

SITE EVALUATION REPORT

Campus Name:	Alpine Academy
Grade Levels:	9-12
School Leader:	Nurit Stites
Purpose of Evaluation:	This evaluation is focused on academic performance and organizational effectiveness components of the school. It includes classroom observations, focus group results, and detailed data analysis of student achievement.
Conducted Date:	March 3, 2020
Conducted By:	Karen Gordon, Danny Peltier

SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

Mission:

Alpine Academy's mission is to ensure students receive a quality education and obtain the necessary skills and knowledge needed to progress in life.

During the Site Evaluation, the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) team noted several instances in which operations and school-wide procedures were put into effect with the school's mission in mind. The school has rigorous, and engaging classes. The staff has established and maintains strong relationships with students. These relationships help teachers know when to strongly encourage a student to be uncomfortable with a new learning concept and when to provide other academic supports or re-teach content. At Alpine, the learning takes place in classrooms with student to teacher ratios at less than twenty students to one teacher. These small class sizes have led to students receiving personal attention due in part to teachers having ample opportunities to maintain high expectations of their students. A quality education is encouraged through academic goal sheets, student progress plans, peer mentoring, foreign language curriculum, leadership opportunities, as well as honors and dual college credits.

The site evaluation team members conducted seven classroom observations. The team observed English, Science, History, Choir, Art, and Study Hall. These classrooms were characterized by respectful relationships and were physically and emotionally safe spaces to learn.

I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
<p>Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</p>	<p>In this area, three classrooms were rated <i>Distinguished</i>, while four classrooms were rated <i>Proficient</i>, for an overall rating of <i>Proficient</i>. In one <i>Distinguished</i> classroom, the teacher welcomed a student volunteer to help show the class a rhyming website. As students used the site to find rhyming words, they laughed and shared their ideas with each other. In another <i>Distinguished</i> classroom, the teacher asked two students ahead of time if they were comfortable sharing their product with the class without making the students feel uncomfortable. In a third <i>Distinguished</i> class, students were asked to pick their favorite painting from a choice of four paintings. Then the class broke into groups based on their choices and discussed with their group why they chose that painting. The students were engaging with each other and interested in the reasons why their peers chose a painting. The conversation was genuine, related to the content, and enthusiastic.</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed</p>
<p>Establishing a Culture for Learning</p>	<p>In this area, three classrooms were rated <i>Distinguished</i>, while four classrooms were rated <i>Proficient</i>, for an overall rating of <i>Proficient</i>. In the <i>Distinguished</i> classrooms, students were passionate about the learning that was taking place. In one classroom, students worked in groups of two to four and were committed to the team expectations for creating and completing a project. In another <i>Distinguished</i> classroom, students were excited to share their thoughts about the work of their peers. The <i>Proficient</i> classrooms all had clearly established measures for student learning.</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed</p>
<p>Managing Classroom Procedures</p>	<p>Classroom procedures and routines have been established and function smoothly in all seven <i>Proficient</i> classrooms. Classroom instructors provided expectations at the beginning of the lesson and responded to students respectfully and thoughtfully. All classroom procedures observed were well-established. There was little to no loss of instructional time during lessons.</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed</p>
<p>Managing Student Behavior</p>	<p>In five classrooms rated <i>Proficient</i>, students were generally on-task and working on assignments or group work with few off-topic conversations. In one classroom rated <i>Distinguished</i>, students were managing the classroom themselves. The teacher worked individually</p>	<p>Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed</p>

	with students who had specific questions, while the rest of the class worked in small groups.	
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II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Communicating with Students	In this area, five classrooms were rated <i>Distinguished</i> , while two were rated <i>Proficient</i> , for an overall rating of <i>Distinguished</i> . Communication in the <i>Distinguished</i> classrooms was clear, and students contributed by explaining content to their peers. In one classroom, students spoke to each other about a painting they selected and what aspects of the painting made them select the work. In another class, students worked in small groups to complete an ELA-related project and as they worked, they talked to one another about their thoughts and contributions to the outcome of the project. The school is a potential exemplar in this area, as they consistently met the <i>Distinguished</i> criteria.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Teachers used a variety of discussion techniques and asked open-ended high-level questions in all seven classrooms observed.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Engaging Students in Learning	In six of the seven classrooms observed, students were highly engaged throughout the lessons and were comfortable and encouraged to make material contributions to the representation of content and classroom activities. The pacing of the lessons allowed for ample student participation and reflection of the content.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Using Assessment in Instruction	In this area, all seven classrooms were rated <i>Proficient</i> , for an overall rating of <i>Proficient</i> . In all classrooms, students were aware of the criteria and standards by which their work would be evaluated, and teachers were open to questions about grading and expectations. In most cases, there was evidence of students assessing and monitoring the quality of their work against performance standards.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed

III. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Observations	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Mission driven operations	There is a strong connection between the mission of the school and daily operations. Small class sizes, personal attention to students, and high expectations are the norm at this school. A quality education is encouraged through academic goal sheets, student progress plans, peer mentoring, foreign language curriculum, leadership opportunities, and honors and college dual credit program.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Managing Schoolwide Procedures	Schoolwide routines and procedures, such as entering the school, transitioning between classes, and a thoughtful format for learning within the classrooms are well established.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Maintaining a Safe Environment	School-wide safety procedures generally ensure staff and student safety. Students transitioned between classes in a safe manner. Staff was available and contributed to a safe environment. Teachers were observed standing outside of their classrooms welcoming students and reminding them to wash hands, slow-down, and adhere to school expectations for safety.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed

IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	No. of Participants	Duration of Focus Group
Governing Board ¹	2	30 minutes
Parents/Families	7	30 minutes
Students	12	30 minutes
School Leadership	2	45 minutes
Staff	9	40 minutes

Governing Board:

- Board members spoke about their responsibilities with the lease expiration and the need to renew or find a new building. They said that this is a big item the board has discussed with leadership at length. There is one board member who is an attorney that will help negotiate a new lease. There is concern because the rate for the lease is below market value even though the cost has risen substantially over the last three

¹ Two members of the seven-member board participated. Quorum was not met, and Open Meeting Law was not violated.

years. The real estate market in Reno has become competitive and expensive. After a market analysis, one board member said, “Our hands are somewhat tied because we are being offered just over one dollar per square foot to re-sign for our current location which is well below market value yet much higher than previously agreed upon.”

- When talking about funding, board members hoped there would be more money allocated by the state. Board members also expressed interest in a better-defined enrollment campaign to increase enrollment at the school. One board member said, “There have been some periodic discussions, and we had a radio station spot and an open house.” However, both members said the school would need to explore expansion of their marketing.
- One Board member said he has background serving on other boards, which he hopes will help him while serving on this board.
- When asked if the board understood its role of serving as a resource for the school, both members said they hoped to increase that role in the future. The SPCSA team mentioned parents had tried to have a security lock for the front door donated but were unable to secure a donation from a company that had donated similar devices to another school. The Board members agreed this would be a good opportunity to assist the school in these types of endeavors since they have the authority to represent the school in discussions.

Parents/Families:

- Parents shared that they chose this school because of better student to teacher ratios offered at Alpine. One parent commented, “The small classes are perfect and there isn’t a lot of change.” Another family member added, “The teachers here really care a lot and that means a lot to all of our children.”
- Parents feel the school is a perfect setting for some students, particularly those that may benefit from additional one-on-one attention or small class sizes. One parent commented, “My son has autism, and the small classes are great. There is not much change, and this is the perfect school for him.” Another parent in a similar situation stated, “The teachers really care here. My son has a hard time comprehending sometimes, and he has the seminar class which helps him keep track of his schedule and what needs to be completed.” A third parent who was new to the area said, “My kids were going to school on-line, however this was the perfect fit because of the size and environment. The teachers reach out and talk to us. Every interaction with the school includes them asking how they can support your child.”
- Parents unanimously said that their children have developed socially. One parent commented, “When our second child with high functioning autism decided to come here the teachers were totally on-board with him and the teachers have helped him feel part of the school and completely supported.”

- When discussing if parents felt their children were challenged academically at the school, one family member said, “Our son is very challenged here. In middle school he was getting poor grades, but here he is getting exactly what he needs, and he is accepted. They have challenged him and helped him grow. He would have been lost at the neighborhood school.” Another parent commented, “My son is very intelligent, but he didn’t know how smart he was until he came here and now, we see that his abilities are at very high levels. My son sees he is capable of getting As and Bs and he knows he can do it.” Finally, another family member remarked, “My son actually challenges some of the teachers, which they encourage. The small class sizes are amazing and there is no name calling.” Other parents also complimented the dual enrollment program with TMCC.
- Parents said they are highly involved with the school. They said they are frequently involved with fundraisers. A parent commented, “We get text messages about fundraisers, game night, and the funds go to the PTO.” Another parent added, “Students want to come here, and as parents we want to be engaged too.” One parent said, “When I see how much they have done at the school for my child, I really want to be here and be involved.” Parents also said they like the variety of extracurricular activities the school offers, including archery and robotics.
- In discussing the administration of the school, parents said the new leadership had been amazing. One parent said, “The new leaders have more than exceeded expectations and parents and teachers are on the same page.” For example, a parent shared that their oldest child was struggling at their former school, so they chose to come to Alpine. When their other child started struggling, they also enrolled at Alpine, and the minute they showed up, they felt welcomed by the administration and staff. Now both of their students are thriving.
- When asked if there was bullying at the school parents said at previous schools there was name calling, but since attending this school, the peers and the teachers have been accepting. Parents all noted that there is a great deal of respect here between all parties, including leadership, staff, students, and families.
- When asked about how the school helps them support their child at home, parents stated that the open communication keeps them informed of things that may be going on at school. This helps them address issues at home they otherwise would not have known about. One parent noted that the care that the staff puts into their work and students has made her care more about their child’s education. One parent said, “I used to travel with my child, but since attending here I have realized the importance of attending school and now I really want him to be here.”
- Parents said that safety is a big issue, and the school does its best to keep all students safe. One said that the location of the school also makes it safer because it is discreet and in an area of town one would not expect a school.

- Parents expressed a desire for more volunteer opportunities. They said they would love to be able to help the administration more. One item mentioned included helping the administration with back office work such as making copies. They also would like to be able to volunteer more for students including throwing appreciation potlucks to celebrate the students' hard work.

Students:

- Students had several favorite things about school. These included off-campus lunch and the size of the school. One student shared, "The school is also very small which helps students get between classes quickly. The teachers are really good too and you can get a lot of one on one time." Another student said, "My math teacher takes time out of their schedule to help me when I have a problem."
- Regarding emotional safety, students said they make stronger connections with each other because of the size of school. Students said staff understands individual student feelings and mental health. One student commented, "They don't judge you. This school is very anxiety friendly. As long as everyone is aware, it is always very helpful." Another student added, "The principal and vice principal have been really good too. They are really supportive and really easy to talk to." A third student commented, "The teachers really care about the students, they notice you and if they see that you are down, they will ask what is going on and they will actually talk to us. They make time for us."
- When asked about how students knew where they were academically, students said they have advisories that keep them on track to graduate. Students also must complete a grade check each week to make sure they were on top of their grades. One student commented, "Every teacher is different, but most of them do grade checks and teachers are always open to allow us to check our grades. Teachers look at each student's profile to see what they are missing, and the teachers check in with the students."
- Students said they feel challenged academically in their classes and math is challenging in a good way. One student commented, "They teach us hard concepts, but they are good concepts. They also take the time to help us understand."
- One criticism was around the history curriculum with a student saying, "The style of the teaching is not as engaging as other classes."
- When asked who they would go to if they had a problem, students said they had a variety of adults they trust at the building. They all said they have adults they feel comfortable going to. As one student put it, "The teachers get to know you and how to help you because they are with us so much. The teachers can know you better than you know yourselves sometimes."

- Students said their campus is very safe both physically and emotionally. The students overwhelmingly spoke about their mental well-being at the school. Disruptions are addressed quickly by staff before things can get out of control. There are some cliques at the school, but they aren't "cut off." Everyone knows everyone. Students said the enrollment stays the same from year to year; there are some changes at the freshmen and sophomore levels but by junior and senior years people are the same. Students said they like knowing that the Sparks police station is right down the street which makes the school feel safe.
- When asked to discuss restorative justice approach that the school had been implementing, some students said they had noticed it, but not every student appeared aware of the change. Some said there have been some differences, while other students didn't think much had changed.
- When asked about the facility, students said that although this school may not have the most advanced technology, the students help clean it and keep the school looking good. The new principal and vice principal do a lot of cleaning themselves and the students were really appreciative. One student said, "I would love to have an actual janitor and a P.E. teacher." The students felt that it would be helpful to have a janitor to keep the building clean, with one stating, "Plus, teachers are already doing a lot, between classes, and clubs and they could use the help."
- When asked about what they would like to see improve at the school, students said they would like to see more parking and enrollment growth. They said that more students mean more funding and that means more benefits for the school. Another student noted they would like to see a stricter history curriculum. Finally, some students did express that they would like more privacy from the principal and vice principal. However, another student chimed in to say that the administration was only doing that because in previous years students got into trouble stealing at a market across the street.

Leadership:

- The leadership team was asked about challenges they have faced in their first year. They said being an instructional leader while managing the reporting required by the SPCSA and the Nevada Department of Education was a major challenge. School leaders also said they are also spending a lot of time recruiting students to build enrollment.
- Both leaders said their health had declined since they started working at the school. The hours have been long. The building has challenges that they are forced to fix themselves. They would like to have a custodian staff, but it is expensive.
- School leaders also noted that funding allocations were unclear, saying: "When we came from Las Vegas the prices are much higher here and that has been a shock."

The operating margins are thin. Even if there were more students, we would have to staff up to address student needs.”

- The leadership team said the lease was coming up soon which was something that worried them. There was a six-year lease to begin with and had been continually renegotiated for 3-year terms. However, now the lease is being required for five or seven years. Leaders went on to state, “The board has been very supportive and has assisted and are engaged but there are challenges. The lease negotiations have been concerning. The team looked into sharing space with another Reno-based SPCSA charter school the Honors Academy of Literature, but those discussions were not successful.”
- The leadership team said the goal is to open the new school year with 128 students. That would mean they would not have to hire more teachers and it would mean extra funding which would allow them to stay in the building and provide money for a half-time bookkeeper.
- The leadership said they explored working with back-office support at \$30,000/year, which was too expensive given the current financial circumstances at the school.

Staff:

- Staff shared that their understanding of the mission at the school is to guide students to be college and career ready. They said that the design elements contributing to the mission include rigor, motivation, and this year, social emotional learning.
- A staff member shared that, “We have been implementing the new social emotional learning elements in two periods throughout the day this year.” Staff shared that other important elements include accountability and effectiveness. This educator shared that, “The accountability part is important at this school because once our students are out in the real world, they will have to be responsible for themselves. We all have a statement in our classrooms framed, and we review the mission and give each student rigor and at the same time, meet them where they are. We are all committed to making sure they have what they need when they leave this school.”
- The staff shared that they are supportive, helpful, and care deeply about each other. One person said, “I like the professional development days because we get to work together.” Another shared that the rules are the same in every classroom and the staff stays consistent with expectations of students. One staff member shared that, “Even though I work part-time, I feel very comfortable and part of the staff.” Another teacher said they feel very supported by the administrative team and they always have time for staff.”

- Staff explained that professional development (PD) happens about one time per month and they meet for a whole day. The administration prepares ahead of time, and the topics are different every time, which could include cross-curricular writing, questioning techniques, and social emotional learning. The PD is also offered at outside events such as the social studies conference.
- Teachers report they use assessments for writing, vocabulary, and reading every quarter. They explained that they use ACT and practice ACT data. Another teacher shared that in their classroom, they have quizzes every week so they can group students accordingly. This teacher also grades homework for accuracy so that they can tell what items need to be re-taught. Students with low scores are addressed individually. Many have study halls or can stay after school for assistance.
- A staff member said that students who have trouble with algebra the first time are in a bridged algebra course. Those students who took the bridged course and Algebra at the same time have seen wonderful results.
- Students having trouble with English are sometimes put in multiple English classes and provided extra support. One of the teacher said that when they saw students were struggling with a certain lesson, they would go back and teach it again focusing on the areas students did not understand the first time: “If a student fall behind, I come early and work one on one with the student. I like that during seminar, I have them check their grades.”
- When discussing how they identify and target their instruction, one staff member said, “If we notice behavior or academics change drastically then we talk about it during our staff meeting and we can find out what is happening at home.”
- Regarding discipline, the school has implemented restorative justice techniques and had a conversation with staff about the school norms and the impact on students. A teacher said they appreciated trying to get to the root of the issue and discover what the student’s reasons were for the way they acted. For new students, staff goes over the norms and addresses this right away with students who are not following those norms.

V. OVERALL STRENGTHS

1. Alpine Academy has *Distinguished* levels of student engagement.

- Classes observed had high levels of students engaged in learning activities.
- Six of seven classes observed received a rating of *Distinguished*.
- Students made several material contributions to the content such as sharing their opinion about each works of art, designing a group project and contributing their thoughts and ideas, and discussing their point of view regarding history.

- The structure and pacing of the lessons observed allowed students time to contribute but moved at a fast-enough pace for students to move along comfortably without becoming distracted.
2. **Alpine Academy is rated *Distinguished* in communicating with students.**
- Five of seven classrooms were rated *Distinguished* in this area.
 - The levels of communication within individual classrooms was clear and students appeared to have high levels of comfort when asking for clarification, sharing thoughts, and asking questions about content.
 - Alpine High School consistently met the criteria and is a potential exemplar in this area.
3. **There is an overall inclusive mindset at Alpine Academy as observed and documented during several of the focus groups.**
- The overall atmosphere, school culture, and climate promote the acceptance of all types of high school learners.
 - Family members shared that the small school setting and class sizes were a perfect school environment for their student(s). Some of the students have speech or other special needs, and these needs appeared to be met within classroom settings.
 - The SPCSA team observed several instances of students with special needs taking part in classroom activities, talking with peers and teachers, and learning along with everyone else.
 - The staff shared that they like to connect with each student and can better judge student needs because class sizes are small and personal educational relationships exist between teachers and students.
 - During the student focus group, students shared that they know they can count on all teachers and added that there are some teachers who are like a second parent to them.
4. **Even though school leadership is new this year, the school climate is positive, and stakeholders put student needs above all else.**
- The school administrative team has a dream to fulfill the needs and school experiences for students.
 - Family members realize that the setting and outcomes the school provides are unlike any other in the Reno area and are totally committed to the school.
 - Students expressed that they like the school environment even though the school does not offer extensive sports and a traditional high school setting. They shared that the learning atmosphere, campus, and other students were a positive influence in their lives.
 - The number of staff members is small, but the group works together to provide a quality high school program for their students.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended items are provided so charters may increase their school-wide ratings as well as their overall success. SPCSA School Support Team members will follow up on each listed recommendation unless otherwise noted.

1. **School administrators should continue to learn and become comfortable with the many expectations of being a charter school leader.**
 - Charter school leader duties are vast and varied and take time to learn and implement fully. Besides administrative leadership, these include required reporting to the Nevada Department of Education, SPCSA, Board, as well as fiduciary responsibilities.
 - Consider hiring part-time staff to upload reports and complete financial transactions that are time consuming and do not require the expertise of the school leaders.
 - Consider hiring a janitorial staff. The SPCSA team was surprised to learn that the school leaders clean the building in the evenings and on weekends. This is not a duty typically assigned to highly educated school leaders and there is a good deal of concern that the school leader(s) may have little time to renew and refresh in the evenings and on weekends.
 - Look at the possibility of establishing an Alpine School Advisory Board. This might be comprised of family members responsible for providing school supports such as teacher appreciation, providing presentations to the board about a topic of importance, and helping to support the school in other ways as well.
 - As the 19-20 school year ends, consider creating a “State of Alpine” report. In the report summarize school level financial, operational, and academic levels with supporting data and clear analytics. Share this report with the school board in depth. Include a plan for next steps and clear direction of goals for next year. Include how all stakeholders, can support the attainment of these goals.

2. **Alpine Academy board members should seek out learning opportunities and better understand the fiscal, governance, and operational duties for which they are responsible.**
 - To better understand expectations, use the board trainings provided on the SPCSA website to learn more about open meeting law and governance responsibilities.
 - Attend other charter school board meetings as observers to understand how other charter school board meetings are conducted.
 - SPCSA suggests that the Alpine Academy board chair connect with a board chair at other, similar charter schools to discuss methods of providing additional assistance and support to students, families, staff, school leaders, and other board members.

- Determine specific ways that board members can offer additional types of support based on the many talents and areas of expertise each board member brings to the table.
- Consider planning and implementing a board retreat to take place one time per year and to review goals, and training.

VII. DEFICIENCIES

There were no deficiencies identified during the evaluation at Alpine Academy.



PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Name of School: **Alpine Academy**

School Year 2018-2019 Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) Rating(s)

Elementary School: N/A

Middle School: N/A

High School: 3 of 5 Stars

ELA Proficiency (CRT New NV Standards)		Math Proficiency (CRT New NV Standards)	
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Elementary	Middle	Elementary	Middle

High School Data

Graduation Rate: 86.21	Average ACT Composite: 19.86
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