

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**North Star Academy
2920 West 14010 South
Bluffdale, Utah 84065**

February 2-3, 2010



**Utah State Office of Education
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**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**North Star Academy
2920 West 14010 South
Bluffdale, UT 84065**

February 2-3, 2010

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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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, February 2-3, 2010, 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 North Star 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 Randy Honaker is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at North Star 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 North Star Academy.

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State Superintendent
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NORTH STAR ACADEMY

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VISITING TEAM REPORT

NORTH STAR ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

North Star Academy exists to ENGAGE and INSPIRE students to achieve their highest potential through a SAFE, INDIVIDUALIZED, and CHALLENGING learning environment.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe that student learning will improve as educators engage children in discovering their own individual talents and abilities.

We believe that as we provide a safe and caring physical, emotional, and academic learning environment, children will feel secure enough to take risks and seize the challenges offered them.

We believe the learning environment should fuel a child's innate sense of wonder about the world and desire to learn beyond the classroom.

We believe that student learning should be meaningful and relevant, expanding their ability to become active contributing citizens.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Good Citizenship
 - Students will adhere to classroom and school wide policies realizing the importance of rules and structure.
 - Students will be aware of social/civic responsibilities beyond the classroom.
 - Students will recognize and value the importance of the following character traits: trustworthy, responsible, caring, respectful, and fairness
2. Academic Achievement
 - All students are meeting mastery in the content areas.
 - All students are receiving additional support when learning objectives are not met.

- Students experience a variety of educational opportunities, allowing students to challenge themselves across the curriculum.
 - Students are meeting challenging objectives that best meet their level of ability.
3. Critical Thinking
- Students identify a question, issue, or problem, access information, then analyze and evaluate possible solutions.
 - Students gather and use information effectively to gain new information, support inferences, and justify conclusions.
 - Students recognize and appreciate alternate points of view and make judgments regarding the credibility of sources.

Date of visit: February 2-3, 2010

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Douglas Finch, Cascade Elementary, Alpine School District, Visiting Team
Chairperson

John Childs, Accreditation Consultant, Utah State Office of Education, Northwest
Association of Accredited Schools

Jacqueline Croswhite, Intermountain Christian School

Dawn Longman, Rockwell Charter High School

Jeannie Rowland, USOE Education Specialist, Charter Schools

VISITING TEAM REPORT

NORTH STAR ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

North Star Academy is located in the rural area of Bluffdale, Utah. The public charter school educates five hundred students from Kindergarten through ninth grade. The elementary grades have 25 students per class, with two classes in each grade. Since the opening of North Star Academy in 2005, the school has maintained a waiting list with open enrollment every January. As of November 2009, there were 118 students on the waiting list.

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

The number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch has risen above 10% for the first time since the school has opened. Only 5% are considered minority students, and currently no students qualify for ELL services. Less than 10% of students qualify for an IEP, with approximately 4% receiving only speech services.

One third of the faculty members are within their first 3 years of teaching and 65% have the minimum bachelors degree required for their teaching certificate.

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

The school profile lacks a thorough commentary or analysis of student learning trends (identifying who is learning and who is not). While an enhanced model of curriculum and instruction was referenced, a system-wide tiered response to students who are not learning was integrally woven into the school's comprehensive school improvement plan.

The Visiting Team could not readily find the details of the school's charter along with a description of the outreach program.

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

The self-study is a good faith effort to accurately reflect the vibrant and dynamic beginning years of this public charter school. The school and community appear to be defining the purpose and future of the school. Beyond describing general

academic scores and programs, the school is emerging in systematically identifying student learning trends and a pyramid of responses to interventions.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Community characteristics, including parent involvement patterns
- Charter summary and performance goals

**CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS
(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 teachers in several teacher meetings developed the mission statement, beliefs and DRSLs. Parents and students were surveyed to determine their desires for the school and their learning environment. The teachers worked hard to craft statements that encompassed both elementary and middle school learning objectives. The DRSLs are good citizenship, academic achievement, and critical thinking. When the belief statements and DRSLs were developed, the Board and parents were informed.

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

The school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs were developed directly from the charter and teacher beliefs. In some way, the school might look at differentiating to completely fulfill the purpose of each statement within the school environment.

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

The faculty is considering indicators and determining how good citizenship might be measured. More discussion will aid the school in developing a school-wide process.

- 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 ideas of safe, challenging, and individualized guide the decisions of the school and are evident in the school culture. There are several ways the school engages students in learning through the SEM and Renzulli model. Good citizenship is recognized in informal ways such as free dress day in middle school and "caught you being good" cards in elementary.

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 entire staff at North Star Academy creates year-long curriculum maps for their grade level or content area. These maps form the foundation for teaching the Utah State Core. The Utah Life Skills document was used to help form the DRSLs, which proved to be a helpful and informative process for all involved.

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

The Visiting Team felt a great commitment to inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills by all students and staff at North Star Academy during their preparation for a showcase of student interest groups. Using the School Enrichment Model, students are encouraged to take a passion from an idea to implementation and enrichment.

- 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 Visiting Team recommends North Star Academy begin exploration of applying newly defined DRSLs and then examining curriculum development and improvement in light of the indicators.

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

Beyond the state-required assessments, the North Star Academy staff continually uses program-specific assessments for formative student information. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff collaborate to create common assessments aligned to the intended learning outcomes relative to content areas and grade levels.

Instruction:

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

The teachers at North Star Academy use a wide variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning. The Visiting Team witnessed age-appropriate activities, ability grouping, and other methods to meet the individual learning needs of 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?*

Though some common posters could be found on walls addressing various aspects of the school's determined DRSLs, strategies developed to explicitly teach these were not evident.

- 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?*

North Star Academy's professional development is currently focused on teaching rather than learning. Most professional development is for programs currently in practice and attended multiple times. The Visiting Team recommends that a professional development plan be developed based on a study of the school's critical needs with outcomes focused on student learning.

- 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?*

The Visiting Team had the opportunity to visit teachers at North Star Academy at all age levels and content areas. It was clear that the teachers were confident in their knowledge of their subject and reflected current research based, effective strategies. The submitted self-study is a work of the teachers' self reflection and the commitment to look at their own practice.

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

As a plan to integrate technology does not currently exist, the Visiting Team recommends that the staff gain professional development for learning to utilize

the currently available resources. The technology use should focus not only as a teaching resource, but also as a learning tool to prepare students for real world experience and responsibility.

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?*

Individual teachers develop classroom assessments for their respective subjects or grade levels. Some subjects, such as the Saxon math, have predetermined testing to place students. The Special Education department has clear expectations for student achievement.

The school uses several outside assessments of student learning such as the CRT, DIBELS, DWA, and DRE.

- 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 school looks at testing data at the beginning of the year and makes a list of students and specific interventions needed. The elementary teachers address individual progress through classroom aides and pullout programs. The middle school teachers meet student needs through individual in-class strategies.

One area that the school has identified for professional development is formative assessment. It would be helpful to focus on teaching strategies that more quickly reveal areas where students are not learning and ways to re-teach concepts to meet these students' needs within the time constraints of the school day.

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

The school uses data from outside testing to assess its academic success. In addition, teachers from the previous grade level are available to discuss student information as students move from level to level. The school might consider developing ways to assess academic expectations from within the school environment.

- 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?*

As teachers have learned differentiation strategies, they have worked with students on project assessments and other ways of showing their learning within the differentiation framework. Teachers also meet to share ideas with each other to develop new assessments in their area of responsibility.

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

The school's DRSLs are still in an emergent state. Indicators and school-wide scoring tools will be developed as the DRSLs are revised and integrated into the school culture.

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?*

North Star Academy leadership is focused on academic learning and developing a strong learning climate. Attention to details including building design and upkeep, student dress and grooming standards, and stimulating classroom décor contribute to this academic climate. The Visiting Team advises the school to further enhance this climate by clarifying and assessing specific desired learning outcomes beyond exiting assessments (CRT, IOWA, etc.).

- 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's leadership uses surveys data and student performance to make decisions regarding supplemental curriculum programs and instructional supports. An example is the purchase of the program "Study Island." The principal and even Charter Board members collaborate on a small scale in making decisions and evaluating effectiveness.

- c) *To what extent does the 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 Board keeps things consistent regardless of numerous principal transitions. The leadership is very approachable and accessible. The school's

administration is able to delegate some of the curriculum and management responsibilities associated with a charter school.

- 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?*

The administration and school board have visited with students about concerns regarding the school climate. The majority of parents stated that they are regularly notified of decisions and given opportunities to help, but generally do not to participate in the decision-making process.

- 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 school has implemented an advisory period daily for 20 minutes for middle school grades. Each secondary teacher advises between 20-25 students on their academic and social support.

School Services:

This standard is dealt with in the school's Northwest 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?

Being a new school, North Star Academy has done a reasonably responsible job of using the Collaborating for Student Achievement self-study model in preparation for the site visit. A sense of responsibility and desire to comply with accreditation and charter expectations is evident in the school's leadership. North Star Academy stakeholders are emerging in their understanding of the benefits of this model in regards to 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?*

Stakeholders are working hard at North Star Academy to balance the urgent and important tasks of school managements. The SEM components are supported through professional development and conference attendance. Core Knowledge, as well as State Core Academy is utilized to develop knowledge. A curriculum specialist is utilized for support and ideas. PD in instructional strategies and utilizing technology resources could be a next step. Mentoring program supports the many new teachers employed at the school

- 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?*

In response to the term "critical need," the school's leadership stated that the academic goals of the school-wide action plans are being addressed, but that management issues are paramount at this stage in keeping the school functioning effectively and financially viable. The Charter Board members intend to implement their DRSLs. The Visiting Team encourages the school's leadership to further develop the professional development component of the existing school-wide action plan.

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

North Star Academy's teachers are very open to continuous improvement, but collaborative models for school improvement, including regularly embedded time and structures for following through to not appear to be in place.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The faculty meets twice a month for collaboration meetings. These meetings are split into two groups, the elementary teachers and the middle school teachers. Parental volunteers are in every elementary classroom on a daily basis to assist the classroom teachers with centers. There is a buddy reading program in place and also a student council/leadership committee that meets weekly.

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

The teachers at North Star Academy focus on the DRSLs and collaboration along with the help of the PTO members. The PTO involvement is strong and is of great help to the classroom teachers. Many of the parental volunteers have college degrees and all bring added strengths to the classroom. There is a substitute teacher on campus every day to fill in where needed.

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

Despite the frequent changes in school administration, the teacher leadership and supportive school community have moved forward in conducting the collaborative self-study process. The school's Board members have thoroughly invested themselves in school routines and processes, and each teacher was given the opportunity to self-evaluate their teaching style, strengths and weaknesses. This information was used to determine the overall needs of the faculty.

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

The school's leadership uses a variety of methods to communicate the outcomes of the school's achievements. The school boasts a long waiting list of families who would like to have students attend the school. Student performance on CRTs and in outstanding student products developed in the SEM model have been effectively communicated throughout the community. In regards to the school's specific work with school improvement goals, the school is emerging in developing networks of communication with all stakeholders

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the founding board for the school has developed a clear and compelling mission and staff members have determined belief statements that are evident in the language, programs, and practices of students, teachers, and parents. The accreditation model has been an opportunity for self-reflection and evaluation.

- The Visiting Team commends the academic environment created by the School Enrichment Model of inspiring, engaging, and learning that is individualized and challenging.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop the capacity and understanding of effectively collaborating for student achievement.
 - Collaboratively examine the DRLS and develop strategies for teaching and assessing these holistic school-wide learning outcomes. Begin by developing a school-wide assessment system for at least one DRSL.
 - Collaboratively examine both summative and formative performance data to system-wide consider “who is learning, and who is not.” Analyze data and develop specific responses to interventions for all students.

- The Visiting Team recommends the Focus Group analysis of the organizational effectiveness of the school needs to be revisited. Identify school-wide critical student learning needs by involving all the school stakeholders, including community and student representative in developing compelling school-wide action plans with SMART goals which address identified school-wide critical needs