

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**South Park Academy
14425 South Pony Express Road
P.O. Box 250
Draper, Utah 84020**

November 6, 2012



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14425 South Pony Express Road
P.O. Box 250
Draper, UT 84020

November 6, 2012

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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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, November 6, 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 South Park 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 Lory Curtis is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at South Park 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 South Park Academy.

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*****Charter School Representative Appointment

**UCAT Representative

****USBA Advisory Representative Appointment

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Tracey Moore..... Assistant Principal

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SOUTH PARK ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of South Park Academy is to reduce recidivism rates among our prison population through adult and transitional education.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- All students can learn which makes student learning our highest priority.
- The higher the level of education inmates obtain, the less likely they are to re-offend.
- Quality corrections adult education is the result of effective collaboration between the students, the school, and the Department of Corrections.
- An effective learning community firmly requires regular attendance, respectful classroom citizenship, and creates an environment that is conducive of study.
- It is our responsibility to provide an educational program that creates graduates that are better students, employees and citizens.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Students will develop essential critical thinking and problem solving skills.
2. Students will develop personal responsibility.
3. Students will demonstrate practical application of lifelong learning.

Date of visit: November 6, 2012

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Robert Stillwell, Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) Consultant, Visiting Team
Chair, Ogden Utah

Peggy Hill, Education Specialist, Davis School District

Renee Hyer, Education Specialist, Jordan School District

Scott Carson, Landmark High School, Nebo School District

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VISITING TEAM REPORT

SOUTH PARK ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

South Park Academy (SPA) is a special purpose school located in the Utah State Prison, Department of Corrections (UDC) at the Point of the Mountain in Draper, Utah. South Park Academy is an adult education program operated by administrators, counselors, teachers and staff of the Canyons School District.

The education program offerings are located in seven housing units serving different prison populations and various security levels. The program provides high school, GED, Life Skills and transition services to incarcerated adults. South Park Academy provides educational services at all seven sites.

South Park identifies all non-high school graduates through an orientation. Each potential student is given the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) in Reading, Language and Math to access his/her skill levels. This information is then used, along with educational transcripts, to formulate educational goals.

The teachers are assigned to teach in a housing unit, and due to the limited number of teachers in a unit, each teacher must teach multiple subjects. Computers are in some housing units so that students can access the course curriculum from A+ to provide individualized course instruction.

Timpanogos houses female inmates, with the other six housing units serving the male population in prison. The total prison population breakdown by ethnicity is as follows: 66 percent of the prison population is white, 19 percent is Hispanic, and the other 15 percent is made up of Native American, Black and Asian inmates.

The population enrolled in the high school program at the time of the accreditation visit was 1,173. Students are sometimes moved from to the Central Utah Correctional Facility or to county jails, making the population somewhat transient. The school operates in an open enrollment environment, allowing students to enter a classroom at any point to accommodate the continual placement of new students into a housing unit.

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

The average non-high school graduate is 38 and has been out of school for more than ten years. Many of the students are former special education students and have adult ADD and ADHD. Adjustments are often made in the housing units to help ensure the safety of the staff. Over 50 percent of the prison population has been convicted of a third degree felony.

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

The program is limited to making modifications to the school profile, as the Utah Department of Corrections is in charge of the prison population eligible to participate in the educational services. The UDC makes decisions regarding the placement of inmates in a housing unit, and thus controls which students can access the educational opportunities.

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

One of the limitations reflected in the self-study is the inaccessibility to the Internet at South Park Academy for teachers and students in the classroom. This factor does limit the staff's ability to bring real-time information into the classroom and access resources on the Internet for student learning.

A strength noted is the positive relationship between the teachers and students at South Park. The teachers enjoy teaching and care about each student as an individual. They are well organized and promote a positive learning environment. The students feel safe and enjoy learning. They know the teachers are willing to help them be successful.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

See the Recommendations section below.

**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 mission of South Park Academy, "to reduce recidivism among the prison population," is clearly defined and ingrained in the minds of the staff and students. This is evident throughout the school. All seem focused on this goal, and believe that the education they provide is the key to their students' future success. The DRSLs are adequate, but perhaps not as visible to the students as they could be. DRSL #3, "Students will demonstrate practical application of lifelong learning," could be rolled

into number two, as it is the essence of developing “personal responsibility” (the goal of that DRSL).

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

The DRSLs are adequate, but perhaps not as visible to the students as they could be.

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

DRSL #3, “Students will demonstrate practical application of lifelong learning,” could be rolled into number two, as it is the essence of developing “personal responsibility” (the goal of that DRSL).

- 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 belief statements are well thought out and specific to the school's unique mission. These beliefs could be made more visible to students by posting them around the school where they could be referred to easily by staff and further ingrained in the minds of students.

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?*

To a large extent, the prison system, with its huge restrictions and cumbersome scheduling, dictates the type of curriculum and instructional delivery that can be used with many students. Students in maximum security must utilize a packet system and have minimal face-to-face time with teachers. This is the least effective means of instruction, and the curriculum is limited. The packets that are used need to be revised and updated in order to maximize their effectiveness.

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

The students in the general population also utilize packets and individualized computer-based modules; however, the delivery can take place in the classroom under a teacher's supervision. Students have the opportunity to ask direct questions and get immediate feedback. Students in these classrooms show a much greater excitement for their learning and take personal pride in their progress. Students also have some limited opportunities to receive direct instruction in some of the classrooms. These

classrooms are much more engaging, and the students are enthusiastic about their learning. Teachers have a greater opportunity to teach to their passions and develop a curriculum that meets the needs of students.

- 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 has the opportunity to recommend changes to the curriculum in a regularly scheduled curriculum meeting. Any staff member may research potential changes and present his/her findings to the committee. The committee then votes to adopt the changes. The staff makes every effort to ensure that the curriculum is always aligned with State Core objectives.

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

Assessments are administered regularly after students complete packets, computer modules and classroom units. Credit is awarded after successfully completing the minimal requirements. The credit drives and motivates the students.

Instruction:

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

Instructional strategies vary from teacher to teacher and from classroom to classroom. Because teachers are required to instruct in all content areas, they are likely to be less expert in areas that they teach. This is particularly concerning in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Teachers admitted to needing more support and training in these areas. There did not seem to be ongoing training in the regular staff development program.

- 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?*

Teachers have sought out experts that they knew outside the school in order to get curriculum and teaching support. Because members of the teaching staff do not have easy access to the Internet in their teaching areas, it is difficult to research and develop curriculum and instructional practices.

- 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?*

In light of the unique situation and restrictions at South Park Academy, professional development is individualized to meet the needs of staff and students. Some staff

members bring extra content into their classrooms by saving material to an approved thumb drive and bringing it to the classroom with them.

- 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?*

Given the challenges that exist at South Park Academy, the teachers do remarkably well, and maintain a high degree of enthusiasm for what they do and accomplish with their students. This is evident when considering the longevity of the staff at South Park.

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

Instructional objectives are aligned to the state standards, but are also dictated by the packets and computer modules. It did not appear that the staff has refined the objectives down to the student learning standard level, and the objectives were not easily evident in the classrooms, where students could access them.

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 TABE was administered to all students as the standard assessment at the school. This provides the baseline for learning and measuring progress. This is the adult education standard. The credits earned are also a basic measuring stick for student progress.

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

There was no evidence that other assessments were developed and widely used throughout the school.

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

This is dictated largely by the level of access teachers have or don't have to students. In this system, it is easy for the credit to be the driving force, as opposed to the student learning.

- 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?*

The school is taking steps to emphasize the importance of academic standards. This is evident from the fact that the ACT test is now being administered to all "11th graders" in the school, just as it is in the other schools in the Canyons District.

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

TABE is relied on to measure numeracy and literacy. Other assessments are not school-wide.

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 administrative team has done an admirable job of creating positive learning environments within the classrooms. Administrators are supportive of teachers.

- 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?*

South Park Academy is bound by all Department of Corrections policies and procedures. It is a strong relationship, but many decisions are non-negotiable. Within the school setting, the school follows adult ed. guidelines and is seeing positive gains in student achievement.

- 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 leadership is constantly weighing its options for resource allocations on an ever-diminishing budget. The school is staffed for low student-teacher ratios. This adds to the effectiveness of the teachers and helps meet school goals.

- 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 teachers were involved in the accreditation process. This was a first-time accreditation visit to an adult ed. program that has been in existence for many years.

- 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?*

Because of the relatively small student-teacher ratio and the fact that the students are motivated to be in class, relationship building is strong. The only factor working against this is the revolving door entry/exit of the students, over which the school has no control.

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?*

South Park Academy has developed a complete self-study and school improvement plan based on the USOE and Northwest Accreditation Commission Standards and the *Collaborating for Student Achievement* booklet. South Park's self-study and school improvement plan reflect a personalized and succinct version of the standards adapted skillfully to the school's unique needs.

- 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?*

In spite of severe budget cuts that limit the hours and days of direct professional learning, South Park Academy succeeds in conducting and implementing professional development that keeps the staff abreast of best practices. The school's immediate focus is training and collaboration regarding reading (CORI training) and language arts instruction, mathematics literacy, and ongoing curriculum analysis.

- 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?*

Individual commitment to student success and school-wide success is abundant in the South Park Academy staff. However, distinct, well defined, measureable objectives *are not* clearly evident in their improvement plan and action plan. The use of general statements like, “We need to do a better job...”, “We need to continue to review all our courses,” and “We can improve our response” are common, while more specific, measureable outcomes and target goals are, by and large, missing.

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

It is the observation of the Visiting Team that conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement are more difficult for South Park Academy. Working within the prison and the numerous safety and security limitations placed upon the school by UDC is making it difficult for the school to implement productive change in its curriculum and instruction, including the need to improve the role of technology.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

South Park Academy is a unique school. The Utah Department of Corrections serves as the community as well as the parent group. The Utah Department of Corrections exerts considerable control on the school community. Even with these controls, school personnel have been able to establish a cooperative working relationship with the prison program officers. The program officers have great respect for the South Park Academy teachers and administrators. The prison staff appreciates the efforts of the school staff and works to provide space and availability for the inmates to enable them to attend classes.

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

The school supports collegial working relationships across K-16 levels of education. Students are encouraged to enroll in courses offered by the Davis Applied Technology College upon their graduation. Students may also apply to one of the colleges that offer correspondence courses. Many of the faculty and staff members serve as proctors for inmates who are enrolled in the correspondence classes. The

school enlists students who have completed their diplomas to work as tutors to assist students in the classroom. School staff members are in constant communication with the program officers. There is a need to improve communication with the housing officers. ISQ data indicates that there is a need to improve the availability of school counselors and administrative staff. The school indicates that there is a plan to improve availability by rotating counselors and administrative staff.

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

The school had prison staff members complete the ISQ representing the parents; however, it did not include any corrections officers or staff on any self-study teams.

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

A graduation ceremony is held annually to celebrate student success. This event requires efforts on the part of the school as well as the prison community. Other than the graduation ceremony, the school has not established a strategy to communicate the results of school improvement with the prison staff.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends South Park Academy teachers for their support and encouragement for their students. In every classroom visited, the students expressed appreciation for their teachers.
- The Visiting Team commends South Park Academy teachers for creating positive learning environments to promote student learning.
- The Visiting Team commends South Park Academy for providing teacher assistants as housing unit tutors and peer tutors. This is a positive incentive for inmates to learn.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that South Park Academy develop a technology plan to increase curricular opportunities for students and curriculum development and collaboration for teachers.

- The Visiting Team recommends that South Park Academy teachers align their classroom instructional goals with the school's goals to increase numeracy and literacy, as noted in self-study.
- The Visiting Team recommends that South Park Academy continually update its curriculum to improve its rigor and relevance.