

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Aneth Community School  
P.O. Box 600  
Montezuma Creek, Utah 84534-0600**

**February 19, 2009**



**Utah State Office of Education  
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**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Aneth Community School  
P.O. Box 600  
Montezuma Creek, Utah 84534-0600**

**February 19, 2009**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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## **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase 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. It is a three-phased 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, February 19, 2009, 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 Aneth Community School 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 Brenda Whiteshore is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Aneth Community School, 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 dramatically increase student achievement at Aneth Community School.

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**ANETH COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

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Jamie R. Hamlin..... Assistant Principal/Counselor

**Support Staff**

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Esther Brady..... Secretary/Information Technician  
Darlene Claw ..... Counseling Technician  
Vernal Collins ..... Maintenance Supervisor  
Elsie Dee ..... Business Technician  
Jacqueline Dee ..... Education Technician  
Maxine Etsitty..... Education Technician  
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Linda Keams ..... Culture and Tradition Leader  
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Phyllis Whitehorse  
Sharon Wolf  
Rena Woody

## **ANETH COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Aneth Community School is to provide students with quality educational services and to create a challenging and diverse environment for students to become accomplished lifelong readers, writers, and mathematicians.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- All students can learn.
- High expectations will yield high achievement.
- Students need a safe and inviting environment in which to learn.
- All students need to be provided with opportunities to learn and practice core values and life skills across all settings.
- We honor and celebrate our Navajo language and culture.

### **DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)**

It is the responsibility and goal of the entire Aneth Community School (teachers and staff, students, parents, and administration) that every student will become accomplished readers, writers, and mathematicians across the content areas.

Date of Visit: February 19, 2009

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Dr. Lynette Riggs, Cache County School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Dr. Chuck Foster, Specialist, Indian Education, Utah State Office of Education

Sue Fredrickson, Lincoln Elementary School, Cache County School District

## **VISITING TEAM REPORT**

### **ANETH COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

#### **CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

Aneth Community School is a BIA/BIE school located in southeastern Utah on the Navajo reservation. Students from the communities of Aneth, Montezuma Creek, Red Mesa, Ismay, Cohone Mesa, and Hatch are served in grades K-6. Approximately 200 day students and boarding students attend. The school administration, teachers, and staff are working hard to meet the needs of every student in the school through monitored student progress and differentiated instruction.

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

- According to the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT), 155 out of approximately 200 students demonstrated limited English proficient (LEP) status. Most of those 155 students report that English is their primary language.
- Data collection, data-based decision making, and data record keeping were not priorities until approximately three years ago (when the current administrator took over the role of principal).
- Brenda Whitehorse became principal in response to restructuring mandates imposed by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The school had a history of failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- A large classified staff supports teacher instruction.
- A Navajo language program has been added and is geared to the state's Core Curriculum standards.

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

- A more developed history and general description of the community and school should be included.
- A more developed narrative of the processes that the faculty and staff engaged in during the self-study should be included. What guided the school's inquiry? Were the self-study reports of other schools used as models? How were the self-study "guiding questions," NSSE rubrics, Utah's Life Skills document, Utah's Core Curriculum standards, and the BIE's mission/beliefs/goals/standards used for guidance?
- Stakeholder responses to the climate/needs assessments and more student achievement data should be included in the self-study report (DIBELS and Core Phonics results, comprehension data, NWEA nationally normed data, etc.). Analysis should accompany each piece. Data percentages should be differentiated (grade level, gender, etc.) to create a sharper picture of who is

learning and who is not. From this information, school strengths should emerge and be discussed.

- The roles parents and community stakeholders played in the self-study process should be clarified.
- Stakeholder responses to “guiding questions” and NSSE rubrics should be reported in the self-study document.
- It would be helpful for the school if the DRSL were broken down (unpacked) for easier measurement. The school should initiate the work of collaboration to produce a rubric that can be used by all teachers and staff members to measure progress on achieving the school-wide DRSLs.
- The action plan goals should be measureable, and specific faculty/staff members should be named when determining responsibility.

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

- This is the first engagement the school has had with the accreditation self-study process; because of inexperience, the written plan was abbreviated. It was difficult for the Visiting Team to devise a plan to substantiate conclusions made in the self-study because of the missing information. Essentially, the Visiting Team’s initial plan of approach concerned clarification.
- The Visiting Team was greatly pleased to discover that most of the protocols had been conducted and that data—and a response to that data—did exist. The new principal, Brenda Whitehorse, is leading the school toward substantial student achievement and staff improvement. Faculty resistance is easing in the face of needed change, and faculty members are beginning to function as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The Visiting Team was impressed by everyone’s dedication to student achievement and to meeting the needs of the school’s many at-risk students.
- Particularly valuable information that is not discussed in the self-study document concerns the many incredible ways in which the school is meeting the intellectual, emotional, and physical needs of its children.

**Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

See *b)* above.

## CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) 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?*

Though this process was not clarified in the self-study document, discussions at the school site indicated that there was collaborative discussion and evaluation of the school's mission and belief statements.

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

Both the mission and belief statements focus on reading, writing, and math.

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

This was the school's first accreditation visit using *Collaborating for Student Achievement*, Utah's school improvement model for accreditation. Aneth Community School is just beginning its journey in this area. The next step—specifically connecting assessment to the DRSLs—was verbally mentioned to the principal during an on-site debriefing session, and the present document provides guidance for future effort. However, varied measurements are already in place to examine student progress in the areas of reading, writing, and math, such as the DIBELS, Six Traits writing rubrics, and textbook chapter tests.

More work (action research) needs to take place that ties specific interventions and programs to school-wide, grade level, and individual student achievement in reading, writing, and math.

- 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?*

Aneth Community School is becoming very focused in these areas; it is the essential work of the school.

## 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 school is dedicated to teaching Core Curriculum standards and doing well on Utah's CRT end-of-level tests so the school will meet the standards for AYP.

Utah's Life Skills document was not mentioned in the self-study document or during on-site conversation. The Visiting Team noticed a strong parallel, however, between the school's values and practices—in fact, these are more parallel than at most schools. The Life Skills values were reflected in the Bureau of Indian Education's mission statement, beliefs, and goals, which are posted in the hallway by the office. Aneth School's student, parent, and employee handbooks contain the BIE's stance and give evidence that these values and goals have been considered, communicated, and discussed. (In addition, as noted above, the Life Skills document should be considered.)

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

Most of the time while the Visiting Team was conducting classroom "walk-throughs," the students were engaged in Tier I and II reading activities. Team members saw many instances of strategic, active reading questioning used to enhance comprehension that would certainly qualify as "higher order." Also, many examples of writing were posted that engaged students in inquiry and problem-solving. The Visiting Team didn't happen to catch research, performances, or projects in process.

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

Because the DRSLs are aligned with core standards (reading, writing, math), a viable curriculum is already in place to teach these content areas. School-level and grade-level collaboration does take place during staff meetings, where data is considered and teachers discuss how the curriculum can be tweaked for better results.

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

This is one of the areas in which very appropriate progress has been made. According to the teachers, principal, and available data, the staff is becoming adept at using data to inform and drive instruction. Greater focus and concern for differentiated instruction seem to be the results.

**Instruction:**

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

The Visiting Team witnessed a variety of instructional strategies being used during morning classroom instruction, and it was clear that the faculty had received in-service at some point that focused on these strategies.

- 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?*

Again, the faculty and staff made management of the DRSLs easy by basing them on existing Core Curriculum content area foci. The self-study document states, “Every teacher and staff member will support students in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics by creating opportunities for students to practice these skills throughout the curriculum. These skills were seen by the teaching and support staff as essential skills than can be reinforced daily not only by teachers but by every employee that works in the school.”

- 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?*

According to the teachers, they have had plenty of professional development concerning data use and best practices that accommodate diverse learners. According to the self-study document, focus group work determined that teachers should/would receive more training on writing instruction, continue to attend reading endorsement classes, and learn more about Response to Intervention practices. All of these in-service foci are appropriate choices, according to the achievement needs of the student body.

- 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?*

As in most schools, the Visiting Team witnessed a wide range of teaching abilities during the classroom “walk-throughs.” Some teachers were making very good use of research-based instructional practices, and they demonstrated solid content area knowledge competence. In particular, we saw a nice use of questioning techniques meant to enhance student reading comprehension. The Visiting Team did observe however, some “loose” classroom teaching, especially during guided

reading, and two teachers misusing vocabulary words/concepts and modeling incorrect grammar.

As for reflection, there seems to be plenty of opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice. The principal participates in regularly scheduled feedback discussions with the teachers, and the Visiting Team saw student learning data displayed everywhere. According to the school's self-study, the "teachers meet monthly with their grade level teams to analyze data and discuss key issues regarding individual student progress. The grade level analysis meetings occur regularly so that teachers can have an opportunity to problem solve with their colleagues in utilizing data to make informed instructional decisions."

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

The Visiting Team noticed relatively new computers on teachers' desks, and there was an up-to-date computer lab for student use. There was a Smart Board being assembled in the computer lab, as well. While speaking with the education technician in the lab and watching a kindergarten group at work, the Visiting Team was particularly impressed by the technician's organization and expertise. It was clear that she supported the state content core while also teaching technology skills. Accelerated Reading assessments are a centerpiece in online testing, and differentiated interventions in language arts and math are offered

**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?*

At present, the school is using the nationally normed NWEA test, state CRTs, Core Phonics, DIBELS, Houghton-Mifflin end-of-theme/chapter tests, Six Traits rubrics, and miscellaneous teacher-constructed classroom assessments to judge the achievement of their students in language arts, writing, and math. The state core standards are central to their application of standards and benchmarks.

- b) *To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?*

Again, as noted, the above assessments are applied. The school wishes to become proficient at utilizing assessments appropriately and effectively, and that desire is noted in the action plan.

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

Over a period of about two years, the school has made great strides in learning to utilize data to better teach the student body. The faculty has had many in-services to instruct the teachers on how to use data effectively, the administration supports and drives this effort, and the teachers are responding thoughtfully. Data is also used as a teacher-accountability measure. DIBELS scores were posted by the individual classrooms, showing how much gain each classroom made between the fall and spring measurements.

- 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?*

This is part of the school's developmental continuum, although right now the school is working on becoming data/results-driven. Teachers becoming experts in creating their *own* assessments is a natural progression that will probably occur in the near future.

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

That concept was suggested and discussed with the principal by the Visiting Team chair. For now, because the school's DRSLs are about reading, writing, and math, the aforementioned (see a) commercial/state assessments are working for them. (The relationship of NSSE rubrics and the state's Life Skills document to the DRSLs was also discussed.)

### **CHAPTER 3: NAAS 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 Visiting Team was very impressed with the principal, Brenda Whitehorse. She is a fine instructional leader who sees what the school needs and is courageous about making change.

- 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 principal and vice principal/counselor employ a data-driven approach to school improvement and are leading the staff to employ research-based materials and pedagogy. The school is coming together as a collaborative learning community under the leadership of the current administration.

- 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?*

Aneth Community School is part of the BIA system, and that affects the who, what, and why of the resources used. In addition, the principal must oversee a boarding school dormitory on campus. By all appearances, the principal is doing a fine job. The school seemed safe—printed behavior expectations were posted everywhere, including the dorms—and inviting. Everything was well-maintained and bright. The school “felt” good. The Visiting Team was very impressed by the technology, teaching materials, and abundance of new books available to the children.

- 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?*

As mentioned, the school is pulling together as a school learning community. The present accreditation effort is evidence of that. This collaborative school improvement process is not required for elementary schools, yet this school recognized that the process itself—a process requiring an intense collaborative effort—would be beneficial. There is much evidence that teachers are becoming leaders and stepping forward to take on leadership responsibilities.

- 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?*

The geographical isolation of the staff and students, the dormitory model, and the cultural cohesiveness of this school create a “family” situation that far exceeds anything a regular public day school can even imagine. This isn’t a formal system—this is an organic system.

### **School Services:**

This standard is dealt with in the school’s NAAS 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 NAAS, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

## **CHAPTER 4: NAAS 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 is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?*

This accreditation visit served as an introduction to the state's school improvement protocol and process. The Visiting Team assumed a guiding, teaching role as well as serving as a critical friend. Some of the suggestions made that should help when the school redoes/revisits its self-study include:

- A history and description of the school, community, teachers, and students needs to be given in more detail so the Visiting Teams can better understand the school and prepare more effectively/efficiently for their visit.
- The processes that takes place during the self-study needs to be laid bare so the Visiting Team can better understand the school's collaborative efforts and the involvement of all stakeholders.
- The DRSL needs to be more focused, and more thought needs to be given to the best methods of assessing it/them. It was pointed out that the NSSE rubrics and Utah Life Skills document could help with this.
- The conclusions and processes of the focus groups need to be discussed in greater depth.
- Hints concerning the writing of a tighter action plan were discussed. The plan's goals need to be measureable, and specific faculty members need to be explicitly named in the plan.

- 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?*

It was very evident to the Visiting Team that much professional development had taken place already—professional development designed to enhance teacher capacity and student learning. The school’s action plan addresses the need for additional teacher learning. For example, program pacing instruction and writing pedagogy instruction are part of the plan. Also, the principal is building a Professional Learning Community around in-service/guidance concerning data use and common pacing guides.

- c) *To what extent is the new/revise 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?*

As one teacher put it, the school is very committed to “shrinking the red lines” (the bars on the DIBELS graphs that indicate the number of students not reaching mastery). The school’s DRSL is built around that concern. The action plan focuses on those same needs: reading, writing, and math proficiency.

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

Because of NCLB issues, change at Aneth has needed to be substantial and quick. Sadly, this situation almost always necessitates the introduction of a strong principal/instructional leader to bring about change faster than it would organically happen, and both passive and overt resistance is often the result. Considering this, the Visiting Team found the attitudes of most of the staff members to be exemplary. The general consensus seemed to be that these changes would help student learning, and hence were worthwhile.

## **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

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

Great effort is being put into creating a strong learning community at Aneth Community School. Capable leadership facilitates this, and thoughtful cooperation from the faculty and staff supports that unity. Much of this work is done at the whole group and grade levels.

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

The staff and faculty plan monthly family literacy events that are designed to bring more parents into the school. Family dinners are planned for the holidays, and guest speakers come to address topics on parenting.

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

The focus groups/study teams and processes were not well described in the self-study document. It is noted that a school climate survey was given to parents. Because the school's clientele is so isolated, many of the staff and miscellaneous employees are also parents of children there. (The principal, for example, has a son at Aneth.) Many of the community members live in other areas and even more out-of-the-way places, which explains the boarding dorm. It didn't appear that any parents were doing volunteer work at the school when the Visiting Team was doing "walk-throughs."

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

There is a hard-copy parent newsletter, although the school has a quite sophisticated web-page. (Accreditation news already appears on the webpage, although the Visiting Team is not sure whether the improvement goals were posted in the past.) The school improvement work is also shared orally at the school site during meetings and get-togethers. The DRSL was posted in many of the classrooms, and mission statements/goals are posted in the hallways.

## **CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team particularly commends the school for its clear sense of community and purpose. The faculty and staff demonstrated true commitment to the nurturing and teaching of the students.
- The Visiting Team commends Aneth Community School for its demonstrated commitment to the improvement of the school's educational efficacy as a whole. Embracing the accreditation process is a strong indicator of that commitment.
- The Visiting Team commends Aneth Community School for its child-centered focus.

- The Visiting Team commends the leadership at Aneth. The school is in good hands. The leaders are strong, capable, and committed. The Visiting Team saw evidence of very good instruction coming from strong, capable teachers.
- The Visiting Team commends the teachers and staff not only for their willingness to work extremely hard, but also for demonstrating their willingness to learn and change.
- The Visiting Team commends the great strides at Aneth Community School toward making data a guiding friend for progress.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that efforts be made to increase the student engagement rate. During the guided reading times and differentiated center times, many children—those not with the teachers—were not being taught effectively. Professional development training might also focus on this fundamental aspect of student learning.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school consider using “education technicians.” Perhaps having paraprofessionals move through the classrooms together there would result in tighter, more intense differentiated instruction during Tier II time.
- The Visiting Team recommends a continued effort to seek out superb-quality, research-based instructional materials and formative assessments.
- As discussed during the visit, the Visiting Team recommends that the faculty find continuity and history in the accreditation process. Flesh out the self-study (see *b*) in Chapter 1 of this report) and let it serve as a history of school effort from year to year—particularly since administrators and teachers may come and go. The self-study should serve as a very thorough meta-analysis that pulls together and reflects the school’s reality.