

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Walden School of Liberal Arts
4230 North University Avenue
Provo, Utah 84092**

September 4, 2008



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

**Walden School of Liberal Arts
4230 North University Avenue
Provo, UT 84604**

September 4, 2008

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase 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. It is a three-phased 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, September 4, 2008 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 Walden School of Liberal Arts 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 Director Diana West is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Walden School of Liberal Arts, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about 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 even more 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 Walden School of Liberal Arts.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
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*Board of Regents Appointments

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7/25/2007

WALDEN SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

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Diana West.....Administrative Representative (non-voting)

WALDEN SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

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Diana West..... Director
Valerie Mechling Administrative Assistant
Sashalai Nichols..... Administrative Assistant/Tutor

Counseling

Amy Roan School Counselor/Special Education

Support Staff

Sharon Beecroft Business Manager/Yearbook Advisor
Doug LeBaron..... Custodian

Faculty

Eric Beecroft	Monson Hayes	Sage H. Pearson
Jenessa Benson	Buzz Hollingshead	Joe Perry
Melissa Daley	Jennifer Kearney	Travis Plympton
Tim Drake	Michael Leavitt	Susan Rogers
Matt Ellsworth	Keiko Miller	Ben Wright
Joshua Faulkner	Dian Monson	Carl Young
Weni Frederickson	Roland Monson	Stephanie Young
Joshua Graham	Hannah Muller	Shaunna Zarbock
Shelley Gramajo	Heather Hess Nibley	

WALDEN SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

MISSION STATEMENT

Walden School of Liberal Arts is a school of life-long learners working together, peacefully and collaboratively, to foster the academic, social and emotional development of young people. Employing research-based models of education geared to the developmental needs of children and adolescents, Walden champions student choice and autonomy, authentic research and project work, significant technology integration, field expeditions, community service, and active, inquiry-driven learning experiences. Our mission is to foster the development of happy, competent, self-motivated learners who are dedicated to making a positive contribution to society.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe:

- that all persons come to earth as unique individuals who should be valued and cherished.
- that diversity is the creative tapestry of the world and it is to be sought and celebrated, especially socio-economic and racial-ethnic diversity.
- in a cooperative school that depends on students, teachers, and parents to work together to accomplish the mission.
- that the education of the whole person is an ongoing process that occurs most successfully when life activities at home and school are consistent.
- in the vision of child development, educational philosophy, methodology, and learning environment created by Maria Montessori.
- that respect for the child is the foundation for academic excellence and that the aim of education is to touch the imaginations of children and ignite their innate curiosity and enthusiasm for discovery.
- in a plan of cosmic education, which provides awareness of the universe and each child's unique place in the universe.
- that the ultimate aim of an education is to foster world peace and work toward global justice.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Students will recognize the possibilities of authentic learning and take responsibility for their own education.
2. Students will gain empathy and tolerance for others.
3. Students will develop cultural awareness, community and worldwide outreach, and desire to make a positive contribution to society.

Date of Visit: September 4, 2008

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ted P. Lovato, Consultant, Utah State Office of Education, Northwest
Association of Accredited Schools, Chair

Jerry Ingalsbe, Washington High School, Ogden City School District

Gary M. Jensen, American Leadership Academy

Jeannie Rowland, Charter School Office, Utah State Office of Education

VISITING TEAM REPORT

WALDEN SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Walden School of Liberal Arts is a public K-12 charter school located in a beautiful setting in Provo, Utah. The student body is composed of 260 students who come from 162 families. In 2007-2008, 41 percent of the families qualified for Title I resources. The Walden community is diverse and includes a wide range of socioeconomic status, from children coming from highly professional homes to children from the homes of manual laborers, as well as single-parent mothers and fathers (16 percent) and two-parent households. Minority students make up 11 percent of the student body. Students come not only from Provo City, but from Alpine District to the north and as far as Spanish Fork to the south.

The school is in its fifth year of operation and in year two of being a K-12 school. The school has approximately 20 students per grade level. The Montessori-based curriculum is used in grades K-6.

The school building is newly built and has beautiful Southwestern-style architecture. Landscaping was in progress on the day of the on-site visit.

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

The school believes students come to Walden for a variety of reasons; some are looking for a different experience than the regular public school, while others like the smaller school size. Some enjoy the project learning and the expeditionary experiences required, and some are looking for a successful school experience where they have always failed before. Students who want simply to “complete the assignment” or are looking for total guidance from the faculty have a hard time managing the ability to make choices about their education. It has been Walden’s experience that students who enter the school in the 11th and 12th grades struggle with the environment and academic requirements. Walden has found a smaller bit of success with upper-level high school transfers. Walden has discovered that students who can handle a less structured environment function very well here.

Analysis of the data reveals that Walden students continue to perform well on both normed and criterion-referenced tests. The strongest subjects are the language arts and the social sciences. The school’s science CRT scores have improved over the last two years. Walden believes this is due in part to the science teachers spending significant time doing hands-on learning. Walden has ups and downs in math. They continue to struggle with students who take extended time to learn math concepts, especially in the upper levels. Walden has

received a three-year math grant to offer a one-hour after-school math lab. Teachers may strongly advise that the struggling student attend the lab for additional assistance, or students may attend voluntarily.

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

The Visiting Team found that the self-study lacked inclusion of the school's mission and belief statements, as well as the desired results for student learning (DRSLs). These were provided upon request at the site visit, but the team feels that these are critical components that were missed as part of the self-study needing to be done collaboratively. This presented a considerable challenge for the Visiting Team as it prepared for the on-site visit.

The Visiting Team found that the faculty was aware of the mission and belief statements when they were read to them, but were unaware of what DRSLs are, including those stated in the self-study.

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

The Visiting Team found that the self-study was completed almost entirely by one member of the administration; thus, evidence exists that key stakeholder collaboration and vital input was missing. The self-study was read by a few members of the staff and faculty, but minimal input was included. The self-study is a compilation of data; reflection was not included. The Walden School faculty and staff cannot reflect on strengths and limitations that they have not seen or analyzed.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- The self-study must be created by the faculty and other key stakeholders. There was no way for the Visiting Team to gauge the level or quality of buy-in, consensus, discussion, or reflection, when the report represents one person's perspective. For the next accreditation visit, there must be proof that focus groups exist and are providing the valuable data and other information that is vital for the school to grow in a positive direction.
- The staff and faculty need to study and analyze the data together to celebrate strengths and plan for improvements where applicable. This data should include student test scores, student/faculty retention, satisfaction of stakeholders, and other information the school as a whole sees as valuable. There is not a clear picture of who is learning and who is not. The Visiting Team suggests that the faculty and staff create a strategic plan to: (a) improve unsuccessful practices, (b) continue productive and fruitful methods in educating the whole child, (c) decide

how Walden School knows if the plan implementation is successful using valid and reliable data, and (d) strategize, in a collaborative way, where to go from there.

CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) 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 Visiting Team was disappointed that the school's mission statement, beliefs and action plan(s) were missing from the self-study document and, with further inquiry, discovered that the vital components of their self-study were not developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement.

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

The Visiting Team, upon receiving copies of the mission statement and belief statements on the day of the visit, felt that the documents did indeed support the school's DRSLs (which were included in the self-study).

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

The school must develop meaningful and valid ways to measure the school's progress in assessing the school's DRSLs. How does the school plan to measure the DRSL, "Students will gain empathy and tolerance for others"? Though this DRSL is admirable in itself, the school must define assessment methods to show progress of this particular 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?*

There is evidence throughout that the belief statements are a strong component of the Walden operational philosophy, but there needs to be an improved effort in bringing all key stakeholders on board with the very critical DRSLs and school

mission. A more meaningful way to market those key pieces is needed in order to ingrain them in the school operation and culture.

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 elementary teachers are fully aware of the Utah Core Curriculum and use the Montessori model and resources to provide full curricular alignment. Classrooms are multi-age, rather than a single grade in its own room. For example, there are kindergarten, 1st-2nd grade, 4th-6th grade, and 2nd-4th grade classrooms. This fosters collaboration among the elementary staff. Though the Utah Life Skills are not posted, it is evident to the Visiting Team that within the Montessori philosophy many, if not all, skills are addressed within the classroom instruction.

There is good collaboration among staff members to ensure the Utah State Core Curriculum is being taught across the board. The Language Arts and Social Science departments work closely together to ensure high cross-collaboration. The curriculum is also based on clearly defined standards from the Core and from those listed in course syllabi. It is recommended that further integration of Utah Life Skills material be added to the curriculum.

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

The Montessori model is based on inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills. The elementary instructional time is used for periods of discovery, direct instruction of skills and knowledge, and application of both elements. While visiting the classrooms, it was evident that a wide array of project/assignment offerings provided students choice and ownership. On the day of the on-site visit, every student was actively engaged in a productive task.

Students are challenged and motivated by the intense curriculum emphasis. Teachers involve all students in class discussions and classroom activities. Because of small class sizes and teacher-student involvement, students are actively participating in critical inquiry, problem-solving, and development of higher-order thinking skills. Relevant and meaningful educational experiences are taking place in each classroom. Teachers challenge and motivate students to “think outside the box.” The school's Belief Statements reflect that philosophy.

- 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 elementary faculty collaborates through sharing ideas and resources, as well as capitalizing on teachers' specialties and areas of knowledge. Support and development of curriculum in line with DRSLs could not be determined, as the faculty was unaware of the DRSLs and their meaning.

Some teachers were not aware of what a DRSL was; most were not sure whether their curriculum focused upon or included these DRSLs. More attention needs to be given by the school administration to including teachers and staff in the development of school DRSLs and their integration into the curriculum across the board. Inclusion of agreed-upon, measurable DRSLs in the curriculum will take this effort to the next important level.

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

Students' concept mastery is "tracked" multiple times throughout the day in core subject areas within the elementary grades. Teachers observe and interact with students with the intent of gauging learning, and thus immediately intervene when needed. Since the classrooms are multi-age, there are many opportunities for teachers to guide individual students through the curriculum in a focused manner. Guiding the curriculum with broader use of assessments will be possible once the staff becomes involved in the self-study process.

Elementary teachers and staff effectively use a variety of assessments to ensure that each student reaches the critical learning objectives and goals. Objectives are clearly stated in course syllabi and course expectations and in assessment rubrics. However, more attention needs to be given to ensuring that assessments accurately measure implementation and evaluation of DRSLs. Assessments should clearly and effectively reflect integration and realization of DRSLs.

Instruction:

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

In observing the elementary classrooms, the Visiting Team witnessed the use of a wide variety of instructional strategies and resources. Visual, tactile, verbal and other modes were utilized to provide multiple opportunities for students to learn a concept(s).

Teachers utilized a wide variety of teaching strategies and techniques that greatly enhanced student learning and involvement. Students were effectively engaged and on task in their invigorating classroom environment. Students were pleased with the great variety of instructional techniques used by teachers, and felt they could comment freely and without hesitation in classroom discussions. There was

close and effective teacher-student rapport evident everywhere. Students really relished their participation in the educational process.

- 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?*

Development of instructional strategies will be possible once the staff becomes aware of the DRSLs and involved in the self-study process.

Again, the administration, teachers, and staff need to better integrate the teaching of identified, measurable DRSLs into the instructional curriculum and into the varied strategies used. Teachers need training on the DRSLs and how to effectively include and measure them in their curricula. They need to better comprehend how inclusion of these DRSLs can further help them achieve more effective and balanced classroom instruction.

- 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?*

Elementary teachers who are new to the school receive detailed Montessori training. A parent on the board is a Montessori specialist and provides weekly training to continually increase teacher knowledge and opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, teachers can request resources to attend training outside the school based on their personal professional development needs. While cross-collaboration among teachers and staff is noteworthy, and meaningful professional development is taking place, more emphasis needs to be placed upon additional quantified assessments of instructional needs and their appropriate applications to instructional strategies. Inclusion of "best practices" educational data and methods, plus updated student/parent/teacher survey information, would enhance this process.

- 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 Montessori program provides a strong foundational knowledge of the content areas with alignment to the Utah Core Curriculum. The Visiting Team observed the elementary staff members share their expertise by rotating into various classrooms to work with other students. Every elementary classroom has two teachers, providing diversity of experience and expertise. Teachers hold discussions and reflect during their weekly professional development time. More care needs to be taken to ensure that all teachers are fully certified in the content areas they teach. Teachers are highly proficient in their main Core content

areas for the most part. However, some areas, such as physical education, require further attention. Teachers are genuinely reflective about their own teaching practices. More information should be available to them concerning current research on the latest instructional strategies.

- 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 Visiting Team was not aware of a technology integration plan and witnessed minimal implementation of technology in the elementary level during the visit. On the secondary level, technology and its effective uses are well integrated into the instructional environment. Usage of a variety of instructional technologies was evident in each classroom. The new building Walden occupies this school year truly enhances and facilitates student learning and provides for increased utilization of expanding technologies in the 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?*

Walden School of Liberal Arts has developed a pre-assessment and post-assessment program to track many areas of the curriculum. Reading and writing skills are assessed, and instructional strategies are adjusted to meet learning needs. In addition, all secondary students are given a reading/writing assignment prior to the beginning of the school year. A list of books is sent to the students in July with the writing assignment due before the first week of school.

Pre-assessment math tests are given to transfer students at the beginning of each year in order to determine what the most appropriate math placement is. Science assessments are both project and test based. The school has a firm belief that science should be hands-on, and field trips are designed for this to occur.

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

Walden School of Liberal Arts continues to perform well on both normed and criterion-referenced tests. It appears the school's strongest areas are the language arts and the social sciences. However, during the last two years science CRT scores in the upper levels are on the upswing. Much of the credit goes to the instructors who use extensive hands-on learning and instructing. There is a need for the fourth grade science scores to be examined and for teaching strategies to reflect an effort for improvement.

The self-study document lacked sufficient information with regard to individual student daily and weekly assessment trends. It would be beneficial to teachers and students alike if more attention would be afforded in this vital area. Direct observation in some of the elementary grades showed the Visiting Team that teachers, through collaboration, are focusing on individual student growth on a daily basis.

In the parent survey, it was obvious that the biggest area of concern seems to be the school's inability to make the students' report cards reflect the most current assignments that have been completed or design a process by which to communicate with parents.

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

Walden students' Iowa Test of Basic Skills data show that they are scoring significantly higher than their Utah and national peers—with the exception of third grade, where the students scored below the state average and slightly better than the national average. School leaders attributed this to teacher turnover that was not expected.

In 2006, 44 percent of Walden 8th graders were in the top 10 percent nationally in one or more test sections of the Iowa.

There was not much information gained from the school's self-study document that could show how faculty are using data results to improve instruction where needed.

- 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?*

At the secondary level, the leaders of the school claimed that, due to the smallness of the school, departmental collaboration is difficult at best. It was difficult for the Visiting Team to ascertain how many meaningful and useful professional development opportunities are afforded teachers and other professional staff. At the elementary levels, teachers receive valuable inservice with the Montessori Development Continuum Model.

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

This is an area that is lacking at the school. The leaders must make a stronger continued effort to have total school-wide knowledge and buy-in of the DRSLs and the action plan. Involvement and collaboration are critical.

Some teachers commented to a Visiting Team member that they did not know what a DRSL was. There was evidence that few staff members were involved in the production of the critical self-study document.

CHAPTER 3: NAAS 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?*

It was apparent to the Visiting Team that school leaders care about students and are passionate about the type of education Walden stands for. There is strong evidence that students have a high degree of respect for Walden School of Liberal Arts faculty and staff, which promotes learning and “safe” exploring/questioning of presented material. In addition, the school leadership is very supportive of the teaching staff and students, and is working diligently to ensure all teachers are properly accredited.

With Walden being a new school, it is obvious that much work needs to be accomplished by the school leadership in promoting all aspects of the accreditation process. Collaboration, although difficult at times, should be pursued with the entire staff and in departments to ensure students are getting the benefits of **all** individual talents of the various 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?*

The pre-assessment and post-assessment tests outlined above are excellent tools employed by Walden School of Liberal Arts to determine and track student progress in their achievement. These tests can also be used to determine instructional effectiveness of the faculty as they review student achievement in their various areas of instruction. Again, a strong collaborative program will only enhance the effectiveness of the acquired data. Comprehensive and attainable DRSLs that can bring to fruition the mission and belief statements should also be considered as part of Walden School of Liberal Arts’ program for student progress.

- 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 Walden School of Liberal Arts is governed by a five-member Board of Directors comprised of a Chief Administrative Officer, a Financial Advisor, an Education Advisor, a Parent Advocate selected by the Parent Council, and a Teacher advocate selected by the school's faculty. The School Director serves as a non-voting de facto member of the board. The Board has full authority for running the school and has the responsibility "to promote the mission and vision of the school as outlined in the charter." In addition, the Board must "oversee and evaluate programs."

With these very important responsibilities, it is recommended that the Board, as a key stakeholder, become more involved in the school's self-study and accreditation efforts in the future.

- 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 Visiting Team found that in the school accreditation process more needed to be done to involve the entire school community so that a shared responsibility for student learning would become a part of the school's culture. The entire accreditation process, with the development of the crucial self-study, involves united effort and school-wide knowledge of the process, thus resulting in buy-in by all key stakeholders. If teachers are not well acquainted with or fail to understand the desired results for student learning (DRSLs), it is obvious that the culture of continual improvement will be difficult to achieve.

It was obvious to the Visiting Team, after interviewing several parents, that there is strong support for the school and for how students are treated.

- 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?*

Walden School of Liberal Arts has been able to keep a small student-to-teacher ratio, which encourages individualized engagement between teacher and student in the learning process. It was quite apparent to the Visiting Team that the involvement and close relationship between teachers and students fostered trusting relationships that not only helped students achieve school-wide expectations, but also brought parents and other community members into this process, though not formally mandated.

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 NAAS, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

CHAPTER 4: NAAS 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?*

Walden Academy has developed a comprehensive school improvement plan based upon approved sources and guidelines. The school has begun implementing and working on this action plan. However, the faculty and staff need to become more aware of and more informed about the action plan to ensure proper implementation in their classrooms and within the curriculum. Ongoing analysis and review are required as implementation proceeds to determine what changes and revisions may be necessary.

- 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 required "walkabouts" and the summer service learning trips taken by students and faculty are truly noteworthy. These foster an environment of continuous, life-changing experiences that benefit students and faculty alike. However, enhanced professional development opportunities for faculty and staff are still needed, especially in the middle and high schools. Professional development opportunities also need to be more closely aligned with the school improvement plan and with the developing DRSLs.

- c) *To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

The school improvement plan is adequate at present for addressing critical areas of concern and enhancement. The Visiting Team was concerned, on the day of the visit, that all key stakeholders should be fully aware what the plan is and what the plan should accomplish. It should be monitored closely during the next three years, so as to be adapted and changed as necessary. More emphasis and dialogue need to occur between the administration and faculty/staff, however, to ensure there is appropriate and committed buy-in by faculty, staff, students, parents, and other important stakeholders. All interested parties need to be involved and fully invested in this process over the next three years.

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

There is definitely a positive, progressive environment at Walden Academy that supports ongoing, productive change and continuous improvement in learning for students. Creation of the required focus groups, and their interactive work in the school improvement process, will further enhance the conditions which support even more constructive evaluation and correlation, which can lead to further innovative change, and to a continuing environment for improvement and progress.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

Walden School of Liberal Arts is a liberal arts school organization in Utah County, servicing students from Alpine and Highland on the north to Payson and Santaquin on the south. Most of the school's students come from the Provo/Orem area. The student body is mostly Caucasian, with approximately 10 percent minority groups. It is a Title I school, with nearly 40 percent considered low-income. The students relate that there is a general feeling of acceptance for all students at Walden School of Liberal Arts by most students and all of the staff. Diversity is celebrated. The Community Council is very active in ensuring that all students who want to participate in school excursions have the ability to do so. These excursions foster closeness between students as well as students and staff. Family and other community stakeholders are also brought into the school community through the various instructional programs and out-of-school experiences.

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

As touched upon above, Walden School of Liberal Arts offers several annual trips to their students. These include spring and fall field trips, as well as annual international excursions. There are also visits to various parts of the country to explore higher educational opportunities in the various regions visited. These out-of-the-classroom experiences increase the students' appreciation for other cultures and educational opportunities outside of the local area. They also foster a spirit of community as stakeholders must cooperate to offer **all** students equal advantage for these experiences.

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

Through Visiting Team communication with parents, a lack of opportunity for parents to access up-to-the-minute status of their student's progress was expressed. Conversely, meaningful partnerships within the community are established to extend learning opportunities to students through numerous out-of-school activities. The experiences gained by students during these activities level the playing field for them collectively so that things such as economic status do not dictate opportunity or outcome for individual students.

Parents interviewed lacked knowledge of the whole accreditation process. Educating and involving parents more effectively should be an important goal for educational leaders in the near future.

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

A concern for the team was that **all** stakeholders have not shared in the process of preparing and demonstrating the strengths and positive programs at Walden School of Liberal Arts. It was apparent to the Visiting Team that the school could market itself to the community in a stronger fashion. This said, important stakeholders do provide significant support for the varied programs, excursions, and meaningful educational experiences provided for all students.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the Walden School of Liberal Arts faculty, administration, and support staff for being highly committed, dedicated, passionate, respectful, and respected. There is a positive feeling of mutual, caring relationships.
- The Visiting Team commends Walden School of Liberal Arts for creating an environment where students feel safe, comfortable, and accepted for their diversity as expounded in the school's belief statements.
- The Visiting Team commends Walden School of Liberal Arts for maintaining a small student-to-teacher ratio, enabling student choice and encouraging individualized engagement in the instructional and learning process.
- The Visiting Team commends the members of Walden School of Liberal Arts' secondary staff (middle and high school) for their use of technology and a variety of teaching strategies.
- The Visiting Team commends Walden School of Liberal Arts for the effective, creative, and student-centered use of the Montessori Development Continuum Model in grades K-6. It is apparent to the Visiting Team that the child's education is a flow experience; it builds on the continuing self-construction of the child—daily, weekly, and yearly—for the duration of the program.
- The Visiting Team commends Walden School of Liberal Arts for the in-depth and unique off-campus excursions that are made available to all students. These excursions (expeditions) are an important part of the curriculum and all students are expected to participate.
- The Visiting Team commends the Walden School's Board of Directors for efforts made in building a new, beautiful, well-designed 20,000-square-foot building that is comfortable for students and faculty alike, and therefore fosters effective instruction and learning.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that Walden School of Liberal Arts develop a higher degree of involvement, collaboration and buy-in from **all** stakeholders in the complete accreditation self-study process—specifically, by following Utah's school improvement model, *Collaborating for Student Achievement*—and that

NSSE-designed focus groups be established in an effort to improve the overall quality of the school. In addition, the self-study document must contain all of the key information needed to have a thorough and successful accreditation experience.

- The Visiting Team recommends that **all** teaching and other professionals working with students be properly licensed and endorsed for all subject(s) they are teaching.
- The Visiting Team recommends that a fully qualified librarian/media specialist be on staff. Further, the library should be organized in a useable manner and contain additional shelving in order to increase the collection.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the Walden School of Liberal Arts administration investigate ways to improve effective and continuous communication with parents, especially in the area of student progress and assessment.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Walden School of Liberal Arts implement a substance abuse awareness program for all students at the school.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Walden School of Liberal Arts increase parental involvement in school surveys and update inquiries to reflect the implementation of the school's action plan and desired results for student learning (DRSLs). It is recommended that this be done annually so school leaders and staff members may have an accurate reflection of school programs and performance.