



# Special School Accreditation

Utah State Office of Education



# Special School Accreditation

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## Overview of Utah State Board of Education Accreditation Requirements

The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) R277-410 and R277-413 require accreditation for Utah public secondary schools (grades 9-12) or schools that include students in grade levels 9-12. Implementation of the USBE Rules cited above require that LEAs with “special schools” under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) determine whether those special schools will meet Utah accreditation standards or be linked to another accredited school located within the LEA. “Special school” for the purposes of this document is defined as a school whose primary purpose is to provide special education and related services for students with disabilities, who have been placed in the special school by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, based on the individual educational needs of the student.

Those special schools meeting Utah accreditation standards will continue to be considered a “school” by the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) for purposes of data collection and reporting; those special schools not meeting accreditation standards will be considered an LEA “program” by the USOE, resulting in data collection and reporting in conjunction with a pre-identified LEA-accredited secondary school. LEAs with schools currently designated as “special schools” by the USOE determined by the end of the 2011-2012 school year whether those identified schools will become accredited through the following process or be redesignated as an LEA program beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

## Purpose of Special School Accreditation

In consideration of these decisions, USOE and LEA staff participated in conversations during 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 that resulted in the following key agreements:

- Special schools serving students with disabilities should be accredited in a meaningful and consistent process that recognizes the intent and specific purpose of the school.
- Special schools should engage in ongoing activities to collect stakeholder input, review student outcome data to determine areas requiring improvement, design improvement strategies specific to the population of students served, and implement those strategies in a strategic manner to positively affect student outcomes.
- Continuous improvement efforts for special education programs in the areas of IDEA compliance and improving student performance are currently implemented in each LEA through the Utah Program Improvement Planning System (UPIPS) and reflected in the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR).

## Special School Accreditation

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- An accreditation process for special schools should utilize and align with the UPIPS process to decrease unnecessary duplication of school staff efforts.
- Students with disabilities are entitled to access the Utah Core Standards and Essential Elements (Extended Common Core Standards), in an amount and manner determined appropriate by their IEP teams.

### **USOE Accreditation Process – LEA**

The Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) process currently used by the USOE and Utah LEAs merged with the AdvancED Standards for Quality. The new standards may be found at <http://www.advanc-ed.org/new-standards-quality> and provide a more integrated approach to school improvement and accreditation to challenge schools to change and sustain quality practices. The merger was completed by the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year and will require all Utah accredited public schools to transition to the new process over the next three to five years. Protocols and professional development materials are under development and will be piloted starting in 2012-2013.

The AdvancED accreditation process requires that schools:

1. Meet the accreditation standards, policies, and procedures of AdvancED;
2. Host an external review team at least once every five years;
3. Engage in continuous improvement;
4. Submit all required accreditation reports; and
5. Pay required school improvement fees.

### **USOE Accreditation Process – LEA Special Schools**

#### Background

Utah LEA special schools have not historically been involved in the current USOE accreditation process. Rather than beginning with an accreditation system that was in transition, special schools are being included in the new AdvancED Standards for Quality accreditation process.

Although no Utah school districts or charter schools are currently “district accredited”, a special school in a school district that is “district accredited” has a different process than the process described throughout this document, and consists of:

- Completing and submitting an application for accreditation.

## Special School Accreditation

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- A certification by the accredited school district to the USOE that the school meets the AdvancED accreditation standards and is actively engaged in the school district's process for quality assurance.
- If receiving accreditation status, the special school engages in the school district's approved plan for accreditation. If the special school does not receive accreditation, the school district must submit a plan for addressing and identified deficiencies to ensure the special school is ready for accreditation within one year.

### Cost of Accreditation

The costs of accreditation, a requirement of all Utah public secondary schools, may not be covered with Federal IDEA special education funds. LEAs must use a non-IDEA funding source to pay any required school improvement fees. It is recommended that the special school coordinate the submission of accreditation applications with other LEAs schools to reduce the need for application fees.

### UPIPS

LEAs are encouraged to include accreditation of special schools as part of the ongoing UPIPS Program Improvement Plan (PIP) targets and activities, in an effort to reduce duplication of effort. The USOE will consider LEAs with special schools going through first-time accreditation for reduced or collaborative on-site monitoring during the accreditation planning and visit process.

### Timelines

Each special school desiring accreditation notified the USOE Special Education section by June 30, 2012. After receiving notification and LEA-level approval, the special schools were assigned to an accreditation cohort by the USOE. The first cohort begins the accreditation process during the 2012-2013 school year with one pilot LEA. Additional cohorts will follow annually. Revisions to the process will be made prior to the next accreditation cohort beginning in 2013-2014 based on data collected during the pilot year 2012-2013.

LEAs should expect the accreditation process to require an internal review (self-evaluation) period of up to 12 months, during which three to five LEA special school staff will participate in USOE-sponsored accreditation professional development, review standards (CCSS and Essential Elements), collect and analyze a variety of student and school-level data and stakeholder input, and prepare to host an on-site visit. Following the on-site visit, annual accreditation progress reports are required.

LEA special schools must complete the accreditation process for special schools by June 30, 2016. Schools not completing accreditation by June 30, 2016 must show meaningful

## Special School Accreditation

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progress towards accreditation or be redesignated as an LEA program for the 2016-2017 school year.

### Utah Special Schools Seeking Accreditation

SCHOOL DISTRICT	SPECIAL SCHOOL	ACCREDITATION COHORT
ALPINE DISTRICT	HORIZON SCHOOL	2013-2014
ALPINE DISTRICT	DAN W. PETERSON	2013-2014
CANYONS DISTRICT	JORDAN VALLEY SCHOOL	2014-2015
CARBON DISTRICT	CASTLE VALLEY CENTER	2014-2015
DUCHESNE DISTRICT	CON AMORE SCHOOL	2013-2014
DUCHESNE DISTRICT	THOMPSEN HIGH	2014-2015
JORDAN DISTRICT	KAURI SUE HAMILTON	2012-2013 (PILOT)
NEBO DISTRICT	OAKRIDGE SCHOOL	2014-2015
WEBER DISTRICT	CANYON VIEW	2013-2014

Accreditation status is a five year term, as long as the special school continues to satisfy the conditions for accreditation.

There are four accreditation statuses that may be conferred on a special school as a result of the External Review, including accredited, accredited on advisement, accredited warned, and accredited probation. There are three non-accredited statuses that may be conferred on special schools, including applicant, candidate, and dropped. Further descriptions of the status options may be found at <http://www.advanc-ed.org/>.

# Special School Accreditation

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## Year 1 of Accreditation

The Special School will complete and submit an AdvancED Accreditation Application, which may be found at [http://www.advanc-ed.org/webfm\\_send/13](http://www.advanc-ed.org/webfm_send/13) by September 1st of the year in which they begin the accreditation process.

During the first year of the special school accreditation process, data regarding five standards (including related indicators for each standard) are analyzed by stakeholders to assist the special school with determining its priorities for improvement as part of the Self-Assessment Report. A scoring rubric is provided for each standard indicator to guide stakeholder review and may be located at [http://extranet.advanc-ed.org/school\\_resources\\_and\\_tools/](http://extranet.advanc-ed.org/school_resources_and_tools/). Special school leadership is encouraged to consider the use of additional school improvement materials, including those available from AdvancED, to ensure that the internal review self-study process is comprehensive and improve by focusing resources, time and effort on those things that improve student learning.

### Five Standards and Related Indicators

1. Purpose and Direction: The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commits to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning (e.g., School Mission and Vision.)
  - The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.
  - The school leadership and staff commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.
  - The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.
2. Governance and Leadership: The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness. (e.g., School Leadership)
  - The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school.
  - The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.
  - The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.

## Special School Accreditation

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- Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.
  - Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.
  - Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.
3. Teaching and Assessing for Learning: The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning. (e.g., Curriculum (CCSS and Essential Elements), Instruction, Assessment)
- The school's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.
  - Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.
  - Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.
  - School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.
  - Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.
  - Teachers implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.
  - Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the school's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.
  - The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.
  - The school has a formal structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.
  - Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represents the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.
  - All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.
  - The school provides and coordinates learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.

## Special School Accreditation

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4. Resources and Support Systems: The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students (e.g., Community Building.)
  - Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.
  - Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.
  - The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.
  - Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs.
  - The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.
  - The school provides support services to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.
  - The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.
5. Using Results for Continuous Improvement: The school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement (e.g., UPIPS.)
  - The school establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.
  - Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze, and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions.
  - Professional and support staff are trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.
  - The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.
  - Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.

# Special School Accreditation

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## USOE Professional Development and Technical Assistance

The USOE will provide professional development and technical assistance that is specific to the special school accreditation process annually to all special schools entering the cohort for the coming school year. The professional development and technical assistance will be provided by the appropriate USOE staff and proposed members of the accreditation visit team, to ensure consistency of message and review.

## Focus Groups

Each special school will form focus group(s) of stakeholders to collect, analyze, and summarize student and school-level data and focus group recommendations regarding the five standards and related indicators. While the size and assignments of each focus group will be determined by the school administrator, each focus group must contain staff, student, and parent representation.

The focus group(s) will collect and review data in an effort to answer preselected guiding questions and standard indicators and identify suggestions for the leadership team to consider during completion of the Internal Review (Self-Assessment) Report. Review should consist of both school and student-level (non-identifiable) data in areas such as student performance on the Utah Alternate Assessment (UAA) or Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs), progress monitoring, Computer Aided Credentials of Teachers in Utah Schools (CACTUS), UPIPS compliance, stakeholder surveys (e.g., USU ISQ), and the SPP/APR in areas specific to the focus group assignment.

Guiding questions should be school-selected for each focus group and may include questions such as:

- What are the general characteristics and needs of the students served by the school?
- What kinds of support for learning do students receive beyond the classroom?
- What assistive technology is routinely considered and used in school, the home, and the community?
- What are the major defining features of the school?
- What does each group of stakeholders believe are the strengths and limitations of the school?
- How does the school adequately prepare students for post-school life (e.g., college, post-secondary training, career, etc.)?
- How can personnel be used effectively and efficiently to maximize student learning?
- How are personnel trained (e.g., teachers, support staff, related service providers) to provide high quality research-based instruction and interventions (aligned with student IEPs), and collect and report student data to parents?

## Special School Accreditation

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- How are related service needs determined and scheduled to address student specific needs? What impact do they have?
- What systems are in place to review and utilize a variety of assessment data for instructional decision making?
- How are IEPs developed to ensure access to appropriate state standards?
- What training do IEP team members (i.e., special educators, general educators, related service providers, paraprofessionals, and parents) have to ensure appropriate, high standards of academic and functional living skill learning for students?
- How can between activity transition times be reduced or utilized for learning? How are teachers provided opportunities for ongoing collaboration and professional learning for the purpose of improving student performance?
- What are students learning and how are they learning?
- Who is learning? Who is not learning? Are there any patterns in student achievement?
- How does current staffing and licensure/certification meet current school program needs?
- What are the school's strengths? What data/evidence validates these findings?
- What are the school's recommendations for improvement? What data/evidence validates these findings?

### Readiness Review

The special school will complete a readiness review within three months of applying. The purpose of the readiness review is to determine if the special school has the capacity and integrity to meet and adhere to the AdvancED standards and policies, and the capacity to support continuous school improvement. The next step is to complete the Internal Review (Self-Assessment) and prepare for the on-site external review.

### Internal Review

The special school will develop a comprehensive school profile that focuses on examining student achievement data, defines and articulates school beliefs and a mission that states a compelling direction for the school. The special school will complete an Internal Review (Self-Assessment) Report using the information gathered through stakeholder input and focus groups, as well as through the diagnostic component of the AdvancED Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools (ASSIST). The action plan is a school-specific continuous, multi-year improvement plan that is school evaluated and reported on annually to AdvancED. The development of the action plan occurs during the first year of the accreditation process, while implementation occurs the following years. The Action Plan will incorporate all five standards to address student achievement gaps and should be

# Special School Accreditation

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reflective of stakeholder input and involvement. All stakeholders should be informed of final results and discuss the Action Plan.

## **Years 2-5 of Accreditation**

### Accreditation Visit/External Review

Leadership of special schools involved in the accreditation process may volunteer and participate in activities related to the external review accreditation visits of other schools.

An external review on-site visit must be conducted by the special school at least once every five years. The Special School Internal Review (Self-Assessment) Report must be submitted to AdvancED between four weeks and six months prior to the external review on site accreditation visit. The external review must take place within two years of candidacy. Prior to the on-site accreditation visit, leadership of the special school will work with the assigned AdvancED team chair to coordinate the visit. The accreditation team will consist of Utah peer reviewers with experience in special education and working with students with disabilities and may include AdvancED staff. The focus of the visit will be on school improvement, alignment with the Utah Core Standards and Essential Elements, the internal review self-assessment process, and the use of stakeholder focus groups to determine school improvement priorities.

The role of the External Review Team is to provide objective feedback on the Internal Review, including validating findings and addressing areas that may have been overlooked. In addition, the External Review Team will provide an avenue for collaborative problem solving and sharing of expertise. Each team member will receive a copy of the school's Internal Review (Self-Assessment) Report which will be used to guide the visit. The External Review Team will review the Internal Review and the process used to develop it by visiting classrooms, interviewing school staff, students, and parents and then use the gathered information to write a comprehensive report in response to the school's Internal Review. Prior to leaving the school, the team will hold an Exit Conference with school leadership to summarize the results from the visit, including areas of excellence and required actions for continued progress and improvement.

Upon receipt of the AdvancED written report and accreditation status, special schools will complete the required actions and continue to review progress and implement activities to improve student outcomes. Progress reports on the team's required actions must be completed and submitted by the special school within two years of receiving the External Review.