

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Escalante High School
800 East Hwy 12
P.O. Box 228
Escalante, Utah 84726**

April 12, 2011



**Utah State Office of Education
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Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Escalante High School
800 East Hwy 12
P.O. Box 228
Escalante, Utah 84726**

April 12, 2011

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	ii
Utah State Board of Education.....	iii
Garfield County School District Board of Education and District Administration	1
Escalante High School Administration and Staff	2
Escalante High School Mission Statement, Belief Statements and DRSLs	3
Members of the Visiting Team	4
Visiting Team Report.....	5
Chapter 1: School Profile.....	5
Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry.....	5
Chapter 2: Northwest Accreditation Commission (Northwest)	
Teaching and Learning Standards.....	6
Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs).....	6
Curriculum	6
Instruction	8
Assessment.....	9
Chapter 3: Northwest Support Standards.....	11
Leadership and Organization	11
School Services.....	12
Facilities and Finances	12
Chapter 4: Northwest School Improvement Standard	12
Chapter 5: Community Building.....	13
Chapter 6: Major Commendations and Recommendations of the Visiting Team	14

FOREWORD

The purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase the quality of instruction and 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 in a three-step 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, April 12, 2011, 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 Escalante High 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 Chris Christensen is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Escalante High School and for their professional attitude which made it possible for them to see weaknesses and strengths and to suggest procedures for 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 most 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 Escalante High School.

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State Superintendent
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*Board of Regents Appointments

*** CMAC Representative Appointment

*****Charter School Representative Appointment

**UCAT Representative

****USBA Advisory Representative Appointment

12/28/2010

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ESCALANTE HIGH SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

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Faculty

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Phyllis Suggett

ESCALENTE HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

Together we educate, participate, and graduate.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- Education is a cooperative effort among students, educators, parents, and community.
- All students are capable of learning and responsible for their decisions. Because students learn differently, they should be provided with a variety of instructional and assessment methods.
- Parents should take an active role in their student's educational experience.
- A school community can enable students to graduate with effective social skills, basic competencies, and good citizenship.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Communication Skills
2. Complex Thinking
3. Lifelong Learning

Date of visit: April 12, 2011

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Robert Stillwell, Consultant, Northwest Accreditation Commission/Utah State Office
of Education, Visiting Team Chairperson

Joette Hayden, Education Director, Falcon Ridge, Virgin, UT

VISITING TEAM REPORT

ESCALENTE HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

The first graduating class of Escalante High School graduated in 1924. The class of 1989 was the first to graduate at the school's current location. The school serves students in grades 7-12, and has an enrollment of 79.

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

The school has done an excellent job of maintaining comprehensive services with declining enrollment. The local economy has led to an outmigration of population from Escalante. The district and the school have made some difficult decisions regarding staffing.

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

The historical information and student data in the profile tell the story of Escalante High School very well. The school has developed a good model for its profile and will need to refresh it with yearly data as they move forward.

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

It is clearly evident that the accreditation process was inclusive and ongoing. There is truly a culture of continuous improvement throughout the school

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Find ways to share responsibility for implementing the Lifelong Learning DRSL beyond the SEOP process.
- Find the means to make collaboration a priority in professional development.

CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION (NORTHWEST) 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?*

The school revisited its mission and belief statements in preparation for the 2011 self-study. The DRSLs are an appropriate fit for the school's purpose. Escalante High School is a unique small school that is very much in tune with its community.

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

There is a high degree of support throughout the school for the students to achieve the DRSLs.

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

Each DRSL has clearly defined indicators. The measures are both formal and informal. Teachers have developed classroom assessments that clearly show student progress on learning DRSLs.

- 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?*

The school is very much an extended family. Because of its small student enrollment, every student is known by multiple adults and all students know they are cared for.

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 Visiting Team observed that Escalante High School demonstrated excellent evidence of coursework alignment with the Utah Core Curriculum. The academic administration, as well as the teachers on campus, have developed a full range of course offerings that are reflective of the requirements and standards based upon each of the core areas. All core teachers were able to verbalize and then demonstrate how they use the core in day-to-day teaching in the classroom. Departments and teachers

use curriculum maps to plan and implement instruction based on the Utah Core Curriculum. Evidence of use of the Utah Life Skills curriculum was observed and excellent examples found in the direct instruction present in a variety of classes (i.e., the Adult Roles and Responsibilities class and others).

The Visiting Team also observed that the staff members at Escalante High School works collaboratively together for the success of students, as evidenced by their dedication to student attendance, participation, and willingness to take on a variety of roles. In this smaller school environment, it was clear that the curriculum and instruction was based upon the needs of the students.

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

The Visiting Team observed that the Escalante High School curriculum engages students in a high level of inquiry, problem solving and higher-order thinking. Based on classroom observations, teachers use a variety of methods to engage all students in the learning process. Many teachers display and refer to Bloom's Taxonomy in their instruction to show when students are engaged in activities involving higher-order thinking skills. Strong kinesthetic examples that engaged students were also observed in the fine arts classes and the Science Department. In all classrooms observed, various teaching strategies were seen that encourage a high level of engagement and participation. Small group work in the English Department and student-led discussion in other elective classes were seen as highly effective in promoting the complex thinking skills needed for students to succeed.

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

The Visiting Team observed that the teaching staff and administration at Escalante High School work collaboratively in support of the school DRSLs and are dedicated to the implementation and continuation of student progress toward these goals. Data collection and activities in class are directly linked to the DRSLs of Communication, Complex Thinking and Life Long Learning. All areas of the school support the DRSLs through school projects such as the Senior Project assignment, as well as the continuing assessment of learning goals and competency. The sense of caring and concern for each student and his/her needs was present in the time spent with students and staff. Many teachers expressed the need for continued collaboration that involved all team members, including the administration and teachers as they evaluate areas that need improvement. This continued collaboration and communication is highly encouraged. Departments are currently in the process of continued development of classroom assessments for the DRSLs.

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

Escalante High school was completing end-of-level testing during the visit, and has a variety of staff members who help to coordinate yearly testing. Data is gathered from a variety of sources, including CRTs; teacher, student and parent surveys; PSAT; PLAN; vocational testing; and ACT scores. Data from these tests is broken down, analyzed and then passed on to school teachers and counselors who identify and address the needs of individual students.

Most of the teachers in the school use common assessments to assess student understanding of core concepts. The Visiting Team recommends that common assessments continue to be used in all departments, with emphasis on using data to adjust instruction to ensure that all students reach intended learning outcomes.

The staff at Escalante High School wants all students to learn and be successful. Excellent examples of informal assessments were also observed being used as indicators of student achievement.

Instruction:

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

Escalante teachers use a wide variety of instructional strategies to meet student needs. They are commended for their development of informal assessments tied to classroom assignments that teach the DRSLs.

- 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?*

Two fine examples of strategies developed to explicitly teach the DRSLs are Senior Projects and Interactive Student Notebooks.

- 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?*

The school's professional development plan can benefit from focusing on collaboration to help build the shared vision.

- 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?*

The quality of instruction at Escalante High School is very high. Teachers are competent in their subject areas and are skilled at creating informal classroom assessments.

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

There are adequate technology resources in use in the school. During the visit, one of the labs was being used for online CRT testing. In another lab, students were working on their individual Senior Projects and preparing PowerPoint presentations.

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?*

The staff at Escalante High School has used data gained from both formal and informal assessment to help determine expectations for student achievement and to monitor progress toward the DRSLs. The school has incorporated valuable assessment data into its overall function. Many departments give tests throughout the year to create “benchmarks” that they as teachers look at to evaluate and see how they can better serve the students.

When the teachers look at the results from the test, they meet and discuss to see which teachers are having more success in specific areas. They can then share ways to better serve the students in their individual classes. It was mentioned by all teachers that this is one area where they hope to make even further progress as they work toward shared goals across the curriculum.

The Visiting Team found that the majority of teachers are very clear about incorporating the DRSLs into their assessments and teaching strategies. All data gathered is shared with teachers and with school administration.

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

The Visiting Team observed that the students at Escalante High School are actively engaged in research-based coursework and a variety of learning opportunities, and that they use in-class assessments to monitor progress and achieve academic expectations. Communication concerning individual progress and academic expectations are strengths at Escalante High School, as many teachers seem to have positive and healthy relationships with students and demonstrate a high level of knowledge as to personal growth and areas of strength and limitations. The fact that the community is small has had a positive impact on the relationships between students and teachers. The CRTs are utilized to provide teachers with valuable information related to student achievement. The teachers are able to access that information through the administration and from the district’s assessment database.

This information provides another element teachers' understanding of each student and his/her needs.

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

The Visiting Team observed that Escalante High school has a professional staff devoted to the success of the school and the success of each student in meeting the school's academic expectations. Many departments use pre-, mid- and post-testing to get a picture of school success. The scores from the CRTs are utilized by some teachers to compare with departmental tests. A few teachers said they go back and look at previous CRTs to see if progress has been made by individual students. If not, a process takes place to see how to better serve that student. Teachers believe this is a great tool to identify weaknesses and provide themselves with information to improve classroom instruction.

Comparisons are made by analyzing assessment data for subgroups such as ESL students, low income, and special education students to determine how best to serve these populations. Teachers are able to determine, through their departmental assessments, whether the curriculum they use is current with the State Core.

- 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?*

The Visiting Team observed that the teachers at Escalante High School participate in some district professional development programs, but that funding and budget issues had prevented the teachers and administration from attending conferences and workshops that were desired and deemed necessary by the focus groups and administration. The willingness to collaborate on a school level was excellent, and daily and weekly opportunities to work together seem to be a strength for both teachers and students. Teachers take the time each week to collaborate on fulfilling students' needs and to discuss student assessment strategies. Additional collaboration was recommended with the administration to enhance student assessment strategies and to increase attendance and participation. Excellent evidence of informal "portfolio" assessment was observed (in the English Department), and it was discussed how to further develop and use this as a tool to monitor student growth.

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

Every department in the school has completed a rubric and DRSL worksheet that indicates objectives and levels of progress. Each DRSL has an Indicator, an Assessment Method, and a Reporting Process/Means. The method of assessment for each department may be unique as it relates to the subject and area of learning, but

every teacher in every department is using some form of assessment to show the use of DRSLs and the understanding of each.

The teachers also assess students on a regular basis through informal observation. There is a high level of care and concern for how students are meeting the DRSLs, and ongoing collaboration and conversation take place regularly on how to assess DRSL growth.

CHAPTER 3: NORTHWEST 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 principal leads the school in the pursuit of quality instruction to a high degree. A commitment to student learning is clearly evident throughout the school.

- 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 school profile used data appropriately Teachers have developed outstanding classroom assessment of student progress and effectiveness of teaching methods.

- 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?*

The learning environment at Escalante High School is one of high expectations for all students in an extended family where the whole staff is looking out for the successful outcomes for students. The district has made some difficult decisions regarding staff cuts that the school has worked with for continuous improvement.

- 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?*

There is room to improve in the area of staff collaboration. It is recommended that this be a priority for teacher professional development. The teachers have meaningful roles in developing classroom assessments, but can gain a greater shared vision by experiencing more collaboration.

- 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?*

It is commendable that a school as small as Escalante High School can be so comprehensive in meeting student needs. The term “extended family” was used in several instances during the visit. Many examples of students benefiting from being well known to staff members were observed. There is help for students in many ways, inside and outside the classrooms.

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 Northwest, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST 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 process, that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?*

The school’s 2011 self-study followed the guidelines of the Utah accreditation process completely. The mission, beliefs and DRSLs had been revisited. The school profile showed ample and appropriate student achievement data. The DRSLs have been institutionalized. The visit validated the findings shared in the self-study.

- 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?*

There is room to improve in the area of aligning professional development with the school's improvement plan. The capacity is present for following through and turning some classroom assessments into school-wide assessments, but this will take time dedicated to teachers working with other teachers outside instructional time.

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

It is recommended that Escalante High School further develop its action plans. As presented in the 2011 self-study, the action plans for Communication Skills and Complex Thinking should be expanded to become school-wide goals that reach across curricula. The Life Long Learner action plan should be expanded to share responsibility for implementation.

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

The school has made positive changes in the face of declining enrollment. There is a clearly evident commitment to continuous improvement.

- e) *What significant progress has been made in implementing the original action plan since the last full visit?*

Significant progress was seen from the comparison of the 2005 and 2011 self-studies prepared by the school. With assistance from Garfield District, the data in the school profile has been disaggregated with great skill and clarity.

- f) *What significant progress has the school made in addressing the major recommendations of the previous Visiting Team and/or review team?*

There were three recommendations from the first full team visit. Using data to inform instruction has been clearly implemented. Progress on higher-level thinking is evident, especially in the development in the processes involved in students preparing and presenting their Senior Projects. Progress has been made with teachers meeting to discuss needs of students, but more time is needed for teachers to collaborate.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The small numbers of Escalante's staff helps the school build a sense of teamwork. All staff members are committed to the success of the students.

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

The school building is a vital resource to the Escalante community. There are comprehensive programs in which students may participate, including extracurricular teams that extend student learning beyond the classroom.

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

The self-study process was thorough. It involves staff, students and parents. The self-study process has clearly helped all involved gain a greater understanding of the school's achievements and areas for improvement.

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

The school shared school improvement goals with staff, students, parents, the community and the school board.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends Escalante High School's teaching staff for using a wide variety of informal assessment techniques and materials that supplement and enhance formal testing.
- The Visiting Team commends Escalante High School for using highly effective teaching strategies including direct instruction, kinetic teaching and small group work that promotes Complex Thinking and Life Long Learning.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that Escalante High School expand its action plans to implement Communication Skills and Complex Thinking Skills across the curriculum. Further, it is recommended that Lifelong Learning have an action plan developed that shares responsibility beyond the SEOP process to include teachers and

students in building capacity for producing excellent work and strengthening motivation for students to become contributors to the community in the future.

- The Visiting Team recommends that Escalante High School continue to fully fund support services for special education.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Escalante High School make collaboration a priority to build the shared vision for the school.