

The self-study was an honest reflection on the practices and goals of the school.

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's parents, faculty and students reviewed its mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs in relation to clear definition of the purpose and vision of the school in supporting student achievement. This collaborative effort through focus groups determined that no changes or revisions were appropriate and that the mission, statements of belief, and DRSLs should stay in place.

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

The school's DRSLs were developed collaboratively, intentionally to align with the school's mission and beliefs.

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

Through collaboration among the teachers, rubrics and guidelines have been developed to assess both DRSLs. These rubrics are intended to be used across the curriculum, with emphasis on written communication. Both the elementary level and the secondary level rubrics are currently in place.

- 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 consciously endeavors to align all policies, procedures, and decisions in accordance with the stated mission, beliefs, and DRSLs. DRSL statements are posted in the classrooms, and alignment of all curricular and co-curricular activities is the focus in planning.

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 school intentionally incorporates and follows the Utah Core Curriculum and Life Skills as applicable throughout the curriculum. Lesson planning is accomplished through adherence to the State Core, as is the selection of curricular materials.

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

Inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills are intentionally incorporated into the classroom in an age-appropriate manner through teacher planning and preparation. Classroom debate and oral communication are encouraged, in addition to the development of written communication skills.

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

Curriculum development that focuses on the school's DRSLs is a core consideration in faculty in-service prior to the beginning of the school year, as well as faculty meetings and in-service throughout the term, and is accomplished collaboratively.

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

The school uses assessment of student progress in coursework in the classroom through the grading system, through standardized testing of all students annually (Stanford Achievement Test 1), as well as through both ACT and SAT results. Analysis of student grades in relation to test scores results in evaluation of student learning in relation to teaching and use of the curriculum. Also, Mount Vernon graduates are surveyed in relation to college acceptance and matriculation.

Instruction:

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

Teachers endeavor to use the teaching strategies that are most effective in relation to the variety of learning styles within their classrooms. This includes visual, aural, and kinesthetic teaching and activity as appropriate. In preparation for a math test with fourth and fifth grade students, a teacher provided a review through reading and writing, an oral question-and-answer procedure using the white board with student responses, and having students individually work the problems on the white board to demonstrate both understanding and areas of difficulty.

- 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?*

Copies of the DRSL statements are posted in the classrooms as reminders to the teachers to explicitly plan and strategize in lesson preparation to accomplish the goals represented by the DRSLs. By having the DRSLs posted, students are also made aware of the purpose of the work and procedures taking place in the classroom.

- 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?*

The focus of in-service sessions and faculty meetings is on developing instructional methods and procedures in order to meet the needs of the students. Opportunity is provided for collaborative development of effective strategies (e.g., the rubrics that have been put in place for assessing accomplishments of the DRSLs, both for citizenship issues and for written communication).

- 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 are licensed and appropriately endorsed in the areas to which they are assigned. In-service time includes professional development in the areas of effective instructional approaches, and is a collaborative effort in that the teaching staff works together for the benefit of the development and improvement of each teacher.

- 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 school uses computers and the Internet on a daily basis, as appropriate. Assignments and reports intentionally require and incorporate the use of technology. Technology is used in the classroom, and a computer lab is available at all times for student use.

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 faculty uses state and school expected learning outcomes as the basis for classroom and school-wide assessments. Standardized test results are analyzed to the extent of determining areas of strength and weakness in relation to individual and class outcomes.

- 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 use of the school's assessment and grading system is uniform, yet individually adaptable in recording and reporting student progress. This, coupled with online availability for continual parent perusal of student progress, provides for both student and teacher accountability and fairness.

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

The school clearly and regularly collects data from assessments and evaluations, and is encouraged to continue to use the data in assessing and supporting overall academic success.

- 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?*

A strength of the school is the provision of a collaborative approach toward all aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment. Since Mount Vernon is a small school, “departments” might consist of one person; therefore, the faculty works as a committee of the whole. As such, in-service and faculty meetings provide for input and collaboration of all, across the curriculum.

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

The collaborative development of rubrics by which to measure student progress in achieving and goals of the schools DRSLs is direct evidence of strong organizational agreement. Collaboration includes the faculty and administration.

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 school’s leadership is actively involved with the faculty in a collaborative relationship that is supportive of the school’s goals and purposes, as demonstrated through the teaching and learning process. The leadership is respectful of the faculty members and clearly utilizes bottom-up development of the various aspects of quality instruction, rather than a top-down approach. There is a unity of purpose and a sense of mutual support throughout the school.

- 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 leadership uses all available resources from within the institution, as well as from without, in monitoring progress on both student achievement and instructional effectiveness. There is complete willingness to increase the collection and use of appropriate data to drive decision making and development of all areas of assessment and planning.

- 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 school’s tuition and fee schedule have been developed and are adjusted in order to ensure the ongoing operation and success of the school. The recent downturn in

enrollment, concurrent with the nation's economic downturn, has resulted in appropriate measures to continue the school's effective operation. Effective operation involves the safe and effective learning environment aligned with the school's goals, DRSLs, and school improvement, as evidenced in the progress made on previous recommendations and action plans.

- 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?*

All stakeholders are included as appropriate in planning and participation in the fulfillment of the mission and goals of the school. Parental support and involvement are strong and evident, and included in the collaborative climate of the school. Members of the student council is appropriately involved and positive in their role and voice.

- 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 relatively small size of the school allows for students to have ready access to the faculty and administration. Due to the small size, the system of counsel and advocacy is less formal, but is effective based on both student and parent testimony. Parents' interviews were unanimous in their positive assessment of their students' relationships with and support on the part of faculty and administration.

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?*

Mount Vernon developed its self-study using the guidelines provided by the USOE. The school has institutionalized both DRSLs since the last visit.

- 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?*

As noted in recommendations, Mount Vernon should produce a professional development plan. The school already has a goal to increase technology. This should be implemented with professional development for teachers to learn effective strategies for using technology in the classrooms.

- 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 school's action plans are adequate to help the school improve.

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

The school is in a competitive market. Stressful economic times and the influx of charter schools require Mount Vernon to adapt to survive. It has adjusted to a smaller overall school enrollment. It enjoys strong support from parents that the school offers a quality education to its students.

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

The school believes that it has institutionalized their two DRSLs since the 2006 visit. Writing rubrics have been created and used.

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

The school has shown progress on all recommendations from 2006 visit. There were 10 recommendations from the previous team, and all have been addressed in 2012 self-study.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

There is great teamwork among the staff, and the school has great support from parents.

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

Mount Vernon has increased its concurrent and AP course offerings. The school is favorably considered by foreign student exchange agencies, and is benefiting from the influx of Asian students.

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

Teachers, parents, and students participated in the self-study process.

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

All stakeholder groups were involved in preparing the 2012 self-study. Parents attended the debrief session April 16, and expressed sincere satisfaction with the accreditation process and the overall quality of education their students are receiving at Mount Vernon Academy.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Mount Vernon Academy for the high quality of direct instruction provided by its teachers.
- The Visiting Team commends Mount Vernon Academy for the adoption of the writing rubrics for use across the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools.
- The Visiting Team commends Mount Vernon Academy for its collaborative effort in the development of the new six-year action plan.

- The Visiting Team commends Mount Vernon Academy for the progress made toward meeting the goals of the previous action plans.
- The Visiting Team commends Mount Vernon Academy for its positive relationship with and support of parents.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that Mount Vernon Academy continue defining measureable outcomes for documenting students' progress toward becoming more respectful and responsible community members.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Mount Vernon Academy produce a professional development plan to prioritize teacher trainings in next five years. This should include professional development on school-wide assessments and the use of technology in classrooms.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Mount Vernon Academy establish a parent volunteer coordinator. The Visiting Team was informed that parents are ready to contribute more time and service to the school.