

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**George Washington Academy
2277 South 3000 East
St. George, Utah 84790**

April 18-19, 2012



**Utah State Office of Education
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P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

George Washington Academy

**2277 South 3000 East
St. George, UT 84790**

April 18-19, 2012

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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 18-19, 2012, 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 George Washington Academy 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 Donald Fawson is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at George Washington Academy 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 George Washington Academy.

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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

GEORGE WASHINGTON ACADEMY

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Shari Rammell
Kengie Gass
Third Grade
Nate McCleery
Stephanie Hulet

Susan Scofield
Chris Hatch
Donna Spotts
Fourth Grade
Joni Bauer
Chase Williams
Matt Swartz
Kari McCoy
Mallory Ames
Fifth Grade
Kent Schwager
Toni Winder
Paula Fawson
Marci Abboud
Sixth Grade
Steve Erickson
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Jake McAllister
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Music/Choir
Kathleen Whiteside
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Special Ed.
Angel Knapp
Cindy Hansen
Tia Ellison
Tara Dippre
Debbie Parker
Speech & Language
Therapy
Monica Dixon
Ashley Ivie

GEORGE WASHINGTON ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

We are a community of learners. We will do whatever it takes to learn.
We are building a strong foundation by Believing we can, Working our plan,
Then FEELING the POWER of SUCCESS!

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- Provide an environment where students can learn, question, and explore.
- All students have the ability to learn and succeed.
- Teaching character development builds a strong foundation for life.
- Responsibility for education lies with the student, family, school, and community.
- Individual and unique differences enhance learning.
- Open communication is essential for success.
- True learning requires consistency and creativity.

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

1. Effective Communication
2. Character and Social Responsibility
3. Thinking and Reasoning

Date of visit: April 18-19, 2012

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Dr. John Childs, Utah State Office of Education, Visiting Team Chairperson

Chuck Weber, Soldier Hollow Charter School

Jenifer McCrory, Early Light Academy

Dr. James McCoy, Assistant Professor of Education, Southern Utah University

VISITING TEAM REPORT
GEORGE WASHINGTON ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

George Washington Academy considers itself to be an academically rigorous charter school. It is located in Saint George, Utah, and was granted its original charter by the Utah State Office of Education in September 2006 for students from kindergarten through eighth grade. The main focus of the original charter was to create a school with a rigorous curriculum and academic program. The curriculum is centered on a sequential curriculum referred to as Core Knowledge. Character development is another essential component of the school. The current school population is 920 students, with a projected enrollment of approximately 1,000 students for the 2012-2013 school year.

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

The school's analysis of its profile reveals a clear understanding of what the school is like and what it is trying to become. The focus on Core Knowledge provides a foundation and basis for the work of the school. The school was thorough in its stakeholder perception surveys.

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

The school should consider including school-level assessment data in addition to the state-level data already included. The focus on Core Knowledge provides essential outcomes at each grade level. Data about how students are progressing in relation to these outcomes should be assessed, gathered, analyzed, and used to drive instructional practices and decision making. The school should consider a synthesis of its achievement data and identify strengths and weaknesses in the data.

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

The self-study accurately reflects the school's strengths, but is limited in surfacing the school's limitations. A greater focus on what students are and are not learning would provide George Washington Academy with a more accurate reflection of what is occurring at the school.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- The school should inquire further into grade level and school-wide achievement data. This data should surface from school-developed formative and summative assessments.

- The school should also consider further inquiry into other school-related data such as attendance, tardiness, discipline, GPA and other types of student data that accurately reflect what is happening at the school.

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 Visiting Team found that the accreditation report presented by the staff of George Washington Academy demonstrated a collaborative effort with its depth and description—that many hands had the opportunity to be involved in the process of defining a school mission, developing a collection of belief statements, and establishing three DRSLs by which to ensure that the focus would remain constant for the school to follow.

Throughout the two-day visit, the administration, board, staff, parents, and students demonstrated this great effort in many creative and innovative ways that were both purposeful and spontaneous. They showed that all parties were involved in the process of self-evaluating and establishing DRSLs that enable the school to remain focused on its mission and purpose in order to help students attain the highest level of achievement.

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

The school's mission and beliefs fully support and align with the establishment of the DRSLs the school has outlined. It is clear that the school community mentioned above identifies the school's environment as being geared toward learners. School community members are dedicated to providing an opportunity for students to be effective communicators with strong character and social responsibility and with the ability to think and reason at a higher level than students found in other schools.

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

While the school has demonstrated a multitude of successes in students' achievement in Core Knowledge, Spalding, Shurley English, Saxon Math, and CRT assessments based on the State Core Curriculum, it has not outlined or described any indicators, rubrics, or assessments that will indicate the students are enhancing their communication skills, their character and social responsibilities, or their thinking and

reasoning abilities. Clearly, throughout the school, it is demonstrated that the opportunities are abundant in each of these areas for student learning and achievement. However, there do need to be clear indicators by which all parties involved, including students, can measure the progress being made on the 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?*

One of the greatest strengths of this school is its culture. From the moment one walks on campus, it is demonstrated by the students' happiness to be present, the teachers' willingness to be involved in the development of programs that support acceleration for students, the parents' willingness to volunteer in the school, and a supportive Board and Administration. The dedication to the building and what goes into it, the programs and technology available to teachers and students, and the continuous growth of the learning environment all indicate that the mission and beliefs guide the decisions and policies of this 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?*

George Washington Academy prides itself on using the Core Knowledge Sequence as a curriculum base that guides students' learning. As a school, George Washington ensures that the State Core Curriculum standards and skill development needed for student success are aligned within Core Knowledge. The school has added such programs as Saxon Math, Shurley English, and Spalding to reinforce student learning and to ensure that all skill areas have been covered.

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

The Core Knowledge curriculum challenges all students in inquiry, problem solving, and higher-order thinking skills by reflecting upon classical education and integrating curriculum areas to build knowledge upon knowledge in those various areas. Students are challenged above their grade levels, giving every child the opportunity to excel.

- 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 staff members worked collaboratively to focus on their mission and beliefs as they developed their DRSLs for their classrooms and for the school. Meeting in focus groups and as a whole faculty enabled them to discuss the curriculum on grade levels as well as a school-wide impact. The DRSL process was developed in these small curriculum groups and grade levels and then opened to the entire staff while also reaching out to the community.

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

Throughout the academic program, teachers have a wide variety of assessments provided by the various programs mentioned previously to support and measure the skill development of the students. The State CRTs are used to assess individual progress as well as to measure the growth of the school on an annual basis. While the DRSLs are based on the mission statement and the beliefs of the school, it is not obvious how assessments correlate the success of the students in the curriculum areas to the success of the students in the areas of the DRSLs outlined.

Instruction:

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

The instructional strategies used by the teachers at George Washington Academy are provided by the Core Knowledge content, which integrates the study of classic literature woven together with the study of various culture experiences. The art, pivotal individuals, discoveries, and advances of that time period are covered and related to the topics covered in the literature. Each teacher provides opportunities for students to be creative in their presentations of materials and reports that demonstrate their mastery of the topics.

- 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?*

Teachers, staff members, and students have developed visuals that draw students' attention to the identified DRSLs in every classroom. The principal utilizes opportunities such as morning announcements to bring students' attention to the school mission statement and the identified DRSLs to all students. The repetition of these DRSLs reminds the students at George Washington Academy of the intended focus and desired outcomes. Still, specific and direct strategies are not as explicit and obvious throughout the school's lessons or instructional objectives and practices.

- 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?*

Teachers have a tremendous opportunity for professional development in all content areas on an ongoing basis. Each summer, the staff returns to the school at least two weeks prior to the start of school, without compensation, for a review of curriculum areas, reinforcement of instructional approaches, and an opportunity to reflect upon their own individual practices as well as share and collaborate with fellow staff members. This focus and dedication enables the philosophy of focusing on the achievement of all students.

- 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 abovementioned practice encourages and ensures the professional development of each teacher in the proficiency of his/her content areas of Core Knowledge, Saxon Math, Spalding and Shurley English. It also allows and encourages teachers to share and collaborate with one another the best practices of these content areas to provide the ultimate teaching experiences and the best learning environments.

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

In the area of a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction and assessments, there is obvious commitment to the acquisition for teacher use in the classroom of interactive boards, computer labs and a library that has access to research resources for teachers and students. Also obvious are the professional resources for curriculum, instruction, and assessment purchased by the school—Core Knowledge, Saxon Math, and Shurley English. In various classrooms, the Visiting Team saw some signs of initial efforts by teachers to integrate the use of this technology to teach and assess during classroom instruction. The teachers being observed also gave this same opportunity to the students for project demonstration. This proved to be very stimulating and innovative for the students and their learning environment.

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?*

Most of the assessments that the teachers present to the students are based upon the programs purchased by the school for direct instruction—Core Knowledge, Saxon Math, and Shurley English. The science program also provides assessments and performance-based achievement assessments. The Visiting Team observed attempts by some teachers in the upper grades (sixth, seventh, and eighth) to bring in innovative and creative approaches to assessments that the students thoroughly enjoyed and took great pride in presenting. They also demonstrated implicit understanding of the DRSLs that had been defined by the school.

- 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 school uses the State Office of Education's CRTs as an annual school-wide and individual measure of progress toward achieving academic expectations. Individual program assessments also exist for each curriculum program at each grade level.

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

The school reviews assessment and other data to establish academic expectations and measure growth. The goals and expectations for the following year are established to ensure that every child has the opportunity to achieve and excel.

- 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?*

Having teachers report to school two weeks before the school year starts enables collaboration between teachers of previous grades to define the needs of students. In reviewing CRT scores, the assessment of standards is fully explained, giving teachers the opportunities to review the students' needs with the established assessments of the commercial assessments of the programs purchased by the school. This is also an opportunity for teachers to develop additional assessments that might include technology and creative and innovative approaches not offered in these commercial packages.

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

While there has been great organizational agreement in the development of the identified DRSLs, there is still a need to establish a uniform assessment that will demonstrate to all parties involved the progress being made by students in the identified DRSLs. There should be direct mention of the correlation between the focus upon the DRSLs and the assessment that indicate the students' progress in accomplishing that DRSL.

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 school leadership was found to be strongly committed to quality instruction in the school. School leaders are very well versed in all aspects of the school's curriculum offerings. School leaders are solely responsible for the planning and implementation of extensive instructional in-service training at George Washington Academy. Leaders conduct both formal and informal need assessment surveys with the school faculty to determine professional in-service training. Need assessment surveys assess both the curricular and pedagogical domains. School leaders determined the need for a staff instructional specialist and created a full-time

instructional leadership position for George Washington Academy. The school instructional specialist actively supports the instructional efforts of every teacher in the academy, and also services as an instructional and curriculum link between the school administrative and teaching staff.

- 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?*

School leaders are extensively engaged in data-driven decision making processes. School leaders collect, analyze, and interpret academic and social data pertaining to the academic achievement of students. Data interpretation is skillfully shared with faculty and staff members to make decisions for the improvement of instruction. Data is processed by the school administration and faculty on a continuous basis. Grade level teams act as “de facto” professional learning communities, but the PLC process needs greater refinement in the school. School leaders and staff members effectively use the Response to Intervention model. Grade level team leaders have received extensive training in the RTI process through efforts provided by the school administrators and instructional coach. Additionally, the school administration has established the effective use of the DIBELS, SRI, and Saxon Curriculum assessments in the monitoring of student performance at all grade levels. The state CRT assessments are also used extensively to prescribe instructional improvement strategies. All achievement data is used by the school administration and instructional coach to allocate school financial and instructional resources to address the greatest areas of need. Teams and team leaders also make recommendations to the school administration on where they feel resources need to be directed to accomplish school goals.

- c) *To what extent does the 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 school leadership strongly encourages the participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process of school improvement. The board of directors is actively engaged in determining policy and goals for the school, but is very careful to leave the administration of the school to the school leadership team. A healthy relationship exists between the board and school staff because job and role descriptions have been defined. Parents have easy access to all the members. Enrollment in the school requires that parents provide forty hours (per household) of school service per year. With a school enrollment of 920 students, parental participation is very apparent in all school operations. The school also has a very active Parent-Teacher Organization. Grade-level teams provide the faculty and staff with substantial input into school operations. Team leaders meet with the school administration monthly to review academic and organizational operations.

- 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?*

The school leadership provides meaningful participation for all stakeholders that encourages commitment, participation, and shared responsibility. However, it is recommended that the school leadership further explore and define ways to increase the formal roles of team leaders in general school operations. Although there is a healthy relationship already in existence, further definition of formal expectations, responsibilities, and engagement will increase organizational communication and effectiveness.

- 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 school organization of grade-level teams has a significant influence on the social structure of the school and its operations. Each grade-level teacher is expected to know the personality and needs of each of his/her students. In addition, each classroom teacher reports to the grade-level team on the performance status of each of his/her students. The grade-level team considers the needs of the students presented by classroom teachers, and strategically relates information to the instructional coach, the school's Director of Special Education (Assistant Principal), and school counselor as necessary to provide timely services to students who may need additional support. The degree to which school staff members know each child individually is very impressive. This was noticed and noted by members of the Visiting Team.

School Services:

This standard is dealt with in the school's NWAC 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?*

George Washington Academy has developed a school action plan and a school improvement plan, as well as a strategic plan based on USOE standard accreditation guidelines. The plan is detailed and includes objectives and measurement criteria. However, the action plan, school improvement plan, and strategic plan do not have a direct correlation to the school's three DRSLs. The Visiting Team recommends that George Washington Academy examine and refine the measurement criteria of the action plan to include criteria that relate back to the DRSLs of Effective Communication, Character and Social Responsibility, and Thinking and Reasoning. The Visiting Team also recommends that George Washington Academy continue to examine and refine key components of its action plan to include a more detailed description of the actual analysis and implementation steps for both mid-range and long-range goals.

- 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?*

The Visiting Team observed that the professional development plan is focused on implementing the action plan objective of improving student learning. The staff is trained over the summer on the Spalding Method and Saxon Math, as well as the Core Knowledge Sequence. The school has hired a staff developer who works with the teachers on professional development goals and implementation. Professional development at the school thus far has been focused on training teachers on the school's curriculum. The school leadership team should work together to ensure that the professional development continues to be intentional and focused on the school's goals for achievement as the staff completes initial curriculum training and professional development needs change.

- 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?*

The current George Washington Academy action plan addresses one area of concern— improving student achievement. The school evidences a strong commitment on the part of both the administration and the faculty to implement and follow-through with regard to this area of concern. Members of the teaching staff at George Washington Academy exhibited dedication and commitment to doing what needs to be done to improve their teaching and their students' learning. The action

plan has not been communicated to the entire staff, and the details of implementation are not known to all staff members. To ensure that commitment to the action plan is school-wide, the administration should communicate the objectives and criteria for the action plan to the faculty.

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

Teachers at George Washington Academy are open to continuous improvement. Collaborative models for school improvement include team-level meetings, faculty meetings, and team leader meetings. Structures to support communication between faculty and administration and structures for following through do not appear to be in place.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

A culture of community building exists within the school. Evidence of strong relationships among the parents, board of directors, school administration, and teachers exists within the structures and practices of the school. There is a shared focus on student achievement in a safe environment.

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

Parents are involved in a PTO organization, a School Community Council, and 40 hours of volunteer work per family per year. The school reaches out to involve and meaningfully include its patrons as well as the larger community. Parents have multiple opportunities to become engaged in the programs and practices of the school.

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

The board of directors, other parents, and school community members were involved in focus groups as reported in their self-study. These groups and stakeholders were involved in providing information for the report and in giving feedback regarding the self-study.

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

The school uses PowerSchool, which is updated every Friday. Teachers use a website, e-mail, and a Smart Board to communicate work to the home. Regular school newsletters also communicate both academic and non academic information to all stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends George Washington Academy for creating a positive school environment and culture that provides for student achievement, character development, and well-behaved students.
- The Visiting Team commends George Washington Academy for a strong correlation between its mission, vision, values, and the instructional practices of the classrooms.
- The Visiting Team commends George Washington Academy for its efforts in the accreditation process and the self-study report. This is especially commendable given the fact that George Washington is a new school and going through the process for the first time.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration, faculty, and staff of George Washington Academy for being highly qualified, loyal, and committed professionals to the students and parents of the school.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that George Washington Academy continue to use the accreditation report and self-study as core documents to guide school improvement efforts. This would include the continuation of focus groups on a regular, prescheduled basis. Greater attention should be given to departmental analyses and implementation of the action plan. The school should create an annual addendum to the self-study in which progress on the improvement plan is reported and monitored.
- The Visiting Team recommends that George Washington Academy select and focus on implementing one DRSL. This selected DRSL should be widely communicated and adopted by all stakeholders. A process for assessing the measurement of progress should also be developed.
- The Visiting Team recommends that George Washington Academy develop and implement a plan for the creation and effective use of professional learning

communities. This process will begin with faculty training on the concepts and principles of PLCs.