

Schools face accreditation issues

Report » Officials say the problems are minor.

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The Salt Lake Tribune

Salt Lake Tribune

Updated:01/05/2010 07:32:53 PM MST

Eight Utah public and private schools face accreditation woes, according to a report the State Board of Education plans to discuss Thursday.

The Utah State Accreditation Committee and the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) are recommending approval for 287 Utah schools this year but want to place five others on "advised" status, meaning they have problems that could eventually threaten their accreditation or they filed incomplete annual reports. They're recommending "warned" status for three other schools, which is one step closer to losing accreditation than advised.

High schools must be accredited in order for the credit they give students to be considered valid. Accreditation status is based on a number of factors, including curriculum, counselor to student ratio and assessment.

Still, Georgia Loutensock, an education specialist at the Utah State Office of Education, said oftentimes parents need not worry just because a school has been placed on advised or warned status.

"They're still accredited," Loutensock said. "It's usually a temporary thing that can be rectified."

Riverton High, for example, is being recommended for advised status this school year because too many of its teachers are teaching too many kids, said principal Brad Sorensen. He said many teachers at the school this year picked up an extra period to make up gaps in offerings. But there weren't enough extra periods in the same subjects to hire more full-time teachers, Sorensen said.

He added, however, that not offering the extra classes would probably have affected kids more than giving teachers heavier loads.

"If we didn't add a section for something kids were interested in, it would lessen their opportunities," Sorensen said.

He said he hopes that next school year, when Herriman High opens and takes part of the school's population, the school won't have to ask teachers to pick up so many extra classes.

Two charter schools -- Merit College Preparatory Academy in Springville and Pinnacle Canyon Academy in Price -- are also being recommended for advised status.

Merit is being recommended for advised status because it didn't have course descriptions, according to the school's accreditation summary. A school official said the course descriptions are in the school's charter and just needed updating to fulfill requirements.

"It's not a huge reason for alarm, but it is what it is," said Merit board Chairwoman Jenni Theobald.

Attempts to reach officials at Pinnacle this week were unsuccessful, and the state office refused to release the reasons for putting schools on advised or warned status before the state board meets on Thursday. In the past, the state office has released those reasons to the public at the same time as the status report.

Meridian School, a private school in Orem, is being recommended for warned status after being on advised

status last school year. But Daniel Smith, head of Meridian, said the school is being recommended for warned status mainly because it takes a different approach to education than the one outlined by the NAAS.

For example, the school is home to some teachers who aren't certified but are qualified in the school's eyes, such as a teacher who has been in the classroom for 19 years and a physics teacher who taught at Brigham Young University.

Smith said the school is applying for accreditation from another body, the Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools. And if that body accredits the school, it will satisfy the state's accreditation requirement.

Several other private schools also face advised or warned status. Utah Helicopter Inc., a postsecondary school in Spanish Fork, is being recommended for advised status; Cross Creek Academy, a private residential school in La Verkin for troubled teens, for advised status; Top Flight Academy, also a private residential school in Mt. Pleasant, for warned status; private school Dorius Academy in Layton for warned status.

Attempts to reach Utah Helicopter, Dorius and Top Flight Academy this week for comment were unsuccessful. Karr Farnsworth, administrator at Cross Creek, said he was unaware of the school's recommended advised status and said he doesn't know how it got that status.

And the committee is recommending Utah Preparatory Academy, a private residential school in Manti, lose its accreditation, though it's unclear if the school is still open. Loutensock said the accreditation committee's attempts to reach the school were unsuccessful.

Schools facing accreditation woes

Eight Utah public and private schools are being placed on "advised" or "warned" status:

Merit College Preparatory Academy, Springville, advised

Riverton High, Riverton, advised

Pinnacle Canyon Academy, Price, advised

Meridian School, Provo, warned

Utah Helicopter Inc., Spanish Fork, advised

Cross Creek Academy, La Verkin, advised

-Top Flight Academy, Mt. Pleasant, warned

Dorius Academy, Layton, warned

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