

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Liahona Academy**

**170 North 400 East  
P.O. Box 790310  
Virgin, Utah 84779**

**June 2, 2011**



**Utah State Office of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Liahona Academy**

**170 North 400 East  
P.O. Box 790310  
Virgin, Utah 84779**

**June 2, 2011**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	ii
Utah State Board of Education.....	iii
Liahona Academy Administration and Staff .....	1
Liahona Academy Mission Statement, Belief Statements, and DRSLs .....	2
Members of the Visiting Team .....	3
Visiting Team Report.....	4
Chapter 1: School Profile.....	4
Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry.....	4
Chapter 2: Northwest Accreditation Commission (Northwest)	
Teaching and Learning Standards.....	5
Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs).....	5
Curriculum .....	5
Instruction .....	6
Assessment.....	7
Chapter 3: Northwest Support Standards.....	8
Leadership and Organization .....	8
School Services.....	9
Facilities and Finances .....	9
Chapter 4: Northwest School Improvement Standard .....	9
Chapter 5: Community Building.....	11
Chapter 6: Major Commendations and Recommendations of the Visiting Team .....	12

## **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, June 2, 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 Liahona 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 Headmaster Brad Christensen is also commended.

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

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

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\*Board of Regents Appointments

\*\*\* CMAC Representative Appointment

\*\*\*\*\*Charter School Representative Appointment

\*\*UCAT Representative

\*\*\*\*USBA Advisory Representative Appointment

12/28/2010

**LIAHONA ACADEMY  
Virgin, Utah**

Clayton AhQuin, Jr. .... Executive Director  
Clayton AhQuin, Sr. .... Activities Director  
Parker Haslam ..... Program Director

**ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

**School Administration**

Tom Roberts.....Director of Education  
Dr. Brad Christensen..... Headmaster  
Kevin Simmons..... Administrator

**Counseling**

Thane Palmer ..... Clinical Therapist  
Dr. T. Brent Price Ph.D., LCSW ..... Therapist

**Support Staff**

Taylor Jacobson ..... Office Manager and Case Manager  
Warren Williams..... Case Manager  
Carolyn Callahan ..... Case Management  
Wesley Jones.....Librarian

**Faculty**

Uatisone Afualo	Faiaiota Faumui	Julie Sanders
Renee Bennion	Angela Frabasilio	Kokys Scarth
Linda Crosby	David Mangleson	
Jack Eves	Russell Neilson	

**LIAHONA ACADEMY  
Virgin, Utah**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Liahona Academy is to ensure that each student is academically, personally, and socially on-track.

**BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- A safe, caring and positive learning environment is essential to student progress.
- All students can learn and students are ultimately responsible for their own learning.
- Communicating ideas effectively is imperative for current and future success.
- Higher level thinking skills are necessary to become literate in reading, writing, speaking, listening and mathematic reasoning.
- Life-long learning is an integral part of all education.

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

1. Academic Achievement
2. Effective Communication
3. Social Skills

Date of visit: June 2, 2011

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Robert Stillwell, USOE/NWAC Accreditation Consultant, Visiting Team Chairperson

Katherine Whitteikind, Education Director, Sunrise RTC, Hurricane, Utah

Joette Hayden, Education Director, Falcon Ridge RTC, Virgin, Utah

## VISITING TEAM REPORT

### LIAHONA ACADEMY

#### CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Liahona Academy, located in Virgin, Utah, is a private residential treatment center for boys aged 12-18. Liahona Academy is designed to help boys who have alcohol, drug, anger, and relationship issues. The facility opened in 2001 and has increased its capacity to 54 beds in 2010.

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

Students come to Liahona Academy from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of academic success. The boys come from many different states and foreign countries. The average stay is 9.2 months. 15 percent of the students have IEPs and are served by special education.

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

There are some elements of a complete self-study that were not included in the school's 2011 self-study. Focus groups (with summaries) and departmental analyses should be completed for future self-studies.

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

The school did an honest appraisal of its own strengths and weaknesses. The school identified areas that are positive and productive and likewise found some areas, notably technology and professional development, where there is room for improvement.

#### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Use NSSE rubrics with focus groups.
- Have teachers complete essential questions for departmental analysis.

## 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 mission statement, beliefs statements, and DRSLs of Liahona Academy are well developed and functional. It is apparent that the teachers are aware of them, and they are posted in each classroom. What is missing is a way to measure the student progress toward achieving the DRSLs. There are some rubrics in place that could be used, and teachers need to coordinate how the progress through the program is reflected as progress on the DRSLs.

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

The mission and beliefs are aligned and stated clearly.

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

There were no apparent indicators. There are bullets listed under DRSL headings, but no information was provided regarding how progress will be measured.

- 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 mission statement, beliefs statements, and DRSLs of Liahona Academy were posted around the school. It was also apparent that the teachers were aware of them, as focus on the DRSLs came through in the lessons. What was not visible was student involvement and student progress toward achievement.

### **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 lessons presented and planned were based on the Utah State Core and reflected the Utah Life Skills. The staff members worked together and planned cross-curricular projects and grading rubrics reflecting the core standards.

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

All students were engaged and actively learning. There were opportunities given for higher-level thinking and discussion. This was especially apparent in the needs-based math classes. The students stated that some group work was required, and they collaborated often on projects. Asking effective questions was also a value apparent in the classrooms, as was appropriate classroom protocol.

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

These staff members worked well together and kept other part-time staff members informed of the curriculum needs. They also collaborated on common assessments.

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

In classroom assessments, this was an area where the teachers excelled. They were able to track students and communicate with parents and staff members. What was missing was the same collaboration in the area of measuring DRSLs and progress on the school action plan.

**Instruction:**

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

The teachers at Liahona Academy were using a variety of instructional strategies and grouping configurations to enhance the learning. Students were observed in quiet study, leveled concept grouping, project development, and constructing questionnaires for research. There was also direct instruction happening in most classrooms.

- 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?*

Strategies for instruction in the teaching of DRSL indicators were apparent in the classrooms. But it was not apparent that the students understood what the indicators were or why they were being taught. There was also not a measurement tool in place.

- 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?*

There is a process in development to give teachers more input into the school's professional development program.

- 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?*

Teachers were very knowledgeable and proficient in the content. They also brought in experts to enhance the learning opportunities and supervised the aides helping with instruction and management.

- 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 technology was limited to a computer for word processing. This area is being expanded.

**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 classroom assessments were developed with the possibility of expanding to cross-curricular use. There is a common rubric that will be used and expanded.

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

There is a process in place, and it is used for many areas, including progress through the levels in the program and progress toward high school graduation.

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

Assessment data is used at Liahona Academy for progress reports for parents, progress through the program, and referral to content area specialized grouping. This system works well for the program.

- 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?*

Collaboration was apparent, and student assessment strategies were in evidence.

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

This is one area where the teachers and staff completely agreed. They were aware that a school-wide tool was necessary and had one developed to assess cross-curricular projects, and are expanding it to include assessing DRSLs.

### **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 headmaster is an accomplished professional educator who promotes high expectations for quality instruction. The school climate is purposeful and structured.

- 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?*

There is adequate monitoring of student achievement following the course syllabi, which outline all the assignments required for course completion. DRSL indicators need to be developed so that teachers and students will have a clear picture of how the DRSLs will be measured.

- 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 school leaders are creative in their use of space and resources. The learning environment is positive and well designed. Improvement could be made in the acquisition and use of technology.

- 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 teachers have meaningful roles in managing their classrooms. There is room for improvement in the form of asking teachers for their input in developing a professional development plan.

- 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 class sizes are kept quite small, and students benefit from the individual help they receive. Through the treatment plans and small school setting, all students are known to multiple adults, and all staff members are engaged in helping students be successful academically.

### **School Services:**

This standard is dealt with in the school's Northwest 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 administration and support staff are supportive of school improvement and professional development, as evidenced by the treatment team model and daily collaboration among the residential, clinical, and academic staff members. The school is currently lacking the action plans that contain improvement steps, timelines and accountability that would make a comprehensive improvement plan effective. Teachers do believe that the current process would be improved by further time and attention to these goals and action plans. The school improvement plan identifies some of the indicators necessary for supporting the DRSLs, although it is difficult to ascertain the direct link to the DRSLs within the plan. Strong leadership is recommended to sustain continuing support for professional development and to

motivate all staff and school stakeholders to be advocates for continuous improvement.

- 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 evidence that indicates the school has a desire for continuous improvement with the support of a professional development plan, but does not yet have a specific process outlined to ensure ongoing professional development. The ownership and administrative team should provide opportunities for ongoing professional development by making available time, resources, and opportunities for all teachers to participate in school-identified professional development activities, and require that it be aligned with the goals for improvement. Professional development programs are designed to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills by all staff members, and they focus on the knowledge and skills required to fulfill the performance expectations of their roles and to contribute to the achievement of the school's goals for improvement.

- 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 Visiting Team believes the school is in need of further development of the action plans before this can be fully assessed. There is a need to more directly align the activities of teachers and students to the learning goals identified by the DRSLs and the indicators.

There is a strong correlation between the department's individual goals and steps in addressing the DRSLs, but that is not encapsulated in the overall school improvement plan. According to conversations with school administration and teachers, there is sufficient commitment to the continued creation of the action-plans school-wide. The Visiting Team believes that this is one of the critical steps that must be taken in order for the school to move in the direction of its outlined goals and DRSLs.

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

The school structure and strong positive role modeling by teachers, support staff, residential staff, and the clinical team create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement. This is evidenced by the creation of individual student learning plans that identify needs and goals of each student within the school.

The school allows for students to pace themselves with many classes, a feature that is well liked by students and staff alike. Time is provided for teachers to collaborate with each other and encourage staff members to improve teaching and student

learning. School leaders model and encourage others to support both academic and personal growth. The commitment to helping young people to be happy, productive, members of society is evident throughout the school, and there is an attitude of positive change and growth throughout the school and residential environment. The school is working on continuous improvement in the SIP through the development of the action plans and ongoing assessment measures that will help monitor school and student growth. This assessment of continuous improvement is a vital part of the process, and as the staff and teachers of Liahona implement these action steps, careful attention should be given to the measurement and quality of the plan and documented results. The school staff and administration are committed to the norms of continuous improvement, and will be making this a standard part of team discussions.

## CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

The teamwork evident among the staff is very positive. Staff members collaborate to better know and serve their students' needs.

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

Students spend part of each school day out of classrooms working in an independent study hall/larger group environment, and receive help from staff members other than teachers.

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

The school staff had input into the DRSLs, and there is strong agreement that they are appropriate. In future self-studies, teachers can benefit from completing a departmental analysis of their effectiveness. In a small school setting such as Liahona, all teachers should reflect on analyzing their own teaching and identify their strengths and their areas for potential growth.

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

The school shares school improvement results with the clinical program at Liahona. Also, through the web site the school communicates school improvement news with parents and the public.

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

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends Liahona Academy for the safe, well maintained, and caring learning environment provided students.
- The Visiting Team commends Liahona Academy for providing a special education teacher for students in need of these services.
- The Visiting Team commends Liahona Academy for the dedication and commitment of its staff.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that Liahona Academy define DRSL indicators. The question of how DRSLs will be measured needs to be answered.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Liahona Academy include focus groups with summaries of areas of strength and areas of needs for improvement for all accreditation standards.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Liahona Academy have its teachers answer the essential questions for departmental analysis and reflect on their own strengths and areas for potential growth with regard to helping the school accomplish its mission and for students to attain the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Liahona Academy develop action plans with necessary action steps to implement the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Liahona Academy develop a plan for the acquisition, training and use of technology by teachers and students.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Liahona Academy involve teachers in developing a meaningful professional development plan.