Utah Program Improvement Planning System (UPIPS) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT NORTH STAR ACADEMY January 31, 2008

The attached report contains the results of the first two phases (Self-Assessment Process and On-Site Validation Visit) of the Utah Special Education Program Improvement Planning System (UPIPS). This Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process is conducted by the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) Special Education Services (SES), as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B. The process is designed to focus resources on improving results for students with disabilities through enhanced partnerships between charter school and district programs, USOE-SES, the Utah Personnel Development Center, parents, and advocates.

The first phase of this process included the development of a Program Improvement Plan. The second phase, On-Site Validation, conducted in North Star Academy on January 11, 2008, included student record reviews, interviews with school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Parent surveys were also mailed to a small sample of parents.

This report contains a more complete description of the process utilized to collect data and to determine strengths, areas out of compliance with the requirements of IDEA, and recommendations for improvement in each of the core IDEA areas.

Areas of Strength

The validation team found the following:

General Supervision

- In August 2006, Ms Hermansen, the special education teacher, did a faculty training on the special education referral process and appropriate pre-referral interventions. The teacher focus group results reflected an understanding of what was presented in this training.
- In August 2006 the speech and language therapist introduced an intervention form to use and
 implement. She created this form to give teachers a variety of specific pre-referral interventions
 for students with communication disorders. Some teachers mentioned that this was helpful, in
 addition, in the file review the documentation using this form was clearer and used more often by
 teachers referring students with communication disorders.
- Kathie Hermansen will finish her coursework for certification in the spring of 2008. She has taught 3rd and 4th grade in the regular education classroom. In addition, she has 10 years of experience as an instructional aide for special education.
- NSA participates in Character Counts Education, which helps them learn life skills. Students
 recognize their connection to the community and develop leadership skills by working with
 community leaders and participating in organized service projects.
- All teachers at NSA are certified and 96% are highly qualified.
- All students create a Total Talent Portfolio and participate in Enrichment Clusters as part of the School-wide Enrichment Model (SEM).
- Founders of NSA believe the continued operation of a school community requires the participation of all stakeholders including community, staff and families.
- NSA utilizes the Core Knowledge Sequence to provide a framework to guide their curriculum.
- Teachers are encouraged to utilize a variety of hands-on activities and experiences to reach students at all levels and foster a love of learning.
- During student observations, a comprehensive student report was made. It reported a clear correlation between the student's needs, goals and services as outlined in IEP. Another observation showed a teacher provided a correct training model for the student, and this method was used with several students. In addition; specialized instruction and accommodations were observed.
- Most students described getting more help with understanding their assignments during student focus group surveys.
- All students surveyed attended at least one of their IEP meetings.
- Six out of nine students said they would recommend NSA special education program to their peers.
- A general education teacher, when interviewed, indicated having a good level of knowledge on referrals, evaluation process and responsibilities in IEP process.

- The Stakeholder Steering Committee was involved with gathering information from teachers and parents. The committee has a variety of expertise and gave input in areas as data were gathered and analyzed.
- School was welcoming, friendly and positive.
- Child-find statement posted on the school website.
- Students report making progress in math and reading with assistance from special education program.
- Staff meets weekly to discuss individual student needs. This provides collaboration opportunities between special education and general education staff.
- Review of existing data by the team was used for all reevaluations, as well as some initial
 evaluations.
- Initial evaluations completed within 45 school days of receipt of parent consent.
- Forms were in compliance with Utah requirements.
- A referral process, as part of the LEA child find procedure, was in place.
- Special education files were stored in a locking cabinet with an Access Authorization list attached.
- The special education teacher provided annually confidentiality training for all school staff.
- North Star Academy provided differentiated instruction training to all staff, which then allows them to implement the instructional strategies school-wide.
- CRT scores are included in special education files. School personnel use U-PASS results to drive instructional practices.
- North Star Academy made progress on the Special Education Annual Performance Report (APR) indicator targets and made adequate yearly progress (AYP) on U-PASS for 2006 and 2007.
- General education teachers are aware of student IEP needs and receive a copy of relevant portions of the IEP.
- Evaluations were comprehensive and addressed all areas of student educational need.
- Eligibility determinations were current and included in special education files.
- Parents report that North Star Academy encourages their involvement as a means for improving services for their students with disability.

Parent Involvement

- Overall, the parents are very pleased with the special education services at NSA.
- Parents like the individualized instruction and they have high praise for the special education staff
- Parents are highly involved with their children and their education.
- 95% of parents reported having a positive experience during the IEP meeting and felt their contribution was listened to and considered by the IEP team, as well as that their child's needs were adequately addressed.
- 85% of parents indicated that student is making progress towards IEP goals.
- Several parents noticed significant improvements in their child's performance in school.
- Documentation was included in all special education files regarding opportunities for parent involvement and parent input received for eligibility and IEPs. Parents also reported having the opportunity to provide input.
- Copies to parents were documented for evaluation consent, review of existing data, eligibility determinations, and IEPs.
- Notice of Meetings complete and included in special education files for eligibility and placement.
- Consent from parents obtained before evaluations conducted and placement in special education.
- Procedural Safeguards provided, summarized, and explained to parents at required intervals.
- Prior written notice of proposed actions regarding eligibility, IEP implementation, and placement review are provided to parents.
- Parent input is solicited and utilized during student evaluations.
- IEPs include documentation of how progress on IEP goals will be measured and when it will be reported to parents. Progress reports were included in the special education files.
- Parents feel that their student's needs are addressed in the IEP, that they receive their special education services consistently, and are making progress towards IEP goals.

Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment

- NSA made AYP for the school year 2005-2006 and students with disabilities made AYP and showed progress on U-PASS.
- NSA uses Saxon Math and all students are taught at their ability level.
- In elementary grades (K-6), each teacher has a classroom aide. Classroom aides help all students, including students with disabilities.
- A math lab is provided after-school for students needing additional help on their homework.
- 95% of parents indicated their child's regular education teacher was aware of learning needs.
- NSA uses the elementary and middle school teacher collaboration and student staffing meetings as the LRBI committee.
- The elementary and middle school meetings, now separated, allows for additional focus on appropriate student interventions.
- Continuum of special education services and placement options are available at North Star Academy.
- Placement decisions are determined by the IEP team, based upon student needs.
- IEPs are scheduled at mutually agreeable times for all team members.
- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statements include current data and how the disability affects the student's progress/involvement in the general education classroom.
- IEP goals are measurable and address areas of concern for students, as documented in the PLAAFP statement.
- IEPs are current and included in special education files.
- IEPs are developed within 30 days of eligibility determination.
- Special education and related services are specific, documented in IEPs, and include location and time. IEPs also include information regarding supplementary services and program modifications and supports needed. U-PASS participation is also documented.
- Special factors are considered and documented on IEPs.
- Extended school year (ESY) decisions documented on IEPs.
- IEPs were thorough and complete.
- U-PASS scores are used to drive instruction practices and to determine professional development needs.
- IEP team membership includes all required team members.
- IEPs and placement are reviewed at least annually.
- Physical education is available to students with disabilities in the same manner as it is provided for students without disabilities.
- Students, when interviewed, could accurately describe the function of an IEP and felt that special education services have helped them progress academically.
- Some students attend their IEP meetings.
- During a classroom observation, student accommodations were provided in accordance with the IEP
- Special education staff are knowledgeable and care about their students, as reported during interviews and parent reports.
- Strong school administrator knowledge regarding functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP).

Transitions

- The special education teacher recognizes that on occasion she will have some students who are 15 and 16 before their next IEP is due and that a transition plan is necessary.
- School staff were aware of the purpose of school to post-school transition planning and could describe some considerations for the planning.

Disproportionality

- NSA is a charter school that receives students based on choice through a required lottery system.
 No restrictions on race, academic achievement, or disabilities are used to enter the lottery. Once children are registered at NSA, if they are a student with disabilities, NSA addresses their needs.
- Special education files contain documentation of primary home language.

 Evaluation procedures are followed for students determined eligible as having a specific learning disability and speech language impairment. No disproportionality noted resulting from inappropriate evaluation and eligibility procedures.

Areas of Systemic Noncompliance*

- Reevaluations not completed within three years of previous eligibility determination.
- Evaluation Procedures: evaluation procedures not followed;
 - Intellectual Disability Multiple measures (formal and informal) not documented; an individual
 test of intelligence which documents significant sub-average functioning not documented; if
 verbal and performance scores are discrepant, further evaluation not documented; academic
 achievement not documented; significant deficits in adaptive behavior not documented in
 100% of applicable reviewed files.
- Transition Plans: Transition plans did not contain a course of study; post-secondary training or
 education goals not documented; post-secondary employment goals not documented; postsecondary independent living skills goals not documented; transition plans did not contain
 documentation of age-appropriate transition assessments; IEPs did not contain transition services
 which facilitate movement from school to post-school.

*These areas represent items where the visiting team could not locate appropriate documentation of requirements of IDEA 2004 and Utah State Special Education Rules in student records or other data sources.