

Utah Program Improvement Planning System (UPIPS)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT
THE RANCHES ACADEMY
March 26, 2007

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 completion of the Self-Assessment and the development of a Program Improvement Plan. The second phase, On-Site Validation, conducted in The Ranches Academy on March 13, 2007, included student record reviews, interviews with school administrators, teachers, and parents, and classroom observations. Parent surveys were also mailed to a small sample of parents. Information from these data sources was shared in an exit meeting attended by staff from The Ranches Academy.

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

- Administrators were happy with the overall running of the special education program.
- The comments from teachers, parents and administration in response to the special education survey were positive and constructive.
- The Special Education staff were seen as good communicators and very concerned for the learning and well being of the students.
- The parents felt the services provided at the Ranches Academy were very helpful for their child and they preferred the school's program over other public education programs.
- Training helped many teachers understand the special education process and their role in the process better.
- The Ranches became more aware of the professional development needs for the school staff and parents regarding special education.
- Some school staff members have chosen to receive additional training and endorsements.
- All students with disabilities are included in the general education curriculum and classroom throughout the school day.
- All staff members are included in professional development at the Ranches Academy.
- Collaboration among staff members is encouraged by school administration. Collaboration is an ongoing process between special education teachers, general education teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents.
- Parents are notified of Child Find opportunities at the beginning of each school year.
- School administrators displayed a positive attitude towards all students and acted as an advocate for students with disabilities.
- Paraprofessionals are properly trained and supervised by school administration and teachers.
- Specialists are contracted to provide services, instruction, and/or training throughout the school day as needed.
- Medical information was included in evaluations, when needed.
- Special education files are maintained in a locked cabinet.
- A positive school climate is evident at the Ranches Academy, as observed by UPIPS team members and described by school staff and parents.
- Professional development activities are data driven and based upon school and staff needs as determined by surveys, staff, and parent concerns.
- Time for individual tutoring is provided to all students based upon their needs.

Parent Involvement

- Parents are generally happy with the special education services being provided for their students and preferred the educational program at the Ranches over previous schools.
- Most parents were happy to participate in the UPIPS process (participate in surveys, compile data) and volunteer in the classroom.
- Parents felt at ease during the IEP meetings and weren't afraid to voice concerns or thoughts during meetings.
- Meetings were scheduled on time and were scheduled for mutually agreeable times, as reported by parents.
- Parents stated that they receive monthly progress reports from the school.
- Parents attend and participate in IEP meetings as documented by their signatures, letters, and statements during parent focus group.
- Parents describe receiving multiple methods of communication from the school detailing their student's progress throughout the school year.
- The Ranches Academy invites parents to attend and participate in trainings at the school.
- Parents demonstrate ongoing involvement in the school by volunteering, attending trainings, and attending IEP meetings.
- Parent contact logs, completed on an ongoing basis, were included in most special education files.
- Parents were provided with Written Prior Notice of Actions proposed by the school for Evaluation, IEP development and implementation, and Placement.
- Parents received copies of evaluation consent forms, evaluation summaries, Eligibility Determinations, and IEPs, as documented by signatures and reports during parent focus group.
- Parents received copies of Notice of Meeting for meetings to discuss Eligibility and IEPs.
- Parents received copies of their Procedural Safeguards, as documented by signatures and stated in the parent focus group.

Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment

- IEPs are developed using entire IEP team members' input.
- IEPs focus on how each student with a disability can have access to the general curriculum and state core curriculum.
- Placement and daily schedules for students with disabilities are carefully discussed and aimed at individual student achievement and progress toward the annual goals on the IEP.
- A large majority of the students with disabilities are participating in extra-curricular activities offered by the school.
- IEP Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) statements addressed how the students' disability affects their involvement and progress in the general curriculum and general classroom.
- General education teachers are provided with copies of relevant portions of IEPs.
- During classroom observations, general education teachers provided accommodations (i.e. preferential seating, small group instruction, paraphrasing, and teacher proximity), as per IEPs. Classroom instruction was provided using a hands-on approach which engaged all students.
- Special education services are provided in the least restrictive environment, as determined by the IEP team.
- IEPs included specific special education services, along with frequency and location.
- The Ranches Academy has few disciplinary issues. Students and school staff interact in a positive manner. School administration is actively involved with students on a daily basis.
- Parents stated that the school staff follows through with agreements and IEPs. Accommodations are consistently provided in the classroom.
- School staff ensures that school environment is safe for everyone.

Transitions

- The Ranches Academy does not have students of transition age at this time.

Disproportionality

- Students who are not determined eligible still receive close monitoring and classroom suggestions for improving learning.
- The Ranches Academy does not routinely use suspension as a consequence for any students.

Areas of Systemic Noncompliance*

- ✓ 1 Special Education Teacher over caseload limits by 5 students.
- ✓ Record of Access form missing.
- ✓ Pre-referral interventions attempts did not document success or failure of interventions with supporting data.
- ✓ Evaluation & Eligibility: Students were not assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability; Evaluation procedures not followed for students determined eligible as SLD and CD; CD Eligibility does not document the use of multiple assessments, formal and informal; CD Eligibility does not document that the student has a disorder in speaking, listening, or reasoning to such a degree that special education is needed.
- ✓ Timelines: IEPs not reviewed and revised at least annually; Placement not reviewed annually.

*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.