

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**White River Academy
275 West 100 South
Delta, Utah 84624**

November 8, 2010



**Utah State Office of Education
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P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**White River Academy
275 West 100 South
Delta, Utah 84624**

November 8, 2010

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

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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 8, 2010, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of White River 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 Kris Cary is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at White River 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 White River Academy.

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

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** CMAC Representative Appointment

***UCAT Representative

7/22/2009

WHITE RIVER ACADEMY

OWNERSHIP

Justin Nielson..... Owner of Record

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Justin Neilson..... Program Director

Kris Cary..... Academic Director

Counseling

Gary Anderson..... Therapist
Name.....

Staff

Laurel Jones Lead Teacher
Aubrie Jones..... Ed Technician/Teacher
Natalee Oppenheimer..... Office Manager
Cydney Cary Academic Registrar
Barbar Habel Parent Liaison/Nurse
Teresa Butterfield Parent Liaison/Group Leader
Loren Pence Day Support Staff
Levi Bettis Evening Support Staff
Dave Barclay..... Group Leader
Cody Clegg Day Manager
Gary Porter..... Evening Manager
Tom Sinnott Service Project Manager
Tracy Benson Head Cook
Kevin Black Head Maintenance

WHITE RIVER ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT and BELIEF STATEMENTS

To instill in students a lasting gratitude and respect for their families, themselves, and the world around them.

To provide a unique and sound educational opportunity in a safe environment where students can gain a renewed sense of who they are and what they can become.

To support one another in creating a strong and consistent overall program that emulates a more helping and caring perspective on life.

To provide the opportunity for students to be able to express themselves in a variety of appropriate manners, creating an atmosphere where they can feel safe and communicate appropriately with their peers and adults, therefore leading a responsible life.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Demonstrate high levels of literacy in reading, writing and mathematics.
2. Model appropriate social skills.
3. Develop problem solving skills and demonstrate the ability to make informed, objective decisions.

Date of visit: November 8, 2010

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Robert Stillwell, Accreditation Consultant, Utah State Office of Education/Northwest Accreditation Commission, Visiting Team Chairperson

Joette Hayden, Education Director, Falcon Crest RTC

E. Stew Shaver, Principal, Cedar Ridge High School, Sevier School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

WHITE RIVER ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

White River Academy is a private boarding school for boys aged 13-18, located in Delta, Utah. It has been in operation since November 2006. It serves boys from several states outside Utah, as well as some international students.

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

The school is staffed by competent and dedicated personnel, but is stretching its compliance with the licensing standard.

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

The next school profile needs to include more data on who the school serves, the skill levels of the boys when they arrive, and clear measures of what the boys learn while at White River Academy.

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

The self-study was an honest appraisal of the school. The boys are educated in a safe and caring environment. The school needs to expand its course offerings, possibly through the addition of distance learning.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Implement assessments for student learning in addition to TABE.
- Include more student data in school profile.

CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION (NORTHWEST) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

- a) *To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?*

The school used a collaborative approach in determining its educational agenda.

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

There is no clear separation between the school's mission statement and beliefs. The DRSLs are lacking indicators, and in their current state will be difficult to measure.

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

The DRSL indicators are stated in the action plans. In their current state they are not aligned with assessments.

- 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 a positive, caring environment at White River Academy. The school is operating with one secondary endorsed teacher and one elementary teacher.

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 Visiting Team observed that White River Academy demonstrated evidence of coursework alignment with the Utah Core Curriculum. The academic administration and the teachers on campus have developed a full range of course offerings that reflect requirements and standards based upon each of the core areas. The core teacher was able to verbalize and then demonstrate how she uses the core in her day-to-day teaching. As the academic model involves a high level of independent study, each student is required to meet a certain number of defined standards and complete a certain amount of coursework. The rigor and length of the examined syllabi are adequate and of appropriate depth. As a therapeutic boarding school, White River

Academy has blended academic and non-academic time to provide life skills opportunities and activities for students.

The Visiting Team also observed that the staff members at White River Academy work collaboratively in what they call “cottage” meetings that include all members of the treatment team. Teachers, therapists, and residential staff members are invited to attend and discuss specific life skills and experiences needed by each student.

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

The Visiting Team observed a curriculum at White River Academy that engaged most students in inquiry, problem solving and higher-order thinking. Included with these classes are study periods where students can receive assistance and one on one help from the teacher, complete independent research and plan for project presentations. White River Academy students have had opportunities to participate in community education through the use of field trips to local historic sites and many experiential learning activities in the outdoors.

It was noted that certain behaviors on campus could exclude students from participating in school and academics, and the possible dangers related to the length of time that this might extend was brought to the attention of the administration. Problems such as avoidance of school, loss of motivation and possible credit deficiency could result if a student were to be in such a situation for an extended period of time. It was recommended that each case be carefully evaluated for appropriate duration and length of time spent away from coursework.

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

The Visiting Team observed that the teaching staff at White River Academy works collaboratively in support of the school DSRLs, but its members are still working to find tools of measurement and data collection to track progress and monitor effectiveness. Current testing (TABE) does not adequately reflect the high level of literacy desired according to the DRSLs, and the possibility of alternative or increased assessment was discussed to appropriately measure this goal. Current classroom information could be used to collect additional informal data to support the DRSLs of the school, and the addition of rubrics, surveys, and other data collection tools would be helpful in the evaluation of DRSL proficiency.

All areas of the program support the development of social skills due to the nature of positive peer culture and the life skills support that is present in the milieu. The sense of caring and concern for each student and his/her needs was present in the time the Visiting Team spent with the school's students and staff. The well-defined program and curriculum support the development of contributing citizens, but the school lacks the longitudinal study or data to give evidence as to long-term success.

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

The Visiting Team observed that, to some extent, the staff members of White River Academy are using assessments to drive instruction. Students are expected to take the TABE upon arrival and retake it periodically throughout their stay at White River Academy. The initial test results are used to help place students in appropriate courses and to help with levels of instruction for the teachers. It was not clear whether the follow-up TABE testing was viewed as helpful, as it was reported by teachers and staff that students seemed to have low motivation to complete the test or to improve scores.

Members of the staff of White River Academy want all students to learn and be successful. White River Academy has a good student support program in the use of peers to act as mentors and “buddies” when assigned. Informal assessments are also used as indicators of student achievement. As a student falls below the expected level of achievement (as indicated on assignments and test performance), the student receives additional tutoring during other recreational hours.

Instruction:

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

Teachers work in an individualized setting. For example, during the math class, each student works at his or her appropriate level (algebra, geometry, etc.), and the teacher floats around the room assisting where needed. It is the same in language arts, social studies, science, etc. Direct instruction occurs in the elective courses, and the teachers use a variety of instructional techniques in these courses.

- 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 DRSLs are written so that measuring effectiveness is not easily accomplished. The school needs to reword the DRSLs so that they are quantitative, so that instruction can better support them.

- 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 size of the school and faculty has made it difficult to have professional development in place. Perhaps giving the two teachers an occasional day to visit other alternative schools that use individualized instruction might give them a better

understanding of what can be accomplished and help them improve their teaching strategies.

- 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?*

Ms. Laurel teaches math, language arts, physics, financial literacy, and music. While she has not received her teaching endorsement, she does have a provisional endorsement. She has a BS in math and is obviously competent in the subjects she instructs. Ms. Aubrie has a degree in elementary education from Wisconsin but no teaching endorsement. She teaches social science, science, computer technology, art, and health. She is working on becoming endorsed. The school would be well advised to help these fine teachers in obtaining endorsements for their areas of instruction.

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

There does not appear to be a plan to integrate technology into the school curriculum, instruction, or assessments. This area needs to be addressed.

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 observed that the school-wide assessment is the TABE, which is meant to gather baseline data and provide support or change for grade-level work. Due to the private status of the school, there are no state testing requirements. ACT and SAT prep and testing (at local testing sites) are used as needed and as offered. The teachers assess students on a regular basis through informal observation. All subjects have a minimum level for mastery of 80 percent. The teachers also collaborate to express students' individual expectations through their syllabi and assess accordingly.

- 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 observed that White River Academy has compiled some data obtained from the TABE testing, but have yet to assess that data into useable information to drive achievement or increase effective teaching. White River Academy students are actively engaged in research-based coursework and self-paced assessments, and are required to re-learn standards and concepts as necessary to meet the minimum mastery requirement. The Visiting Team also observed the ability of

students to graduate with their diploma either from their home high school or from White River Academy, as appropriate, and encourages the school to use graduation data to provide additional information to indicate the extent of school-wide and individual progress.

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

The Visiting Team observed that White River Academy has a professional staff devoted to the success of the school and the success of each student in meeting the school's academic expectations. Additional data obtained through increased academic counseling and career planning could be beneficial in helping the school to develop a better-rounded profile and overview of who the school serves and its changing needs. The professional staff offers some academic counseling, but student interviews and observations reflect a need in this area.

- 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 Visiting Team observed that the teachers at White River Academy have participated in some district professional development programs, and encourages them to use further education to enhance individual teacher growth. Additional collaboration is recommended to enhance student assessment strategies and to increase opportunities for students to display mastery of content knowledge in the classroom. Currently, student assessment is mainly measured using individual course syllabi in conjunction with the level of mastery required. The Visiting Team also observed some evidence of informal "portfolio" assessment, and discussed how to further develop and use this as a tool to monitor student growth.

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

The Visiting Team believes that the DRSLs identified for White River Academy's education department needs to be more measurable, and data obtained used to help guide and define the action steps and growth in the school. Initial positive collaboration is present, and all teachers and administrators involved with the school goals are striving for student success. The Visiting Team observed that the school is emerging in its knowledge of how to track and assess DRSLs, and that good discussion is taking place on immediate steps to start this process in identifying scoring tools.

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 leadership renovated the old Delta Hospital and created a clean, healthy building with adequate lighting, furniture and other ancillary equipment in order to provide an appropriate educational environment.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?*

The school is using the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education) several times a year in order to monitor student educational growth. It would be advisable to have more than one version of that test in order to better validate the results.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?*

The school leadership provides sufficient management to ensure a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment that aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement. It would be an added benefit if a few more computers with Internet capability were available for student use.

- 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 school leadership appears to be working toward empowering the entire school community to help in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, student input could be listened to more often.

- 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?*

While the teachers do an admirable job of assisting students in the learning process and course selection, this is a type of student that needs a counselor present to address personal problems that deal with education and provide an ear and voice in helping them plan and process post-high school education.

School Services:

This standard is dealt with in the school's Northwest Annual Report, which requires specific responses and information regarding student support services, guidance services, health services, library information services, special education services, and family and community services.

Facilities and Finances:

This standard is addressed in the school's annual report to Northwest, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

Culture of Continual Improvement:

- a) *To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using Collaborating for Student Achievement, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process, that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?*

The school did use the Collaborating for Student Achievement process, and included appropriate participants in the process.

- 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 school staff is small, and opportunities for professional development are limited. The school needs to learn assessment strategies to monitor student achievement.

- 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 include action steps, timelines, estimated resources and staff members responsible. They do not indicate how success will be evaluated.

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

The school strives to improve. The teachers in place are quality instructors, but there is some teaching out of endorsed areas. It has been suggested to the school that they consider adding more courses via distance learning and use the teachers they do have as proctors and tutors in the areas in which they are not endorsed.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

There is a high degree of teamwork evident among the staff. All are concerned for the well-being and success of the students.

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

White River Academy Students perform community service projects in Delta. They have helped out at the Recreation Center and at ball fields. There is good communication between the academic and residential components of the program.

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

The self-study process involved all stakeholders. Since this is an educational accreditation, the Academic Director led the self-study efforts.

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

The Board and owners are involved in the program on a daily basis. Parents were surveyed for the self-study, and a large representation of the staff was present for the de-brief meeting.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends White River Academy for the quality of Laurel Jones' teaching and for her ability to accommodate varied student needs.
- The Visiting Team commends White River Academy for the cohesiveness of its program and the effective use of the existing building to suit the academic climate.
- The Visiting Team commends White River Academy for the high level of communication among the staff members.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that White River Academy provide academic counseling to help students increase their awareness of transitional options after leaving the school.
- The Visiting Team recommends that White River Academy provide an ACT/SAT Prep course.
- The Visiting Team recommends that White River Academy extend special education services to qualified students and assure that appropriate evaluation procedures are in place.
- The Visiting Team recommends that White River Academy rework its DRSLs so that they are measureable.
- The Visiting Team recommends that White River Academy behavior intervention plans for students be evaluated to ensure that they do not negatively affect educational opportunities.
- The Visiting Team recommends that White River Academy improve teacher licensing to better address the Standard. Distance learning and additional course offerings should be considered.
- The Visiting Team recommends that White River Academy collect, use and report data on student achievement.