

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**The Ranches Academy
Charter School
7789 Tawny Owl Circle
Eagle Mountain, Utah 84005**

May 5-6, 2011



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

**The Ranches Academy Charter School
7789 Tawny Owl Circle
Eagle Mountain, Utah 84005**

May 5-6, 2011

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, May 5-6, 2011, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of The Ranches Academy Charter School 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 Susie Scherer is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at The Ranches Academy Charter School 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 The Ranches Academy Charter School.

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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

12/28/2010

THE RANCHES ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

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THE RANCHES ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

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School Administration

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Jennifer Tillotson Assistant Principal

Counseling

Mr. Davey Erickson Psychologist/Counselor
Dr. Kyle Elder School Psychologist/Assessments

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Mrs. Tamera Buchanan	Mr. Scott McCord	Ms. Ashlee Robbins
Mrs. Emily Buttars	Ms. Polly McGaffin	Mr. Bryant Rogers
Miss Jillaine Clark	Mrs. Angela Milton	Mrs. Carolyn Weimer

THE RANCHES ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

The Ranches Academy Charter School was founded to join parents, teachers, students, and community together to create an environment where students have the opportunity to reach their highest potential and are challenged academically, primarily in the area of reading, writing and arithmetic. This will be accomplished through an academically rigorous, content-rich educational program, in an environment of discipline, respect and parental involvement.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- We believe all students have the ability and the right to learn.
- We believe that all students, parents, staff, and the community, share the responsibility of education.
- We believe all students desire to be treated respectfully and equitably.
- We believe in cultivating a safe and respectful school environment.
- We believe all students have the right to know that we have confidence in their abilities and potential.
- We believe all students have the right to be contributors to their educational success.
- We believe that high expectations influence positive student performance.
- We believe in the lifelong process of learning, and that we have the responsibility to foster that desire in each student.
- We believe an effective classroom individually challenges students and gives them a feeling of success.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

It is the responsibility and goal of the entire Ranches Academy community that every Ranches Academy student will be:

1. **An effective communicator** – will be capable of integrating and using a variety of communication forms and skills such as; written, verbal, non-verbal, listening, and technology to communicate an understanding based on Utah State Standards.
2. **A responsible citizen** – will demonstrate honesty, courage, integrity, kindness, morality, and respect when interacting with peers, adults, and community members to achieve their highest personal potential and be a productive member of the community.

Date of Visit: May 5-6, 2011

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Edy McGee, Indian Hills Middle School, Canyons School District, Visiting Team Co-Chairperson

Deborah Swensen, Hawthorn Academy Charter School, Visiting Team Co-Chairperson

Fred Roberts, Lincoln Academy, Charter School

Jeannie Rowland, Utah State Office of Education

Rachel White, Renaissance Academy, Charter School

VISITING TEAM REPORT

THE RANCHES ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

The Ranches Academy opened in September 2004 in Eagle Mountain with 350 students. The school is a K-6 public charter school. From 2006-2008 the school expanded to include grades 7 and 8. However, parents decided that it would be better to establish a separate 7-9 charter school and returned Ranches Academy to a K-6 school. Until this year, each class had 25 students. To avoid having to pull students to fill vacancies midyear, the school increased class sizes to 26 at the beginning of the year. Some classes have decreased to 25, and some have remained at 26.

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

The school identified the need to improve its writing scores after looking at the 2009 sixth grade students' DWA scores. When the DWA then moved to the fifth grade the following year, the school felt that the DWA scores did not rise significantly. The school invested in the Utah Write program for grades four, five, and six for the 2011 school year, and focused instruction on writing throughout the school. This year 100 percent of the school's fifth grade students achieved proficiency on the DWA.

The Visiting Team found that the school supports its faculty and staff. It has a strong mentoring program. The school participated the past year in CMAP, a mentoring program for charter schools. The school has four trained mentors for seven teachers in the EYE program. The school provides training and support for its paraprofessionals. All paraprofessionals are highly qualified, having either taken the state-required Praxis test or accumulated the required 48 hours of post-secondary credit.

The Visiting Team found that the school is aware of students needing additional services through special education. The special education population has increased over the last few years, as the school has been diligently testing to identify students. The administration has dedicated funds to providing the necessary number of staff members to give one-on-one instruction for these students. The school has also put into place one teacher with an ESL endorsement, should the school ever have an ELL student.

The Visiting Team found that the school had identified that its population was predominantly Caucasian. The school had also started to look at subgroups, finding that many students who would be identified in the economically disadvantaged category had not identified themselves until the school offered free and reduced-price meals this year.

The Visiting Team found that there was a number of other significant finding that the administration and staff had found through the self-study, but had not articulated in the profile portion of the written accreditation report.

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

The Visiting Team found that, while the school included CRT scores in math, science, and ELA from 2005-2010 by subgroup in chart form, the school needs to analyze this data and articulate the trends within grades and between subgroups. If the school would complete this analysis, it would expand understanding of who is learning and who is not.

The school faculty and administration articulated how they collect yearly data on the DIBELS math and reading assessments, attendance, special services, Saxon Math level, Star reading level, special services and parent participation. At the end of the school year, the data is passed from one grade's teacher to the next on a card. This data follows the student throughout all his/her grades at Ranches Academy to help teachers determine the needed differentiated instruction for each student. The Visiting Team recommends that the school add this data to the profile by grade to increase understanding of student learning trends, and that the school look at trends from grade to grade.

The Visiting Team found that the administration and teachers knew the formative data of their individual students. However, this was not included in the profile. An analysis by subgroup and gap analysis by subgroup on the formative assessments (DIBLES, Saxon) and the CRTs needs to be added to the profile to better identify who is learning and who is not.

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

The school's self-study identifies a number of programs and identifies writing as a limitation. However, the programs need to be detailed further. After visiting with the staff and administration, it was clear that there are many other activities being done by the teachers and administration to enrich the learning of students. The Visiting Team found that the school needs to further share its strengths. Further data analysis would assist the school in identifying their limitations. The Visiting Team recommends that the school disaggregate its data by subgroup, gender and grade in both state summative assessments and the school's purchased formative assessments to better identify the school's strengths and limitations. The school can utilize the state Data Display system to do this for the CRTs, and use it as a template to help identify the same types of disaggregated data with formative assessments. This will allow the faculty to clearly identify who is learning and who is not. It is recommended that the school not only chart the data but graph it to identify trends.

The profile does bring out some of the programs that are being developed or have been developed to help students. Further analysis of data and tying in how the programs have turned previous limitations into strengths would enrich the profile.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Disaggregate summative and formative data by subgroup in charts and visual graphs. Conduct analysis of the data by grade and by school.
- Develop common formative assessments at each grade level, and track the resulting data.

**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?*

Because The Ranches Academy is a public charter school, the mission statement was not developed during the self-study process. Rather, the founding members of the school wrote and incorporated it into their charter. The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for collaboratively developing the belief statements and DRSLs. In conversations with stakeholder groups (e.g., Board of Trustees, School Council, administration, and faculty), members of these groups indicated that The Ranches Academy collaboratively developed the present belief statements and DRSLs over the course of several months. During this process, ideas were generated, discussed, refined and then accepted as belief statements and DRSLs. The Ranches Academy also solicited ideas from students that were included in the belief statements.

Earlier in its history, The Ranches Academy had another set of DRSLs that were subject specific. When beginning to write the current DRSLs, The Ranches Academy incorporated the Utah Life Skills into their DRSLs.

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

The Visiting Team found evidence that the mission and belief statements align with one of the DRSLs. The second DRSL is aligned to the mission statement but not to

the belief statements. The Ranches Academy has a Responsible Citizen DRSL. This DRSL aligns with the mission statement because the mission statement mentions responsible citizenship. Furthermore, although the mission statement stresses meeting each individual student's needs, the school also wants its students to understand that they are part of a global community. One of the ways they have done this is by having a shoe drive for Africa that allowed the students to be part of supporting a larger cause. Stakeholders at the school also want the practices of the school to show their community what a charter school is, and to dispel misconceptions about charter schools.

Communication is the second DRSL at The Ranches Academy. The mission statement mentions that the school wants its students to reach their highest potential and to be challenged in the areas of reading and writing—or, in other words, to communicate effectively. Although The Ranches Academy has done extensive work with communication, particularly writing, there is no mention of communication in the belief statements. The Visiting Team recommends that The Ranches Academy revisit the belief statements to ensure that both DRSLs align to the statements.

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

The Ranches Academy is in the beginning stages of assessing its progress with the DRSLs. For the Communication DRSL, the school uses the Six Traits of Writing program. The school has created rubrics to score student writing, and is in the process of selecting anchor papers. The faculty and administration reported an increase in Utah Write scores and the rate of DWA passing. For the Responsible Citizen DRSL, the school uses lightning bolts. Staff members give students a lightning bolt when they are caught being responsible citizens. Each Friday, ten bolts are drawn and the students receive a reward. A secretary tracks this data. The Visiting Team recommends that The Ranches Academy develop a systematic way, perhaps a rubric, to assess its progress in assessing the DRSLs.

- 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 Visiting Team found extensive evidence that the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school. The staff reported that the students are polite, helpful, and caring. They look out for each other. Discipline records show minimal discipline issues. The administration indicated that there is little bullying, fighting, or swearing, and that most of the discipline issues involve minor disrespect.

In discussions with team leaders, the Visiting Team learned that the school has a focus on communication. In addition to the school-wide writing program at the school, all teachers are expected to be communication teachers. For example, The PE teacher has his students do written reports, and the librarian has older students write

plays. Additionally, some teachers have academic word walls in their classrooms. The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for the work it is doing in these areas, and recommends that the school continue to ensure that the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs always guide the school.

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 Ranches Academy focuses school-wide on one Life Skill. It begins with grade levels teaching a lesson about one Life Skill per month. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions reflected in the Utah Life Skills Guide dovetail directly into the school's Wise Skills character development program. Again, teachers implement the chosen strategy during the month and report back their activities to the administrator. Additionally, the teachers have the opportunity to showcase their successes at the next monthly staff meeting.

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

Students have consistent expectations from grade to grade, making it easier to focus on learning. The Visiting Team witnessed mostly direct instruction, with students responding individually or chorally to teachers in answering recall or recitation questions. Culminating activities are used to creatively show student learning. However, the Visiting Team encourages the school to work to integrate inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills into its curriculum and instruction.

- 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 DRSL goals of being an effective communicator and a responsible citizen are in perfect alignment with the Life Skills and Wise Skills. Teachers meet regularly with their grade level partner to evaluate current uses of these skills within their curricula.

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

The Visiting Team found that many teachers utilize both commercial and personal formative assignments to review student learning. All teachers expressed their willingness to reteach any learning outcomes not shown by the students. Common grading practices can also be found within grade levels.

Instruction:

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

The teachers at The Ranches Academy displayed the use of many instructional strategies, from using interactive boards to differentiating student expectations, from attention signals to proximal movement in the classroom. It was evident that the classroom procedures are firmly in place, as students knew how to begin the day, uniform ways to ask for help, and what to do if they finish early. Each of the classrooms is equipped with an interactive board, and the teachers are using these boards daily. Each class makes effective use of breakout/small-group direct instruction. These groups have the benefit of helping slightly struggling students keep up with the learning pace of the class. Activities and movement appear to be incorporated into the majority of lessons.

- 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 students articulated their awareness of improved writing instruction and increased choices of topics and styles, as well as a newfound enjoyment of writing. The combination of instruction, discussion, and writing support The Ranches Academy's Effective Communication DRSL.

Student council members articulated being a responsible citizen, the second DRSL, with their expression of the respect, kindness, and the safety they feel at The Ranches Academy.

- 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 school's professional development is first guided by the director's observations of teachers' needs. The director also offers conference attendance to relevant topics requested by teachers. The faculty meets once per month for school-wide professional development, and it is at this time that teachers attending outside professional development are expected to share what they learned and train the other teachers.

Test scores are reviewed, and gaps in learning are identified. Once identified, an action plan is developed to address the needs. An example of this is the emphasis on writing the school has taken over the last few years. It was discovered that the school's writing scores needed improvement, and so training and curriculum resources were researched and implemented to meet those needs. Utah Writes is a large part of the curriculum change. The students now show a great love of writing, and the majority of the students are grade-level proficient or higher.

Teachers and the paraprofessionals respond a survey at the end of each year that helps identify gaps. The administration takes the information from the surveys and designs trainings based on the results of the survey.

There is ongoing training regarding, instruction, technology, health issues, and a variety of other educational ideas and needs.

- 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 to be proficient in their respective subject areas. Guest professional developers are brought in throughout the school year to present on and follow-up with current research. This ongoing training inspires and updates the teachers on pertinent educational ideas and tools that the School Council and administration feel will benefit the proficiency of the teachers. The staff meets on a monthly basis to discuss various instructional approaches. These activities are followed up with an assignment for implementing at least one aspect of their learning and then reporting their activities back to the administrator.

The teachers appear to have a solid foundation in knowledge and instructional approaches.

- 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 departmental and grade level teams have identified the need to increase the understanding and classroom use of technology as a result of their self-study.

All teachers have access to a personal computer and an interactive board. A part of the budget is specific to technology, with the hope of being able to remain and keep updated on technological advances that are specific to the classroom and education. Outside training is available to the teachers. The school continues to include technology as part of its future.

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 Visiting Team found that The Ranches Academy has a clear understanding of the RTI model and uses assessments to identify the learning needs of students. The school has not developed school-wide assessments, but has purchased a number of formative assessments that are used across all grades. The faculty and staff view these

purchased assessments as having developed school-wide assessments. Each grade uses DIBELS math and reading and Saxon Math. If a student does not do well on the DIBELS test, the school will test students with the DRA. Teachers and paraprofessionals have also been trained on the use of the Star reading program. Teachers also review the CRTs at the beginning of the year and utilize the results to set individual and team goals regarding what they need to address and how. Teachers review the data and utilize it to place students in ability groups for instruction.

However, the Visiting Team found that the faculty and staff have not created common assessments. The teachers spoke about using UTIPS, but each teacher utilizes the items in the UTIPS pool to create individual tests. The Visiting Team recommends that all grade level teams work together to create common assessments for each unit and collaborate with the computer teacher who administers the assessments.

The school has been using Six Traits of Writing rubrics to assess writing. Teachers have established anchor papers and are in the process of modifying the rubrics for each grade level's expectations.

- 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 Visiting Team found that the school has teachers assess the effectiveness of their instructional effectiveness through an evaluation of the previous spring's CRTs. The teachers also evaluate each student's progress using the purchased formative assessments. The process is a consistent and equitable way to track individual progress in achieving academic progress. Extensive support is given to students in special education, and students are grouped according to ability based on formative assessments. The school needs to evaluate the data by grade and subgroups to identify trends.

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

The staff does a review of the CRTs at the beginning of the year. Teachers review formative data on each student three times a year, and readjust ability groups. The data helps to provide clear insight into each student's progress. At the end of the year, teachers pass on the data cards to the next year's teacher, using both data and anecdotal notes to help the next teacher devise effective strategies for that student.

- 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 staff at The Ranches Academy provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate to develop lessons by grade. Teachers discuss and set goals based on data from state summative tests and the purchased formative tests. The teachers work together on the

DIBELS to ensure that in the administration of the assessment they are getting inter-rater reliability. Assessments have been developed individually, such as the kindergarten test given three times a year and individual teacher UTIPS tests. The Visiting Team found that the staff needs to increase its development of a broad range of assessment strategies and develop common assessments.

The Visiting Team did find that the process of developing a broad range of student assessment strategies has begun in the content area of writing. It is recommended that the school expand this process to other content areas.

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

The school administration and faculty did identify that the school is in the beginning phase of developing rubrics as a scoring tool to assess the effectiveness of the action plan in implementing their DRSL. There is some confusion among the staff regarding the scoring tool that is being used to assess the identified DRSL. Since there has been such a focus on the communication DRSL, specifically on writing, many are under the impression that the Six Traits rubrics are the identified scoring tool to assess the DRSL.

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 Visiting Team commends the leadership team at The Ranches Academy for promoting quality instruction and fostering an academic learning climate. In discussions with the administration, they indicated that they support the faculty by providing a teaching assistant for every classroom and by maximizing the hours these assistants are available. In addition, the administration has high expectations and standards for the teachers. Administrators state the expectations at the beginning of the year and then work with the teachers collaboratively to set goals. They expect the teachers to meet regularly as teams and to collaborate.

Additionally, the administrators strive to make certain the paraprofessionals are highly qualified. They are continually letting paraprofessionals and teachers know that they are valued. They model lessons for teachers, and are in the classrooms observing and giving feedback. They recognize teachers for the strengths that they have, and work to find the funds necessary to send teachers to professional development opportunities. They also reward both students and faculty members for

their accomplishments. Because of these actions, students realize that learning is important.

The Board of Trustees and School Council play an active leadership role at The Ranches Academy. These groups set high expectations and standards for the administration and then holds administrators accountable. The Council and the administration have a collegial, collaborative relationship, so they are able to work together well to provide the leadership necessary for creating an environment where learning is valued and expected.

Parents indicate that the culture at The Ranches Academy is positive and fosters learning. They feel that in part this is a result of The Ranches Academy being a school of choice. They are pleased with the direction the school is taking, and feel that their children know that The Ranches Academy is a place of learning. They feel that both their children and the teachers want to be at 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 leadership at The Ranches Academy uses data to make decisions such as placing students in math and reading RtI. Math and reading groups are fluid, and are organized according to data. At the beginning of the year, the staff meets to analyze the CRT data and make decisions about instructional effectiveness of the previous year. The results of this analysis are communicated to the administration.

- 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?*

In discussions with the administration, the Visiting Team learned that the former business manager was replaced because this was not happening. Once the new business manager was in place, the director met with him weekly and communicated almost daily. They reviewed budgets to make certain that the money was being allocated appropriated. The director requires that when teachers are requesting money for activities, they align the activity with the standard they are teaching. The director is always looking for funding sources. The school is frugal with the funds and insists that, when possible, equipment and supplies be shared throughout the building and that items be purchased at the best possible price. To determine how funds are expended, the school uses a priority: student learning and safety. The director also elicits input from the business manager and lead teachers when items are purchased, so that there is more than just the principal's perspective considered. The School Council is aware of all the financial aspects of the 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 leadership at The Ranches Academy focuses on student learning and is willing to spend resources to support teachers and students. They encourage parent volunteerism which they feel helps student motivation. The relationship between the Board of Trustees, the School Council, and the leadership is congenial and appropriate. The Board and Council are accessible but not overbearing. They allow the director to manage the day-to-day affairs of the school. The leadership team communicates with the Board and Council and all the parents of the school. Because of the communication, the school enjoys a high level of parent involvement. In an effort to help the wider community understand the mission and goals of The Ranches Academy, the director has offered tours of the school to community members. The team recommends that the school continue their outreach to the parent and larger community and utilize the parents in this 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 Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for having a systematic way of ensuring that all students have an adult who knows him/her. Evidence of this includes the special education structure. Children who are on an IEP receive one-on-one attention from a paraprofessional or the special education teacher. Students who need psychological services see a psychologist. Students needing occupational therapy receive that. The teachers track student scores each year on the school purchased formative assessments. Additionally, the administration has successfully lowered the student/adult ratio by having an adult instructional aide in each classroom. To further meet student needs, there are groups that meet regularly, including a social skills group and a divorce group. Because there is such a high level of parental involvement, parent volunteers know the kids and the kids know them. Furthermore, because the turnover rate of students and teachers is so low, children of the same family are known by the older siblings' teachers and look forward to the special activities those teachers do. The philosophy at the school is that everyone needs a trainer, and that includes everyone from the principal to the youngest child. The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for establishing a school community that is underpinned with caring and concern.

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

- 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?*

It was evident from reading the self-study and visiting the school that the school improvement plan followed the processes outlined in *Collaborating for Student Achievement*. The Ranches Academy has accomplished this by surveying parents and staff members as well as by gathering information from the focus groups and departmental reports. The school also handed out a professional development needs survey that has helped in designing the action plans.

- 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 first action plan is currently being addressed with professional development opportunities on the Six Traits of Writing model. The school is also planning on having a writing specialist help select anchor papers and to refine the writing rubric, and anticipates that the writing rubric will be complete in June.

One of the ways The Ranches Academy has addressed the second action plan is by establishing a technology committee in charge of teaching the staff how to use the current technology. During the lesson, "homework" is assigned to the teachers to help them learn the new technology. The school also provides classroom support to teachers needing additional support with the new technology. The Ranches Academy also plans to address the second action plan by purchasing document cameras for use in classrooms. Each classroom is currently equipped with an interactive board, which teachers use for reading, Saxon Math, sorts, and reading and writing activities.

The third action plan is to develop the Student Success Team (SST) for at-risk students. This program was implemented last fall, and is still in its infancy. The Ranches Academy has a complete set of forms used in the SST referral process, and is working to get the teachers to use the process more. The Visiting Team

recommends continuing professional development to encourage teachers to utilize the SST more frequently.

- 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 action plans are sound. There is a specific goal statement for developing meaningful assessments to measure school progress; however, the Visiting Team would like to see a more measurable rubric to help the school determine whether the goals have been met. The current rubrics do not have a narrative for each standard. Adding a narrative would make the goal measurable.

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

It is evident, after visiting with the staff members, that the school supports continuous improvement. The faculty and staff have made a good start, with the creation of a writing rubric scheduled to be complete in June. A writing specialist will be working with the staff members to refine the writing rubric.

Each classroom is currently equipped with an interactive board, and continuous training is provided in the area of technology. Every faculty member is given homework following the technology training in order to help them become proficient in the new technology. Classroom support is also given to the teachers who need more help with the new technology. The school is to be applauded for its ongoing technological training.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The school has an obvious culture of relationship building. The teachers at this time work closely with their grade level partners in developing lesson plans, activities, and projects. They also work to develop the relationship and continuity of the grade level paraprofessionals. The students exhibit a freedom and a willingness to share ideas within the classroom and the school overall. The administration is open to ideas and training from the various faculty members. Parents and School Council members contribute time and energy to the overall culture of fostering positive relationships throughout the entire community.

There is a plan that will improve the educational relationship between vertical grade levels. It is hoped that this alignment will lead to an increase in the overall language arts achievement and continuity of the school's curriculums.

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

The school has established a student council, which meets with the council faculty leader, and occasionally with the director. The members of the council are expected to help the rest of the student body feel accepted and comfortable in the school. These students are also expected to be examples of good behavior.

The School Council plays an active role in monitoring and collaborating with the school. Its members discuss items that are working well and items that can be improved. There appears to be constant reflection as to what works and those things that can be improved.

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

Parents are encouraged to be involved in their child's education through service hours, input, and specific learning of the curriculum. Annual surveys are given to the stakeholders and evaluated to identify what areas need to be the focus of more effort to be improved. Each teacher appears to take a personal interest in each child's education. The students' names are known, along with their needs, challenges, and talents. All staff members are invested in the success of the students and the success of the school.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for a school climate that is inviting, warm and fosters respect and learning.
- The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy Board of Trustees and School Council for understanding the difference between governance and management and their respect of those lines.
- The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for the great collaboration and buy-in for the sustained implementation and integrity of the school's mission from all stakeholders.

- The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy staff members and students, who feel safe, respected, valued, and appreciated.
- The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for the shared leadership and student ownership of their education that has been developed.
- The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy for its courage to collect and use data.
- The Visiting Team commends The Ranches Academy teachers for their use of weekly journal entries to encourage self-reflection.

Recommendations:

- The Ranches Academy has begun the process of identifying who is learning and who is not learning, as required by the accreditation process. To complete this process, the Visiting Team recommends that the faculty and staff disaggregate summative and formative data by grade and subgroup in order to analyze trends.
- The Visiting Team recommends that The Ranches Academy continue meeting as focus groups, and make the results of these discussions part of the school improvement process.
- The Visiting Team recommends that The Ranches Academy include the essential questions for grade-level analysis and the guiding questions for focus groups as part of the self-study.
- The Visiting Team recommends that The Ranches Academy continue to work collaboratively within grade levels and develop effective vertical teaming to broaden instructional strategies, including higher-order and critical thinking skills.
- The Visiting Team recommends that The Ranches Academy collaboratively create and then implement common formative assessments at each grade level.
- The Visiting Team recommends that The Ranches Academy collaboratively complete the development of the action plan rubrics by adding descriptors for each point score.