

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Discovery Academy
105 North 500 West
Provo, UT 84601**

September 15, 2003



Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Discovery Academy
105 North 500 West
Provo, Utah 84601**

September 15, 2003

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

**Steven O. Laing, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

Patti Harrington, Associate Superintendent

**Vicky Dahn, Director
Curriculum and Instruction**

**Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist
Curriculum and Instruction**

Salt Lake City, Utah

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	ii
Utah State Board of Education	iii
Discovery Academy Administration and Staff.....	1
Members of the Visiting Team	2
Visiting Team Report.....	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	3
Chapter 2: The Self-Study Process	5
The School Profile	5
Beliefs and Mission Statement.....	6
Desired Results for Student Learning.....	7
Analysis of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness.....	8
Analysis of the Action Plan	8
Chapter 3: Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) Standards I-XI	9
Chapter 4: General Commendations and Recommendations	9

FOREWORD

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (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 15, 2003, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of Discovery 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 Jonathan Jones is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for Discovery Academy students, 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 adequately meet the needs of the students of Discovery Academy.

Steven O. Laing, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

District 1

Teresa L. Theurer
66 Canterbury Circle
Logan, UT 84321
Phone: (435) 753-0740

District 6

Tim Beagley
3084 South 3550 West
West Valley City, UT 84119
Phone: (801) 969-6454

District 11

David L. Moss
1964 Hawk Circle
Sandy, UT 84092
Phone: (801) 572-6144

District 2

Greg W. Haws
5841 West 4600 South
Hooper, UT 84315
Phone: (801) 985-7980

District 7

John C. Pingree
1389 Harvard Avenue
Salt Lake City, UT 84105
Phone: (801) 582-5635

District 12

Mike Anderson
455 East 200 North
Lindon, UT 84042
Phone: (801) 785-1212

District 3

Edward Dalton
1323 Bryan Road
Erda, UT 84074
Phone: (435) 882-4498

District 8

Janet A. Cannon
5256 Holladay Blvd.
Salt Lake City, UT 84117
Phone: (801) 272-3516

District 13

Linnea S. Barney
1965 South Main Street
Orem, UT 84058
Phone: (801) 225-4149

District 4

Joyce W. Richards
930 East 5000 South
Ogden, UT 84403
Phone: (801) 479-5370

District 9

Denis R. Morrill
6024 South 2200 West
Taylorsville, UT 84118
Phone: (801) 969-2334

District 14

Dixie Allen
1065 South 500 West
Vernal, UT 84078
Phone: (435) 789-0534

District 5

Kim R. Burningham
932 Canyon Crest Drive
Bountiful, UT 84010
Phone: (801) 292-9261

District 10

Laurel Brown
5311 South Lucky Clover Ln
Murray, UT 84123
Phone: (801) 261-4221

District 15

Debra G. Roberts
Box 1780
Beaver, UT 84713
Phone: (435) 438-5843

Jed H. Pitcher*

Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield of Utah
P.O. Box 30270
Salt Lake City, UT 84108
Phone: (801) 583-2375

Sara V. Sinclair*

1340 North 1500 East
Logan, UT 84341-2851
Phone: (435) 754-0216

Steven O. Laing
Executive Officer

Twila B. Affleck
Secretary

**Board of Regents Appointments*

10/30/03

DISCOVERY ACADEMY

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Brent R. Hall, LMFT.....Executive Director
Jonathan Jones..... Headmaster
Momilani Tu’ua..... Secretary/Registrar

Faculty

Dorothy Ah Quin
Andrea Banks
Greg Beveridge
Clark DeLange

Mark Edwards
Elaine Layosa
Erin Presley
Steve Revelli

Vera Stephens
Max Thomas
Larry Witherspoon

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Dr. Ralph P. Vander Heide, Consultant in School Accreditation,
Visiting Team Chairperson

Georgia Loutensock, Accrediation Specialist, Utah State Office of Education

Judith H. Vander Heide, Consultant in School Accreditation

REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM

DISCOVERY ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION - DESCRIBING THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT, THE SELF-IMPROVEMENT PLAN, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL, AND OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

On September 15, 2003, a team of three educators (the Visiting Team) visited Discovery Academy, a *special purpose residential school* for boys and girls ages 13 to 18, to complete a site evaluation as part of the requirements for accreditation by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) and the state of Utah. Discovery Academy has been accredited by these two bodies since 1990. The purpose of the visit was to fulfill part of the requirements for Discovery Academy to maintain full accreditation status as a **special purpose school** by the NAAS and the state of Utah. The visit was to carry out the second step in the ongoing self-improvement/accreditation process, a review of the school's self-study by a team of peers and on site evaluation visit. The first step in the process is completion of the self-study by stakeholders associated with the school. The third and last step is to continue the self-evaluation and to achieve the objectives of the school's self-improvement plan. It is expected that the self-improvement process will be "internalized" and become part of the culture of the school. Ongoing self-review is essential for the improvement of teaching/learning and the accomplishment of specific schoolwide learning objectives.

The school had prepared for the visit by conducting a thorough self-study over a period of two years. The study was based on the six-step procedure advocated by the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) and the state of Utah, and therefore made use of the NSSE manual, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance* by (Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Project Director) as well as *Collaborating for Student Achievement*, the manual specifically designed for use in accrediting schools in Utah that is based on the NSSE materials. The school's self-improvement plan (SIP) is based on the NSSE recommended form. A brief analysis of the SIP appears in section B-5 of this report.

Discovery Academy is a private residential senior and junior high school located in Provo, Utah. Dr. and Mrs. Eugene Thorne, who formulated and implemented the vision and operation of the academy, founded the school in 1989. Dr. Curtis Van Alfen consulted with the Thornes in creating the competency-based tutorial system that is employed today. The educational philosophy and program of the school have continued to develop through ongoing consultation with educational administrators and teachers.

The current school facility became the home of Discovery Academy in 1992. It was originally built in 1902 as the Third Ward Assembly Hall of The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints (LDS), and is an historical site in Provo. The entire building was renovated for use by Discovery Academy.

In April 2003, the school was purchased by the Redcliff/Ascent Educational Corporation, which operates several youth therapeutic facilities. The addition of Discovery Academy provides a residential therapeutic facility centered in an accredited academic program.

Under the direction of a state-licensed staff of professional educators and support personnel, the Academy provides a competency-based tutorial format built around guided **individualized learning** with appropriate **group** activities.

The first of three components of the overall program, **academics**, is directed and tutored by teachers and aides in order to support student progress in the other two components of the academy's program, **individualized therapy** and **life skills**. The faculty includes teachers who are state-endorsed in special education and qualified resource teachers; therefore, the Academy is able to adapt Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) to meet specific needs of students in learning and accommodations.

Discovery Academy provides separate instructional areas for boys and girls. Each contains a "concept room," computers, and a testing area. The facility also includes a dining hall, lounge areas, a gymnasium, and an outdoor field for physical education and recreation. Community resources are available for school needs and student activities. These include university and college (BYU and UVSC) museums and libraries, health clubs, and special event opportunities. Deseret Academy is also conveniently located in an area that offers a variety of outdoor recreational activities.

The school depends heavily on the Provo City Library to augment and supplement class work. As dictated by need, teachers take students to the library for research and to acquire materials needed for school assignments. Some supplementary materials are available within the school's own concept rooms.

Various school activities and therapy sessions take place during the morning hours at Discovery Academy. Academic classes are held in the late afternoon and evening. Therefore, the Visiting Team met at 3:00 p.m. with the school secretary/registrar and continued this meeting including the headmaster at 3:30. Then at 4:15 teachers arrived and were included in the meeting to discuss various aspects of the work of the school. A succinct overview of the purpose and procedures of Discovery Academy was presented. Following this meeting, the Visiting Team toured part of the school, ate dinner with the boys, visited with a cross section of students, and visited classrooms.

Boys (presently 24) and girls (presently 17) are strictly separated. Their classes are held on different floors of the building, and their meals are served at different times.

Instruction is highly individualized. Students are tested, screened, and interviewed upon arrival, and past schoolwork is evaluated. They are then assigned learning tasks, each of which consists of mastering, at an 80 percent level, "concepts" in the various subjects.

These concepts are outlined on assignment sheets. Upon indication of sufficient mastery of a given concept, the next is assigned. Teachers, therefore, work with small groups of students, perhaps 6, 8, or 10, and monitor progress on an individual basis. In addition to the teachers, each learning area (concept room) is staffed with two or three monitors.

The school has in place a self-improvement plan (SIP) that has been developed by the total staff following the assessment of weaknesses and strengths in the learning areas based on the evaluation of parent and student evaluations, teacher assessments, and data derived from the school profile. The SIP focuses on three areas (“action plans”): (1) thinking and reasoning skills, (2) communication skills, and (3) expanding and integrating knowledge.

Each action plan includes a goal statement, action steps, timeline, estimated resources, and person(s) responsible for overseeing the accomplishment of the goals.

CHAPTER 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE RESPONSE TEAM’S PERSPECTIVE AS TO THE WORK OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL IN ADDRESSING EACH ASPECT OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

The School Profile:

The profile of Discovery Academy adequately portrays the school population, environment, curriculum, and other relevant information about the school with emphasis on its mission, philosophy, and educational direction. A systematic process of collecting and managing data is in place. Data concentrated on the performance of sixty-one students who attended the school over a two-year period. Of these sixty-one students, thirty-six graduated with high school diplomas. The other twenty-five left the school at various grade levels upon completion of their therapeutic programs.

The ongoing profiling of the school accomplishes the following things:

- Provides a comprehensive description of the school.
- Includes the identification of the school’s strengths and limitations, as well as emerging issues.
- Provides a description of the “big picture” about the performance of the school.

Profiling information included the following:

- Some student demographic, ethnic, and gender data
- Student performance data (national measures, school performance-based measures, additional performance indicators)
- School characteristics
- School staff data

- Parent, faculty, and student opinion and assessment data
- Stakeholder perspectives on the quality of education

The above categories were further broken down to provide specific information in the following areas:

- Scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), both upon entering (“in”) and upon leaving (“out”) the school.
- Grade point average improvement
- Percentage of improvement and grade level increase
- Profiles of teachers and administrators
- Teacher enrollment and assignments
- Comparison of student/parent/teacher opinions

Beliefs and Mission Statement:

Beliefs

The study lists four “general statements of belief” and fifteen “specific statements of belief.”

It appears to the Visiting Team that the school beliefs are an outgrowth of many years of profiling, learning, changing, and positive growth. The beliefs are free of jargon and may be understood by the general public and all stakeholders. They seem to express what the school wants expressed. School personnel are willing to make a commitment to the direction indicated by the beliefs, philosophy, and principles.

However, the Visiting Team could determine no reason for having two sets of beliefs. Furthermore it seems, upon careful perusal, that there is duplication among the beliefs. The Visiting Team concluded that some could be combined, or found that the primary concept of one is already embodied in another. It is suggested that the beliefs be reviewed for the primary purposes of reducing the high number and stating even more succinctly that which the stakeholders of Discovery Academy believe.

There is one general belief:

- All activities of the school should have a clear educational purpose that supports and enriches personalized academic programs.

Discovery Academy also has five specific beliefs:

- Students need to apply their learning in meaningful contexts.
- A safe and physically comfortable environment promotes student learning.
- Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and

intellectual needs.

- Cultural diversity can increase students' understanding of different peoples and cultures.
- All students can learn.

Mission Statement

The school has two mission statements, labeled “Our Mission” and “The Stated Mission of the ‘New Discovery Academy.’” “Our Mission” is a concise statement that appears to express succinctly the mission of the school as derived from the belief statements. The statement is as follows:

Within the Mission of the total program of Discovery Academy, the Mission of the School at Discovery Academy is to nurture and sustain the academic success of our students within the Academy’s three-part program of individualized therapy, life skills, and education. To nurture this success, the School seeks to maintain a safe, orderly, and friendly environment that promotes learning, human dignity and personal responsibility.

The Visiting Team sees no need for the second mission statement. However, the Visiting Team points out that the first sentence of the second statement most concisely states what Discovery Academy is about:

“The New Discovery Academy is a clinical boarding school whose mission is to inspire each student to a quest for excellence in all areas of life.”

The remaining several sentences simply expound on the first one.

The Visiting Team recognizes both mission statements as being meaningful to the school’s stakeholders and providing worthwhile, realistic objectives for school personnel. Both describe a compelling purpose and direction for the academic division of the school. The Visiting Team reminds the school that a mission should be clear, concise, and precise, and reflect student learning as the top priority of Discovery Academy. It should motivate, inspire, and reflect a collective vision that focuses on the role the school must assume in shaping the future. Such a mission statement is based upon and aligned with the school beliefs. Therefore, the mission statements should be revisited in order to create a single statement that achieves the objectives outlined above.

Desired Results for Student Learning:

The School Improvement Team at Discovery Academy, in collaboration with faculty, administrators, and some parents, has identified the following three desired results for student learning (DRSLs):

- Learning to Learn
- Thinking and Reasoning Skills
- Communication Skills

For each of the above three DRSLs, concise and meaningful indicators are given for guiding learning and assessment. The Visiting Team observes that Discovery Academy followed closely the guidelines of NSSE (*School-wide Goals, Survey of Goals*, etc.) for establishing DRSLs.

Members of the Visiting Team concur that the DRSLs are consistent with the school's beliefs, philosophy, and mission statements. The DRSLs reflect meaningful, realistic, yet challenging overall goals for the students. The Visiting Team reminds the school that the entire self-study should be built around the DRSLs, which form the very heart of the self-study procedure.

Analysis of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness:

A holistic approach is evident which integrates values and lifelong learning skills, and some cross curriculum instruction (teachers pointed out, for example, that they could readily confer with each other in their nontraditional school setting). Furthermore, teachers and therapists regularly confer. A variety of teaching methods was not observed. It was observed and reported to the Visiting Team by teachers, administrators, and students that the school employs only limited use of computers for augmenting and supporting instruction.

An analysis of the school's instructional and organizational effectiveness was conducted based on research-based principles of quality systems of teaching and learning. Each member of the faculty and administration was involved in the review and analysis of the school's instructional and organizational effectiveness. Both strengths and limitations were identified. Instructional and organizational effectiveness was analyzed in accordance with the recommended procedure outlined in the NSSE manual *Indicators of Schools of Quality*.

Analysis of the Action Plan:

The three action plans contained in the school's self-improvement plan (SIP) are aligned with the school's profile, beliefs, mission, DRSLs, and analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness. The areas of emphasis appear to be appropriate for the students at Discovery Academy. It appears that the action steps of the three plans can be accomplished within the timeline given (all are 2003 to 2006). It is recommended that the school periodically review the plans in order to make certain that appropriate and sufficient attention be given to each.

It is commendable that each action plan has a specific goal statement, and that each has indicated action steps, a time line, estimated resources, and persons responsible. For

example, the goal statement for Thinking and Reasoning Skills is “Students will demonstrate improved and effective development of thinking and reasoning skills.”

**CHAPTER 3:
THE SCHOOL’S ADHERENCE TO THE NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF
ACCREDITED SCHOOLS STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION, THE STATE
OF UTAH CORE CURRICULUM AND THE UTAH LIFE SKILLS**

Discovery Academy, with minor deviations, meets the eleven standards of the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS). The school meets the requirements of the State Core Curriculum. However, the Utah Life Skills, while being taught in various departments and in varying degrees of thoroughness, are not clearly articulated in the curriculum. All teachers should become conversant with and integrate the seven life skills into the curriculum.

**CHAPTER 4:
GENERAL COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Discovery Academy for closely adhering to the manuals and surveys of NSSE in conducting the self-study. Indeed, the school carried out the self-study “to the letter.”
- All school personnel are commended for being most frank and willing to improve.
- School personnel are also commended for being cordial and helpful, and for fostering a nurturing, caring, and goal-directed atmosphere.
- Teachers and administrators are commended for making a great effort to meet the requirements of the State Core Curriculum.
- The administration and owners are commended for making ongoing improvements to the facility, and for maintenance.
- The administration is commended for conducting follow-up studies with students who have left the programs, and with their parents.
- The faculty is commended for making certain that each student improves his/her grade point average and grade level as well as test scores during his/her stay at Discovery Academy.

- The faculty is commended for the formal and informal “teaming” that occurs at Discovery Academy.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that owners, administrators, and faculty pursue ways to increase the use of technology (i.e., computers in classroom instruction and for homework). Improvements are necessary in both hardware and software. The Visiting Team recognizes that filters need to be used in order to prevent misuse of computers.
- It is recommended that administrators and teachers explore strategies to improve instruction for the purpose of better meeting individual needs and relying less on the packets of “concepts” that are now being used. Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of more “direct teaching.” All these students said they had great difficulty in “learning on their own.” The Visiting Team recognizes that, due to transience, the varied backgrounds of students, various learning styles, and varied innate learning ability, meeting the unique needs of each student is difficult indeed.
- It is recommended that the faculty consider using a greater variety of assessments, again for the purpose of better meeting differing learning styles.
- It is recommended that the administration work with the owners of Discovery Academy to agree upon a “dedicated allocation” of funds for the purpose of meeting the educational needs of students. This refers to library needs, technology, etc.