

**THREE-YEAR-TERM REVISIT
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

FOR

NEVADA UNION HIGH SCHOOL

**11761 Ridge Road
Grass Valley, CA 95945**

Nevada Joint Union High School District

March 3-4, 2014

Visiting Committee Members

Mrs. Carla Escola, Chairperson
Teacher, Retired

Ms. Sally Bimrose
Principal, Piner High School

Ms. Kiran Grewal
Vice-Principal, Florin High School

Mr. Michael Pilakowski
Teacher, Gridley High School

The Three-Year Term Revisit Visitation Committee thanks Nevada Union High School for their kind hospitality in hosting our visit this year. The openness of all stakeholders as we've gone through this process is commended. Breakfast served by the Culinary Arts class was delicious.

I. Introduction (1/2–1 page)

Include the following:

– General comments about the school and its setting and the school's analysis of student achievement data.

Nevada Union High School (NUHS), a comprehensive high school established in 1961, is located in the Sierra Nevada foothills northeast of Sacramento, serving Grass Valley, Nevada City, North San Juan, Penn Valley, Alta Sierra, and Lake Wildwood, bussing students as far as 55 miles. Its enrollment is over 1840 students. Nevada Joint Union High School District includes two comprehensive high schools and three alternative high schools (a technical high school, a continuation high school, an academy for online instruction/court community day school) as well as the Ghidotti Early College High School in partnership with Sierra Community College. There are also many charter schools in the area. A myriad of diverse feeder schools brings students to NUHS from individual elementary districts.

Demographically, 55% or more of the population base is 50 or older with only 15% 14 or younger. The economic downturn and rising housing costs have contributed to declining enrollment and budgetary challenges.

Student population at NUHS is almost 88% Caucasian, so ethnic diversity is minimal, but 35% of students qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program, up nearly 50 percent from the last visitation, indicating a growing socio-economic diversity that creates a significant subgroup.

The three year term progress report states that the school's analysis of student achievement data indicates progress has been seen, but the discrepancy in scores between the non-SED/SWD and the SED/SWD groups shows a huge need for intervention strategies. NU's findings also indicate that a number of student subgroups, including their growing socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED) and students with disabilities (SWD), perform lower than their counterparts on CST and CAHSEE exams. Discussions and recommendations from the focus groups and departments as well as review of their data support this need. In addition, Nevada Union is currently in the second year of Program Improvement and needs to intensify their focus on proficiency rates for the CAHSEE to move out of PI.

- **Significant changes or developments that have affected the school since the last visit.**

Nevada Union High School has undergone significant changes since the last WASC visitation. For instance, the administrative team since the last full visit has seen a complete transition. Michael Blake, former principal at Park Avenue Continuation High School, began transitioning in as principal in spring of 2011 and officially took charge as Nevada Union's principal in fall 2011. Assistant Principal Dan Frisella came in fall of 2011 from the Natomas district. Kelly Rhoden, who had been a physical education teacher at NU for 15 years, was hired this past year as an assistant principal. Paul Lundberg is also a newly hired assistant principal. Previously, Paul was curriculum and instruction coordinator and assistant principal for five years and taught US history at Del Oro for 15 years. These changes, coupled with budget cuts, declining enrollment and the transition to Common Core have challenged the staff and stakeholders to preserve core beliefs while also embracing their new reality and adapting within their school culture.

Nevada Union has also seen the retirement and movement of positions at the site and in the district of many experienced and veteran staff members. Some of these positions have been replaced while others have been absorbed due to financial cutbacks. District administrative decisions last year eliminated teacher positions such as the TOSAs (Teachers on Special Assignment) which included EL, Title I and on-line data analysis coordinator. A new district superintendent, Dr. Louise Johnson, was hired this past summer. Dr. Johnson comes as a veteran superintendent with a history of improving district academic and school cultures.

NUHS is anticipating an additional loss in revenue again this year which will subsequently result in further staff cuts. In the World Language department, German will be eliminated after this year and French is being phased out. The current budgetary climate and declining enrollment may lead to layoffs in the coming school year as well that the district is attempting to mitigate through retirement incentives. Despite the budget cuts, all staff continues to attempt to ensure quality education for all students.

Staff development has seen a major change over the past three years as the district has begun to embrace the concept of Professional Learning Communities. Nevada Union sees this as a model for establishing a systemic change through collaboration, data collection, and intervention. Collaboration time has significantly increased to 22 Mondays with hopes to expand to every Monday. This increased collaborative time has also been important in the creation of common assessments, aligning curriculum and transitioning to the Common Core.

NU reports that due to the volatility of administration with changeovers, retirements, transfers, and new hires, many initiatives in the school lack direction. The recent process of developing the newly modified Action Plan is reported as building trust among stakeholders and assisting them in focusing their efforts toward common goals.

II. Follow-up Process (1/2–1 pages, but more may be needed)

- **Briefly comment upon the school's process for follow-up, including the capacity of the school to monitor implementation and accomplishment of the areas for improvement as recommended by the previous visiting committee.**

As presented in the three year progress report, the process for follow-up appears to have taken place only during the 2013-2014 school year. The progress report submitted prior to the Visiting Committee's arrival contains little evidence of progress or follow-up having been made on the original VC recommendations from the 2011 visitation. The process described in the progress report began in October of 2013. The Action Plan included in the progress report differs significantly from the plan approved in the 2011 visitation. The new Action Plan has only recently taken shape, having been developed in the month prior to the March 2014 visit at a retreat. The VC's initial reaction to this situation was alarm, as it did not appear much had been done in the preceding years. Upon interviews and observations on campus with students, parents, certificated and credentialed staff, district office personnel and site administration, it is evident that much *has* occurred over the last three years that shows evidence of progress even though this progress has not been reported in the three year term progress report. The collaboration of the focus and home groups, as well as the recent reworking of the Action Plan, appears to have drawn the stakeholders together with new purpose, trust, and the will to monitor their progress from this point forward as well as HOPE that there is a brighter future for NU. Support from and for administration is evident from all stakeholders interviewed by the VC.

In their process for completing the three year term progress report, NU met first in homegroups comprised of departments, a student town-hall, a parents group, and a classified employees group. Following these, the homogeneous groups split into heterogeneous, thematic focus groups with representation from all home groups in each. Commonalities were obvious as the groups proceeded to summarize their progress. Interviews with members of the focus groups confirm that all stakeholders were represented during the midterm progress process and had input. Members also iterated that they felt this process was much more inclusive and authentic than the process used in the 2011 full self-study. Input from these groups was reported, and confirmed, to have been used in the significant modification to the original Action Plan. Focus group members interviewed by the VC report confidence in the current process and the ability of the current administration to see the modified action plan through to fruition. The VC is in agreement about their confidence in the ability of the current administrative team as well. In addition, the leadership team and administration understand the importance of amalgamating their current Action Plan and their SPSA to simplify their future planning strategies.

III. School's Progress on the Critical Areas for Follow-up (2–4 pages but more may be needed)

A. Summary of School Progress: Comment on the accomplishment and success made in each schoolwide action plan section, noting which critical areas for follow-up have been addressed. In this succinct summary of the school's progress since the full visit, comment on any observable impact on student learning.

In the 2011 self-study, NU identified three primary goals for their future improvement:

1. Addressing the needs of the lowest performing students
2. Technology
3. Keeping students at Nevada Union

Progress in each of these three areas was not immediately apparent in the three year term progress report. Through interviews on-site with stakeholder groups, the VC was able to determine that there has been some progress in each of these three areas.

Goal 1: Addressing the needs of the lowest performing students

- Support classes for ninth graders have been developed and added. Currently there are two sections each for English 9 Support and for Algebra Support.
- The system for identifying Title 1 students has been clarified so that students who need support receive it. Included here are the non-grads from eighth grade.
- Reconnecting Youth, an intervention class that focuses on life skills curriculum, and a new health class assist at-risk freshman students with transitions to high school. The classes feature use of successful former at-risk students as peer tutors. Students who did not graduate from eighth grade and students who have failed one or more classes in ninth grade are recommended for these classes.
- Tutoring for Title 1 students takes place each afternoon in NU Connections center.
- EL students also receive support through their ELD classes and in the Partnership Academy. There are two bilingual aides as well, up from one at the 2011 visit.
- The Partnership Academy has two feeder English classes for ninth graders that prep and promote entrance into the program itself; teachers spoke of these classes as helping to create a sense of belonging for at-risk freshmen.
- Currently, staff are implementing the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) program school-wide. This program assists with the development of a more positive learning environment for students, and while it is in the formative stage, staff involved are very enthusiastic about the beneficial impact that will be possible through this program.
- Staff has taken a more proactive approach to identifying students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch in order to allow them to benefit from free meals, fee waivers for standardized assessments such as SAT and AP exams, and access to scholarships.
- Currently staff is exploring options for an expanded block schedule in order to provide additional opportunities for students to take classes of interest in electives and advanced placement.
- Last year a course called Introduction to the Visual Arts was offered by the Art Department as a means of introducing at-risk freshmen to various strands of visual and performing art.

- Assessment logistics for CAHSEE have been modified from previous large-group model to a small-group, more authentic one with students testing in familiar classrooms with subject area teachers.

Goal 2: Technology

- Wireless connective capability has been implemented campus-wide since the original visit.
- A new district technological coordinator has been hired effective this year, replacing a previous technological coordinator with less of an educationally-oriented background.
- Over two dozen faculty recently attended a two-day Google Apps seminar in Roseville.
- Additional faculty have attended on-site Google Apps training.
- Administration has supported and implemented a Bring-Your-Own-Device policy promoting students bringing and using their own wireless device to campus for educational purposes.
- Deployment of LCD TVs and LCD projectors has continued, funding-permitting, with deployment affecting approximately 75 percent of classrooms at this time.
- Approximately 12 documents cameras have been deployed across campus since 2011.
- District Technology Team meetings have invited input from faculty into technological issues on campus.
- Availability of the NU Connection site on campus for parents without home Internet allows them to check on student grades.
- Implementation of Samsung tablets for all members of the Partnership small learning community since 2011.
- Launching of a Business and Technology Club
- 3D printers are currently being used in the physics and ag mechanics classes.
- Discussion on the Daily Diggins has led to details being provided beyond the scope of the announcements.

Goal 3: Keeping Students at Nevada Union

- A Freshman Task Force was formed to identify and suggest improvements to the transitions issues affecting freshman students.
- Administration has met with parents requesting check-out slips to remove and transfer their students to other schools in order to determine reasons for movement away from NU.
- On-going work has continued with outreach to the many feeder schools, including brochures outlining the offerings at NU, NU preview nights, video presentations for potential transfer students, and an increased outreach effort at feeder schools by those who sponsor campus clubs and activities, such as cheer, dance, and basketball camp.
- Ongoing consideration for the development of some form of block scheduling in order to offer additional elective opportunities to students.
- Hiring of a Public Relations team to explore NU culture and aid in its promotion as a desirable educational choice in the Nevada County service area.
- The PBIS program for redirecting student behaviors has been initiated to all students and improve campus culture.

- NU continues to use programs such as Breaking Down the Walls to encourage a building of culture at the school.

The stated schoolwide Action Plan goals in the three-year term report are different from those in the original document as the process for development of revised goals evolved over the past six months. There are now five goals, and these form the backbone of the new Action Plan:

Goal #1. Create and implement a systematic process of intervention that addresses the needs of all students and student groups (i.e., failed learners, EL, SED, SWD, etc.) to ensure that all students will have the time and support needed to learn at high levels. *This goal is aligned with original goal 1 - addressing the needs of lower performing students and original goal 2 - keeping students at NU.*

Goal #2. Establish NU as a school of excellence offering personalized learning opportunities with clear pathways to college and careers. *This goal is aligned with the original goals 2 and 3 - technology and keeping students at NU.*

Goal #3. Nevada Union will develop as a 21st century school with the technological infrastructure that prepares students to be Career and College ready. *This goal is aligned with the original goals 2 and 3 - technology and keeping students at NU.*

Goal #4. Further develop and clarify departmental learning outcomes based on the CCSS and improve consistency and integration of instruction across the curriculum. *This goal is aligned with original goal 1 - addressing the needs of lower performing students.*

Goal #5. All students will experience a supportive and safe learning environment through improved communication among all stakeholders and by improving the culture and climate of the school. *This goal is aligned with all three original goals.*

Critical Areas for Follow-up from the 2011 VC report are addressed as follows:

1. All stakeholders need to integrate the school's vision and mission statement with expected student learning outcomes and use that power to drive the decision-making process in curriculum-instruction-assessment matters as well as expectations to prepare all students for their future. Administration, staff, and district office need to ensure greater staff involvement in WASC visitations to other school sites in order to understand the process better (reciprocal responsibility).

NU's three year term progress report shows insufficient evidence that the stakeholders have been actively incorporating the school's missions and vision to the curriculum. Elements of "accidental alignment" are present, and in interviews with stakeholders the VC finds that faculty admit not using the ESLRs or mission/vision to actively drive instruction or make decisions. Since the last visitation a limited number of faculty and administration have been sent on WASC visitations to other school sites or training, although some of the new administration team has previous WASC experience.

2. Staff needs to align ALL courses to academic and CTE standards, using tools such as formative assessments, evidence, and ESLRs.

The NU three year term progress report states that movement to complete alignment of academic and CTE courses to standards has been a “unique process” with variable success depending on the department and course under consideration. Cross section of students interviewed report little common pacing and use of common assessments in their experience. Evidence of using assessment data to drive instruction on a regular and consistent basis is limited at best. Faculty and administration interviews cite “data challenges” as a primary reason for this difficulty, noting the continued use of the non-user-friendly *eSchoolPLUS* data management system as a primary culprit. As a component of the current review process, NU has realized that their ESLRs and mission/vision are in need of review and potential revision so that they will be measurable and easily understandable for all staff and students. NU states that they will be including this in their revised action plan.

3. Staff needs to expand or modify support systems for low achieving students, including targeted differentiation for all learning modalities.

Progress toward expanding or modifying the support systems for lower achieving students during the past three years was minimal within the three year term progress report. However, interviews with stakeholders show significant progress toward meeting this goal and addressing this area of critical need. The school has entered PI 2 for failure to have sufficient numbers of students pass the CAHSEE at the federally-mandated proficiency level of 380. Faculty and administration are aware of this, and they have demonstrated inclusion of several new initiatives in their goal evidence to note an attempt to address this critical need.

4. Staff needs to clarify criteria for student placement in advanced and support courses.

NU’s three year term progress report states that the criteria for student enrollment in AP courses have been revised and are now more inclusive, conforming much more to the open enrollment model preferred by the College Board. Students are now advised about the stringent requirements of being in an AP course but are not barred from enrollment. Evidence collected in interviews with types of students previously deterred from taking AP courses (e.g. at-risk students in the Partnership Program) shows that this is true. However, additional evidence collected in student interviews suggests that some individual teachers are still deterring students from choosing challenging and rigorous experiences through their interactions with students. Movement at NU has also occurred toward better defining criteria for placement of students into the newer intervention courses, including curriculum-based entry assessments, increased articulation with the many out-of-district feeder schools, and teacher recommendation. In a related area, students reported being unclear about the importance of early PSAT, SAT and ACT registration and testing and that this has affected their competitiveness for admission to four-year schools.

5. Leadership needs to organize and strengthen the leadership structure with clear roles and responsibilities for all, including enhancement of staff awareness, training, and accountability to maximize use of collaboration time.

The NU three year progress report states that collaboration time has significantly increased to 22 Mondays and the hope is to expand collaboration to every Monday. Collaboration time is being used to create common assessments, align curriculum and transition to Common Core. Collaborative time was initially used to establish learning outcomes and to design common assessments, but there is still a lack of evidence present for significant movement in the creation of common formative assessments. The data from existing assessments is being used to determine successful instructional practices, but there is inconsistency in the application of common assessments, pacing, and the like. Departments are at different stages regarding the use of their collaboration time. The three year term progress report provides an indication that NU is attempting to move toward a PLC model. Planning for this training fell through due to restrictions within the school calendar this year. However, plans are underway to calendar this in fall 2014. Administration is assisting departments by providing on-site professional learning for staff to better understand the roles and processes of how to use collaborative time. Currently there are other demands on collaboration time as well because of the move to Common Core, which is new since the 2011 visitation.

6. Staff needs to collect, analyze, and implement input from all stakeholders (i.e., certificated and classified staff, students, parents, community members) to be included in the decision-making and school review processes.

Overwhelming evidence from interviews and discussions with stakeholders indicates that progress is being made to include all stakeholders in the decision-making and review process. Classified staff, students, and parents all report much greater involvement in the three year review process. Students interviewed report that administration is not always receptive to student input and/or that students do not understand the process to bring suggested changes to the administration. Future plans include implementation of a survey created by researchers at CSU Los Angeles that will allow collection and analysis of stakeholder input beyond the few surveys that have already been administered.

7. Staff and students need to maintain and update the 4-Year Plan (Independent Learning Plan) so that all students have active access to revision as they proceed through NU and plan for their futures.

Counseling Evidence Binder indicates that the 4-year plan is being used by students to plan their course selections through high school. Planning takes place in a large group setting as well as individually. This was confirmed through student interviews; students were aware of the 4-year plans and indicated that they are reviewed annually with them.

The Partnership Academy has been a safety net for students to succeed and has enhanced student learning as quantified in increased GPAs. Other evidence of enhanced student learning is documented in evidence binders, improved test scores, and classroom/evidence room displays as well as interviews with students discussing their achievements.

B. Priority and/or Additional Areas for Improvement: Identify and note any areas that need to be given priority for the school's ongoing improvement. (This may also include additional critical areas for follow-up.)

Progress in the previously identified areas of critical need was found to be made and the VC encourages NU to continue monitoring the implementation of the schoolwide action plan and its addressing of the critical needs. Three areas, however, especially struck the VC as being in need of additional attention before the next accreditation cycle:

- Integration of mission and vision statements and ESLRs and WASC participation by all stakeholders. The VC team found that in the previous three years, there has been little movement toward active, conscious implementation of ESLRs and the school's mission/vision. The current plans reflect this recognized need. Additionally, NU's understanding of the WASC process and the ongoing need to monitor implementation of previous recommendations was seen to only have been recently addressed. NU may consider investigating funding for ongoing maintenance of a WASC coordinator/data management position to help monitor and report to stakeholders the progress made on goals and critical areas.
- Alignment of courses to state content standards and national common core standards, creation of common formative as well as summative assessments, and use of data from those assessments to drive instruction is a second area of ongoing critical need. Currently, data from the curriculum teams is not driving instruction in every department; many departments are using summative assessments to place students in classes, but the work on developing and understanding formative assessments needs to continue. Evidence collected from multiple student interviews indicates that while some progress has been made to common assessments and collaborative teaching that there are still a number of resistant faculty whose reticence is impeding the progress of students at NU.
- Although some evidence of movement toward addressing critical need 5 was found, additional progress in defining what collaboration time "looks like" and how it should be used is needed, as is increased accountability so that there is more uniform progress toward the PLC model indicated in the three year progress report. Accountability of faculty for collaboration time norms, common assessment development, and alignment to state and Common Core standards is imperative.

In terms of the revised action plan developed recently by NU, the VC team finds the updated goals to be largely consistent with the challenges reported in the three year term progress report and the evidence collected during the visit. Current goal five, however, is seen as really addressing two separate, but related, issues - 1) communication and 2) a safe learning environment and school culture. NU may consider splitting goal 5 into two distinct goals to facilitate tracking of progress toward each. Although identified as a new goal, evidence was

found that suggests this is a valid need that should be addressed before the next accreditation cycle. Minority students indicated that there is racial tension at times and a lack of cultural sensitivity among students. The recent racial incident at a basketball game underscores the issue as NU represents itself to people outside the community. Additionally, the communication issue on campus was a resonating concern throughout interviews with faculty, classified staff, students, and parents.

Overall, the expression “Importance Fatigue” is used within the three year term progress report to describe the faculty feeling in response to the overwhelming number of items that all appear to need addressing in equal parts simultaneously. However, as the school works to prioritize their efforts to foster changes that are outlined within their current updated goals, they should be able to decrease the impact of this feeling of being overwhelmed. Prioritizing various projects is imperative so that stakeholders can actually concentrate their efforts and facilitate progress. Compared with three years ago, staff is more aware of areas within their school that need improvement in order to provide meaningful learning opportunities for all students and to offer multiple routes for career and college success. Consistency in follow-through on the newly revised Action Plan will be crucial, and ongoing oversight by a coordinator who acts as a WASC coach on a yearly basis - not just in a WASC year - will be extremely helpful to this end.