

ACS WASC Words 2017-2018

“One cannot always build the future for our youth,
but we can build our youth for the future.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt



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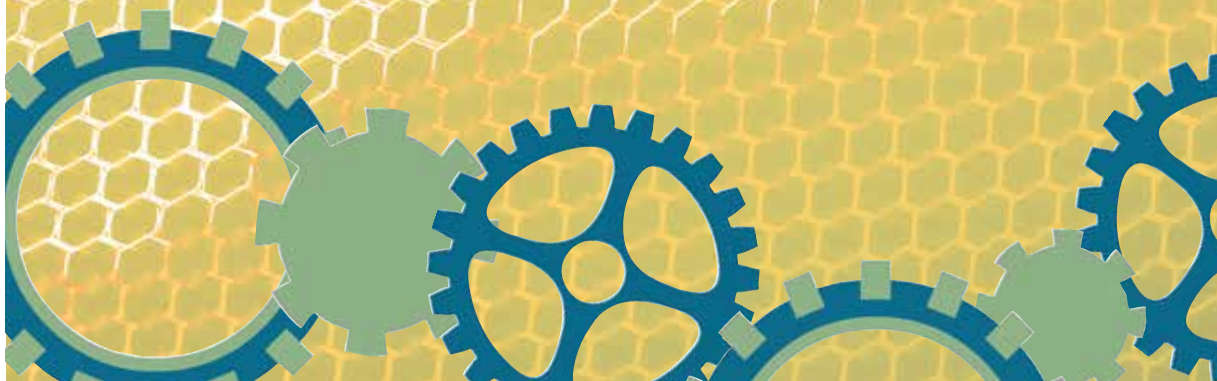
ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Mission

ACS WASC advances and validates quality ongoing school improvement by supporting its private and public elementary, secondary, and postsecondary member institutions to engage in a rigorous and relevant self-evaluation and peer review process that focuses on student learning.

Territory

ACS WASC extends its services worldwide to approximately 5,000 public, private, independent, church-related, and proprietary pre-K–12 schools. ACS WASC provides assistance to schools located in California, Hawaii, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Asia, and other parts of the world.



Thoughts from the Chair

Stephen Cathers | Chairperson, Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC



As the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC) Commission begins another year of service to schools and I, in a new role as its chairperson, wish to remind us once more why we are doing this work. I know we are all busy with day-to-day business and the odd, unexpected surprise issues, but we should step back and appreciate the safety net that our accreditation system gives all of us. Thousands of businesses, agencies, universities, and literally millions of parents and students breathe easier because our work at ACS WASC is done reliably. Furthermore, we educators can have confidence in our own professional work partly because we have opened a door to outsiders and allowed them to step in and look around our school systems.

At the risk of “preaching to the choir,” let me affirm that ACS WASC is absolutely dedicated to all students’ learning and well-being in every one of its accredited schools. What ACS WASC does is ultimately all about children; I have heard from ACS WASC Vice President Dr. Marilyn George repeatedly that the unofficial meaning of our acronym is “We Are Student Centered.” As an educator, I can say I would only do my work if I thought I was improving children’s lives. So, this part of the ACS WASC ethos is crucial for me! And I do really think the ACS WASC seal of approval means a school is a good place for a child to grow and learn. I am personally proud to be a small part of something with such far-reaching consequences, arguably world-changing consequences. I believe our schools, and our students, truly are far better because of the ACS WASC accreditation process.

Let’s review that process: it is guided by a commitment to quality and improvement, a belief in the strength of third-party review, a framework of assessment against established standards, and official judgments by professional educators that verify school systems are intact and effective. Every few years we are guided to take time for self-evaluation. Then a team of people we may not

know arrives at our place of work and studies our self-evaluation in light of what they see and hear. Having been on many visiting teams, I can say that most schools do look at themselves honestly and are better for it. I can also say that many schools have at least one blind spot the visiting team helps them see. I think that is a little like when a good friend tells us our shirt is unbuttoned or our collar is turned inside-out. We need to know about it but may not hear it without the right person to tell us.

One final nudge while I have a platform to nudge from: I encourage all educators, new and experienced, to participate on an ACS WASC visiting team whenever given an opportunity. In fact, being on ACS WASC visiting teams has been some of the best professional development I have ever had. I invariably bring back some new and promising ideas from schools I visit. It is also a great networking opportunity; I have become close friends with many visiting team colleagues after a week of intense work together. Of course, ultimately being on a visiting team is a service opportunity that actually makes a difference — I am sure you are now convinced to sign up and serve on one yourself.

Regardless of where we are in the “cycle,” I know we are all improving our schools, and ourselves, for all the right reasons. I wish you the best in that ongoing endeavor and I think all of us know what hard and important work that is!





President's Update: New Frontiers

Fred Van Leuven, Ed.D. | President, Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC



It seems only too appropriate that the theme of this year's ACS WASC Words is "New Frontiers." The past four years have seen tremendous growth of student learning, due, in part, to the accreditation process; the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC) now employs specific actions

and methods to measure this impact, beyond the anecdotal. Schools, districts, and even our organization, have taken the first steps to look deeply and critically into their practices toward improvement. In this edition of *ACS WASC Words*, we will highlight some of these first steps as a rallying call for all ACS WASC partners to raise the bar on student learning.

ACS WASC Self-Study: Last year we shared the executive summary of the academic research study focused on our organization and its impact on public California high schools. The final report of this study is now posted on the ACS WASC website and illustrates our need to support both school and district staff better to utilize this proven process for school improvement. The impact of our work is already tangible. One significant outcome has been our partnership with ACSA and CDE to create webinar trainings that support both district and school staff's efforts to align the district Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) with the accreditation process. An overview of these findings is provided on pages 8 and 9.

Accreditation Cycle Alignment: Over the past few years, we have described the work of a few districts as they align their K-12 feeder schools' self-studies. Districts in California, Hawaii, and Guam have experienced some incredible improvement as a result of this simple move and eliminated many barriers that held their students back. In fact, the Hawaii DOE has allowed our pilot to expand to all of their Complex Areas (regional districts). The results have been spectacular!

Aligning the cycles is the easy part. It allows for the district to provide support, resources, and time to each unique regional or feeder school configuration, which is the fulfilling work. This alignment is changing the work lives of both school and district

staff and school improvement is taking a different shape for schools. Pages 10–11 highlight some of these efforts in Hawaii.

California's State Accountability System: ACS WASC has forged an even stronger relationship and alignment with the California Department of Education, the California State Board of Education, and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. The accreditation process has always been recognized as a key way to review and improve student learning and is now being connected to California's new accountability system. To this end, we are defining our role in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) process. All of these organizations want to create a system that works with schools and districts to improve student learning.

California Pilot District Accreditation: Two years ago, we reported our first district accreditation with Guam. We have now expanded our district accreditation work to California. Antelope Valley Union High School District has volunteered to be our first pilot district in California. We have created the protocol, inclusive of LCAP requirements, yet flexible enough to capture district priorities. The purpose of district accreditation is for a district to embark on a thorough review of how it supports its school community and students. Antelope Valley Union High School District will have its self-study visit in April 2018. See page 11 for additional information.

One of the interesting things coming out of this pilot is the discovery of policies and practices in place for decades which have actually been detrimental to student learning. Communication silos between divisions were recognized as being barriers to student learning and are being resolved with exciting outcomes. This is exactly what the accreditation process is supposed to be — an exercise in self-reflection that allows for review of the data and the development of an action plan. Look for more information about district accreditation on pages 7 and 15.

New ACS WASC President: Finally, I will be stepping down from my role as president in June 2018. It has certainly been a fast-paced, enjoyable five years. Former ACS WASC Commissioner, Dick Bray, will be conducting the search for my replacement. The position will be finalized at the ACS WASC January 2018 Commission Meeting with the new president coming on board April 2018 to allow time for a successful transition. Look for more information on our website in the coming months.

Learning: The Focus of a School

Marilyn S. George, Ed.D. | Vice President, Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC



“I taught Spot, the dog, how to whistle,” states one little boy. His friend states that he does not hear the dog whistling. The first little boy shares that he taught him and he did not say that Spot learned it. This is the essence of a cartoon that has been used for years to emphasize that the ACS WASC *Focus on Learning* challenges all of us to reflect

deeply on these questions:

- How do we know that all students are learning?
- Are we, as a learning institution, doing everything possible to support high-quality achievement of all our students?

If learning is the business of a school, the ACS WASC *Focus on Learning (FOL)* accreditation cycle of quality can provide the coherent and transforming process to engage students, parents, teachers, staff, school leaders, governing authorities, and other stakeholders in ensuring all students are maximizing their learning. For over 25 years, the *FOL* process has centered a schools on their one and only charge: ensuring all students are learning. Integral to the *FOL* process is the engagement of all stakeholders in the rich conversations around such questions as: How does our school define learning? What do we want students to know, understand, and be able to do? What are the current and future learning needs of students? What is the most effective preparation of students for their future?

Too often in discussions about what learning means, learning becomes confused with an emphasis on the conditions for learning. In review of various explanations of learning and defined learning principles, there are common points that emphasize active student engagement, reflection, and creation of understanding through the information and experiences that lead to new understanding and development and application of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In addition, research emphasizes basic tenets or principles, such as the following:

- Students bring prior knowledge and understandings that must be taken into consideration in new learning.

- Students’ motivation based on their natural curiosity and interests influences and guides what students learn and their current level of development.
- To develop mastery, students need to have and practice the basic competencies or skills and also understand the factual and conceptual knowledge in order to apply what they have learned.
- Learning targets or goals linked with timely, specific, and descriptive feedback enhances the quality of students’ learning.
- To become self-directed learners, students need to be aware of how they learn and know how to monitor and reflect on their learning in order to adjust their approaches to learning.

A Research-based Design Focused on Student Learning

In the ACS WASC *FOL* accreditation process, these key aspects of learning are inherent in the principles or design elements. The ACS WASC *FOL* process provides the tools for a school to:

- Demonstrate that through its program there is evidence that its vision, mission, and schoolwide learner outcomes are accomplished.
- Evaluate where the students are in achieving the schoolwide learner outcomes and the academic standards.
- Use multiple ways to analyze data to demonstrate student achievement.
- Evaluate its program effectiveness in relation to its impact on student learning and meeting an acceptable level of quality in accordance with the ACS WASC criteria.
- Align its prior and current prioritized findings to a schoolwide action plan focusing on student achievement.
- Ensure there is an ongoing improvement and accountability process.
- Ensure that there is a culture of involvement and collaboration of all.
- Ensure there is a culture that nurtures and supports the well-being of all students.



Learning: The Focus of a School – *continued*

Based on these design elements, the ACS WASC *FOL* process engages schools in defining, designing, delivering, and demonstrating learning — supporting the school in a coherent, collaborative, and capacity-building process of focusing the school on the most important emphases impacting learning.

Schoolwide Learner Outcomes: Focusing the School on Student Learning Goals

One of the design elements of the *FOL* process is the belief that the school’s vision and mission and knowledge about the students provide the foundation for establishing schoolwide learner outcomes. An essential element of systemic school improvement is the collective vision on the part of the school’s stakeholders for all students: what all students should know, understand, and be able to do to be globally competent citizens. For example:

Students will demonstrate:

- Effective communication
- Creativity
- Content knowledge
- Character
- Critical thinking skills
- Collaborative skills
- Cross-cultural awareness

When schools unite around identified schoolwide learner outcomes that complement the standards-based learning and are integral to the school culture, they become the focus to support high-quality learning for all students now and in the future. As each school develops its own schoolwide learner outcomes and ensures they have helpful, measurable descriptors to support a clear understanding and use of these by all stakeholders, the learning focus becomes real. Below is a specific example of a schoolwide learner outcome.

Students will be **Innovative Thinkers**, who

- Build on the ideas, explanations, and reasons of others
- Summarize, analyze, interpret, and evaluate information
- Define problems and use problem-solving strategies appropriate to the context
- Create original work
- Use technology to create products of high quality.

ACS WASC Schoolwide Research-based Criteria and Indicators

The ACS WASC data-informed processes support the assessment “for, of, and as learning.” Specifically, the ACS WASC criteria and the supporting indicators address the basic tenets of learning as summarized above. Excerpts from one criterion on how students learn (instruction) illustrate this:

How Students Learn: The professional staff a) uses research-based knowledge about learning and teaching and b) designs and implements a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students at a high level of learning consistent with the school’s purpose and schoolwide learner outcomes.

- **Creative and Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Application:** Teachers involve students in activities where they can express their opinions, perspectives, and explore their curiosity to demonstrate thinking, problem solving, and application of the knowledge and skills.
- **Student Understanding of Learning Expectations:** The students know the standards/expected performance levels for each area of study.
- **Student Perceptions/Feedback:** The students’ feedback is used to adjust instruction and learning experiences. Interviews and dialogue with representative students inform the degree to which learning experiences, including relevancy, prepare students for college, career, and life.
- **Student Needs:** Teachers address student needs through the instructional approaches used.

Closing Comments

Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn in their book entitled: *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems* reinforce the attributes that are inherent in the ACS WASC *FOL* process as they present their concept of a coherent framework for action and transformation. These essential components are “focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability.” As stated in the book, “Leaders must find the right combination of these four components to meet the varying needs of their context.” The ACS WASC *Focus on Learning* cycle of quality provides the transformative, data-informed process that empowers schools to have this coherent foundation.

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District Accreditation as a Continuous Improvement Process

Nancy Brownell | Director, Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC



Integral to a school's evaluation process under the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC), is an assessment of the vision, mission, programs, services, organizational structures, operations, and resources to ensure students are reaching high levels of success.

Given the importance of a local school district's leadership of and support to schools, ACS WASC is piloting a district accreditation process with the Antelope Valley Union High School District. The goal of the pilot is to evaluate the effectiveness of the services, resources, and leadership provided to schools by the governing board, the superintendent, and the district leadership using a similar self-study and stakeholder feedback approach as is used for school reviews. The intent of the district accreditation process is to provide a valuable means for districtwide leadership and staff to analyze and reflect on district strengths and needs and provide a more systematic evaluation of the systems and structures that are used to support student success, continuous improvement efforts, and the alignment and refinement of district goals, the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and other strategic plans.

Similar to a school accreditation process, district personnel will evaluate and determine the effectiveness of district programs and operations in contributing to quality learning and teaching within the context of the impact of the goals, actions, and services identified in the LCAP, and other strategic district priorities in supporting student success across all student groups. The ACS WASC district criteria provides a guide for districts to review the systems that support student success and schools, organized into four major categories: A) Culture of Performance and Accountability; B) Academic Systems: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; C) Personnel Management and Resource Allocation; and D) Parent and Community Relationships. Moreover, the criteria are intended to support district conversations about its coherence and organizational commitment to an ongoing process of learning, self-reflection, adaptation, and growth.

District personnel are involved in assessing how well the district supports student learning and well-being based on the ACS WASC research-based criteria. District and school personnel from all departments serve on committees. Examples of types of districtwide services that are organized into departments and cross-department areas may include: personnel, finance, safety, curriculum, instruction, assessment, transportation, student support programs, and facilities. Using a district-determined focus and home group structure, the intent of the analysis and self-reflection process is to build on existing organizational structures to evaluate the effectiveness of district systems and provide the district leadership with options to strengthen what is working and consider innovative solutions to meet their needs for improvement.

Similar to a school accreditation process, district leadership and staff prepare a succinct self-assessment report of findings for each criterion within the categories, supported by evidence and highlighted by strengths and growth areas. There is flexibility in how the district prepares its report in order to be of the greatest use to the district. As a district accreditation pilot, the ACS WASC team and the district will have opportunities to determine what processes best serve the district goals and make adjustments as needed.

Experienced ACS WASC district educators from the region will study the report and visit the district to provide reflective feedback and additional recommendations for continued growth, alignment, and improvement as needed. The visiting committee will provide a summary report that will be shared with the district and the ACS WASC Commission for action on the accreditation status. The district leadership will then be able to use the report to continue to align and adjust district goals and actions, as well as overall efforts to support student learning and ongoing school and district improvement and success. ACS WASC will share its findings from the district accreditation process once the pilot is completed.





ACS WASC Evaluation Study: Summary of Final Report

The principles and design elements of the ACS WASC *Focus on Learning* accreditation model provide a process through which a school assesses multiple types of data to determine if the program and operations support the desired high-quality student learning. This leads to planning, implementation, and re-assessment of the schoolwide action plan in an ongoing school improvement process. Because the contexts and circumstances can, and will, vary dramatically from one school to another, the ACS WASC accreditation process was constructed to be adaptable to such differences. The capacity of the ACS WASC process to facilitate strategies and approaches to support improved learning and teaching in all schools will vary.

ACS WASC has always been engaged in ongoing refinements to its accreditation process. As noted last year in *ACS WASC Words*, ACS WASC determined it was important to engage an outside research group to conduct a formal study to gather information about the accreditation process. Another impetus for this study emerged from an active national discussion among state and federal policymakers over the quality and effectiveness of accreditation in higher educational institutions.

Given that multiple stakeholder groups are associated with the ACS WASC accreditation process, an initial question revolved around determining a manageable and reasonable starting point. Thus, this exploratory study examined how schools view and use the ACS WASC accreditation process through the perceptions of California public high school principals.

The study's primary purpose was aimed toward gaining a deeper understanding of the feedback from the process that has continually reinforced these key points:

- How ACS WASC-accredited schools implement the self-study process
- The relationship between ACS WASC accreditation and ongoing school improvement
- The effects of the ACS WASC accreditation process on schoolwide improvement and increased student learning.

The detailed report and the executive summary from the study are available on the ACS WASC website: www.acswasc.org.

Big Picture

The overall “big picture” findings are that ACS WASC:

- Has a strong accreditation model that is widely respected
- Fosters school conditions for high-quality student learning and ongoing improvement through data analysis, reflection, inquiry, and discussion
- Provides a process for regularly examining programs, processes, and data around school goals
- Builds a professional culture to support the schoolwide action plan
- Validates a school's improvement efforts.

Conclusions and Implications

The more specific conclusions and implications are given below:

- Effective school-site leadership is crucial to the successful implementation of the ACS WASC accreditation process in complex and diverse school settings and environments.
- The ACS WASC accreditation process supports principals with a data-informed school change framework.
- The ACS WASC process provides a structure for school stakeholders to a) engage in meaningful collaboration and dialogue, b) initiate investigations into the processes and outcomes of school programs, and c) base decisions on how to best advance powerful learning and teaching for all students.
- The ACS WASC accreditation process promotes the use of data and other types of evidence to strengthen the training of teachers in the use of instructional practices and assessments of student learning. In addition, principals believe that the accreditation process has positive effects on student learning through continuous school improvement activities and interventions.
- The application of structured and systematic processes for analyzing and evaluating school and student data and using the results to improve student learning is uneven across the schools examined in this study.



- Some principals shared that the ACS WASC *Focus on Learning* process could be more streamlined, less redundant, and even more aligned with the Local Control Accountability Plan. The results reinforced that accreditation is widely regarded as a valued activity, but there is room for refinement. One principal stated, “A more user-friendly process would allow for greater buy-in by all stakeholders into the reflection and growth cycle.”
- Interviewees would like more frequent informal “check-ins” with ACS WASC regarding the annual implementation of the action plan using “coaches” or another type of input that could be used to improve action plan implementation and the use of data prior to the self-study.
- Principals appreciate support for ACS WASC accreditation from their district offices; however, the amount and types of support for ACS WASC accreditation varies considerably between districts.
- Most principals express positive attitudes towards visiting committees.
- Facilitate a further review and refinement of the self-study and follow-up processes to ensure a more streamlined, effective, and efficient process based on the ACS WASC principles and design elements.
- Facilitate through the process greater parent and community involvement in the school’s improvement efforts.
- Move forward with strengthening a consistent process for the work of the visiting committees.
- Consider how the results of this study may prove helpful as ACS WASC interacts with state and federal policymakers, school district leaders, and school-site principals.
- Continue to engage in ongoing assessment and evaluation as a regional accrediting body through rigorous and longitudinal evaluation-based research.

It is very clear that the ACS WASC Accreditation Cycle of Quality addresses the basic aspects of school change and transformation through its design elements. Not only did the study reaffirm this but the study also provided important insights into future direction in which areas and processes need to be further examined, studied, revised, and refined. These opportunities for ACS WASC are summarized below:

- Increase ongoing and multiple support to schools in the self-study and follow-up processes, and operationalize the use of data in an ongoing inquiry mode beyond the planning and implementation phases (e.g., monitoring and using assessment evidence to change practices and refine school goals).
- Work with districts and school boards on the understanding of accreditation as an ongoing school improvement process.
- Ensure the ACS WASC process facilitates alignment of the SPSA and LCAP.

Closure

The research study pointed out the importance of looking at the impact of the accreditation process in the aggregate. As stated in the study: “While such vital factors as leadership, analyzing and using data to support learning, stakeholder engagement, professional collaboration, a united focus, and a commitment to action and progress are critically important elements of a successfully accredited school, only when taken together can the synergy be appreciated and their unique contributions to each school.”

The study further emphasized that no two schools are exactly alike on any number of important variables related to effectiveness. Accreditation is an empirically grounded process for guiding and facilitating ongoing organizational renewal, transformation, and development that is aligned with a school’s core values, mission, vision, and schoolwide learner outcomes with the ultimate goal to provide powerful learning and teaching for every student. A recent publication by Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn entitled *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, District, and Systems* has reinforced the transforming attributes of the ACS WASC Accreditation Cycle of Quality. In summary, this initial exploratory study has provided reliable and empirically accurate information that can be used to stimulate additional research and policy development by ACS WASC and other educational agencies.



ACS WASC Words of Wisdom: New Frontiers

The past year has seen tremendous growth of student learning, due, in part, to the accreditation process. The Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges has been busy working with schools and districts to use accreditation in new ways to assist them in ongoing school improvement. Two examples are provided below.

Nānākuli-Wai‘anae Complex Area Accreditation Alignment

Ann Mahi, Complex Area Superintendent



Three years ago, our two complex (district) feeder school systems aligned their accreditation self-study cycles and created a K-12 construct to support the learning needs of the students as they transition from one school level to the next. Our Nānākuli and Wai‘anae complexes were two of three in the state of Hawaii approved to participate in this pilot program. It has been amazing to see how such a simple decision resulted in significant systemic improvements.

The Nānākuli-Wai‘anae community is a geographically isolated and socio-economically challenged area on the island of O‘ahu. 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Out of the 3,200 documented homeless students in the state, 600 students (20%) attend Nānākuli-Wai‘anae complex schools. A high rate of chronic absenteeism negatively impacts learning as about 35% (2,800 out of 8,000 students) are absent 15 or more days per year. Collectively, the nine complex schools totaled 1,058 out-of-school suspensions in SY 2015–16. Additionally, few students meet academic standards, as measured on statewide Smarter Balanced Assessments. In SY 2015–16, proficiency rates for the complex area were 25% for ELA and 21% for Math, compared to the state averages of 49% and 41%, respectively. Over the past three years, the graduation rate has hovered near 73% for both high schools compared with the state average of 82%, and the college going rate averaging 36% compared to the state’s 56%.

Once the complex alignment pilot program was approved, all of the schools within each complex were put on a visitation schedule for the same week. Elementary, intermediate, and high school principals began to work on their individual self-study and also met regularly to discuss K-12 goals and priority areas for improvement. District staff was made available to provide data, resources, and support as requested by the principals. New questions arose that led to interesting discoveries about current practices and expectations for teaching and learning. Principals brought their leadership teams together to discuss issues, review data, identify research-based practices, and develop actions plans to strategize how to meet goals and begin implementation. Both complexes identified attendance, behavior, and college- and career-readiness as their priority areas for schools to focus on.

These efforts have resulted in both state and national recognition for our schools. The Nānākuli complex schools all have received the distinction of being recognized as American School Counselors Association, Recognized ASCA Model Programs (RAMP). The pilot program ensures that all feeder schools are working together to support student transitions including the academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health services needed for them to be successful. Both high schools in 2017 were recognized for the increase in the number of early college credits earned by students, the highest FAFSA completion rate in the state, and a decrease of 36% in out-of-school suspensions for SY 2016–17. These outside validations have boosted staff confidence, pride, and sense of achievement as they continue in the school improvement efforts.

In the spring of 2017, the Nānākuli Complex, comprised of two feeder elementary schools and one high, and one intermediate school, completed its self-study visit. Each school had a visiting team for its individual accreditation and all three chairpersons collectively gave feedback and recommendations on the complex alignment. The visiting teams' final reports were powerful and left a great foundation for the schools to look beyond their individual efforts and collectively design a pathway to support building a promising future for all students.

This simple act of using the ACS WASC accreditation process to visualize the educational construct from K-12 and beyond changed the structure of articulation between schools. The priority now is collaboration among the schools with the students at the center of all decision making. This collaboration also extends to the operations of the complex/district office staff as responsibilities have been changed to focus on supporting the schools in the facilitation of alignment meetings, collection of school and complex data, researching strategies to address the identified complex priority areas, and helping with the assessment and monitoring of the progress toward set goals.

We have seen the benefits of alignment in our journey and will continue to collaborate to do what is right and best for our children in the Nānākuli and Wai'anae Complex Areas.

As the result of our success as a pilot program, the Hawaii Department of Education has officially made this ACS WASC opportunity available for all of our complex areas. ACS WASC is now aligning complex schools to allow for conversations and support that will lead to transformative K-12 improvement.

Antelope Valley Union High School District Accreditation

David Vierra, Ph.D., District Superintendent



The Antelope Valley Union High School District is excited to be the first California school district to participate in the ACS WASC District Accreditation Pilot. As a high school district, we have always valued the accreditation process and its impact on our schools. Consequently, we were eager to pursue the opportunity to participate in this pilot.

The process for district accreditation is similar to the process for school accreditation. This fall we will complete our self-study and have our district site visit in April 2018. Our initial work has already made an impact as we have discovered systems and practices that have created silos separating our district divisions.

As we started to review the data, we found issues that have inadvertently slowed the progress to best serve students. Questions that arose out of our initial data review have led our organization to address issues even before the self-study has been completed. The district accreditation process has also helped us begin reshaping our district's culture with formal recognition that we are all interconnected in fulfilling our mission to serve and support our students in the classroom.

As leaders, we have always expected our schools to conduct a thorough review and the ACS WASC process fulfilled that need. In conducting this district self-study through a similar accreditation process, we anticipate positive impacts and lasting benefits.



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(listed by the organizations they represent)

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Commission Update

The Commission is comprised of individuals representing the various constituencies of ACS WASC. The Commission convenes three times a year.

2018 Commission Meetings

Winter: January 29 – 30, 2018 • San Diego, CA

Spring: April 30 – May 1, 2018 • Burlingame, CA

Summer: June 25 – 26, 2018 • Burlingame, CA

ACS WASC Commission Chairperson

As of August 2017, ACS WASC has a new chairperson. Our new chairperson, Mr. Stephen Cathers, is currently the head of school at International School Suva in Fiji. He was appointed to the board of EARCOS and has represented EARCOS on the ACS WASC Commission since 2015.

ACS WASC Commission Members

Members who left the Commission this year include: Grant Bennett, Chad Colden, Chase Davenport, Damon Kerby, John Kerr, Ann Mahi, Michael McCoy, Dale Phillips, Nina Russo, and Doris Yamashiro-Tanaka. We deeply appreciate the excellent service provided by these Commissioners and wish them well in their continued service to others.

ACS WASC welcomes the following new Commission members: Michael Alvarez, Lee Duncan, Juan Flecha, Andrea Fukumoto, Melissa Handy, Laura Herman, Doreen Oleson, Matthew Russo, Kim Shields, and Diana Walsh-Reuss.



ACS WASC Departing Commissioners

L-R: Doris Yamashiro-Tanaka, John Kerr, Chad Colden, Damon Kerby, Michael McCoy, Grant Bennett, Ann Mahi, and Dale Phillips

International Update

Harlan E. Lyso, Ph.D. | International Consultant, Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC



Since accrediting its first international school in 1967, the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC) has continued its international focus on providing services for schools located in Asia, specifically schools served by the East Asia Regional Council of Schools

(EARCOS). The relationship between ACS WASC and EARCOS is a unique one as EARCOS has for several decades provided a representative to serve on the ACS WASC Commission. ACS WASC is the only regional accrediting agency which provides a permanent seat on its governing board to a representative from a regional international educational organization. This has ensured that international schools can directly influence ACS WASC policy and actively participate in the development of future ACS WASC initiatives. Clearly, the ACS WASC Commission recognizes the value of the contributions of accredited international schools, as for the third time in recent history it elected an EARCOS representative to chair its Commission. Mr. Stephen Cathers, current head of the International School Suva in Fiji, begins his two-year term as ACS WASC Commission chair with the 2017–18 academic year.

International schools continue to be established around the world at an amazing pace. A huge percentage of these new schools are located in Asia. Given the reputation that ACS WASC has developed within Asia and the recognized value of the ACS WASC *Focus on Learning* protocol, the ACS WASC office receives accreditation inquiries almost weekly. In order to serve the burgeoning number of international schools seeking accreditation the Commission has authorized the employment of additional professional personnel to ensure that international schools are served appropriately. Dr. Marilyn George, recognized as one of the world's foremost experts in school accreditation, will continue to spearhead the ACS WASC accreditation of international schools. In addition, a new full-time position, Director of International Accreditation Services, has been established. Dr. David Ottaviano has been appointed to serve in this role.

Dr. Ottaviano has served as head of school at prestigious international schools in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. While serving as head of school at Canadian Academy in Japan he represented EARCOS on the ACS WASC Commission. Having served as an international school consultant for ACS WASC in the past, Dr. Ottaviano brings a great deal of experience and credibility to this position and is eager to meet with international school leaders to ensure that their needs are being appropriately addressed.

Three part-time consultants have also been appointed to provide support with international schools. Ms. Barbara Parker, who will continue in the role in which she has served for the past several years, has developed a reputation as an exceptional resource for international schools and a gifted trainer of the *Focus on Learning* protocol. Mr. Steve Massiah, who will be based within Asia, joins ACS WASC as an international school consultant and brings significant experience as an international school administrator at several schools within Asia and in the Middle East. Finally, Ms. Alana Steward, who is also based within Asia, will draw upon her extensive experience as a teacher, ACS WASC coordinator, teaching and learning coordinator, and ACS WASC visiting committee chair, as she serves schools within the region. Through the provision of these capable and experienced educational leaders, ACS WASC evidences its strong commitment to supporting international schools as they seek to enhance further the quality of educational programs they provide to their students.

It is also noteworthy that the model for International Baccalaureate (IB) and ACS WASC synchronized visits which has been implemented so successfully internationally, is now being utilized in IB schools authorized in North America as well. ACS WASC remains committed to collaborating with exemplary educational organizations such as the IB, to ensure that schools seeking authorization and accreditation from multiple agencies can conduct their school improvement efforts efficiently, meaningfully, and without redundancy.



The Importance of Communication in the School Improvement Process

Ginger Hovenic, Ed.D. | Director, Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC



Involving all stakeholders on the broad issues in the school environment is motivational and an important process of the California Department of Education's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Never underestimate the views of a variety of people — they can enhance everything: *methods, standards, processes and overall*

effectiveness. Remember, leaders are not paid to have all the ideas that are necessary to keep operations working well in a changing world, but they are paid to make sure that there are enough ideas to make things work and go on working.

The principle of working together with all stakeholders should underpin the direction of a school's Action Plan. Leading and managing people doesn't just mean acting as overseer and seeing that people get their work done satisfactorily, it means involving people throughout the process in a creative role, to ensure that together there is success.

Frequently we get asked about how to create a team-based environment in a school. I recently saw this quote from Henry Ford: "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." It's very appropriate that it is all about working together as a team to view the operations of the school to ensure all students' needs are being met.

If you want people to participate they need to understand the rules of the game! That means educating individuals on how their efforts impact school success and how this success contributes to the overall achievements of the school. If people don't understand how their work connects to organizational wins, they can't possibly have a team attitude or take ownership.

Appeal to the highest level of thinking and you will likely get the highest level of participation and results. Liberate the information that you as principal have and people will likely have the same level of commitment as the leadership team. People are smart and they are hungry for information, and your ability to provide them with that information in a way that resonates with them is tantamount to success.

Helping stakeholders understand how working together as a team contributes to the school's Action Plan is part of telling that big-picture story, but it is also part of helping them understand how their individual role contributes to their own team, and, ultimately, the success of all students.

Work groups and teams develop systems that allow them to complete tasks efficiently and quickly. When a task is handed to a well-trained and efficient team, the team's work pace assures that the task will be completed quickly and accurately. This allows the school to take on more complicated work without having to add more staff. This becomes helpful when efficient teams from different departments work together. Each team is well aware of its own abilities and the groups can work together effectively as opposed to disjointed groups who may not be familiar with how to work together.

Teams in the workplace often meet to discuss how to solve school issues. When a team works well together, it allows staff members to feel more comfortable in offering suggestions. Team members become accustomed to processing brainstorming information and the school benefits from the variety of suggestions that come from effective teams.

Communication is key. Observe the communication patterns in your school. Identify how best to communicate with various work groups. Don't rely solely on email or google docs or any other one type of communication. Decide which forms of communication work best to achieve your desired outcome(s). Effective communication enhances the success of your goals and objectives of your school's Action Plan.

There are challenges each day in any workplace, and a strong team environment can act as a support mechanism for staff members and the connectivity of ideas of the community, parents, and students can help enrich the learning environment for all students.

Adaptability of the Focus on Learning Accreditation Process

Barbara Parker | International Consultant, Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC

“Change your opinions, keep to your principles; change your leaves, keep intact your roots.” — Victor Hugo

“There are three constants in life... change, choice and principles.” — Stephen R. Covey



When faced with so many innovations in technology, the variety of educational approaches, and the changes in the geopolitical environment, those of us in education face challenges in knowing what to use as a ballast. Trusting and holding onto well-founded learning principles is one way to ensure that we are moving in the right direction.

The ACS WASC *Focus on Learning (FOL)* accreditation process was developed after extensive critical analysis of research related to learning principles and to change management, which yield high-quality student achievement. Over the past 25 years, since the first draft of the *FOL* protocol was created, there have been some changes in the details, in the ‘leaves’ according to Hugo’s metaphor, but the principles and the ‘roots’ have remained firmly in place. This constancy affirms the solid foundations and trustworthy principles upon which *FOL* stands.

Within the *FOL* accreditation process, there is room for change and choice, while respecting the guiding principles. The principles provide both a compass and parameters as schools identify their strengths and critical learner needs. Schools that have followed the *FOL* process for several iterations have been transformed. Being founded on solid principles, the *FOL* accreditation process can be applied, with confidence, in a variety of contexts.

The *FOL* process enables schools to differentiate the self-study process to suit their context. One of the learning principles embedded in *FOL* is the need to define a school’s current status and develop shared understandings among all its stakeholders before designing plans to move forward. This clarity enables the school to analyze and evaluate where it sits on a continuum aimed at its vision and mission. The goal for where a school wants to go may change; the principle of defining its existing state before developing plans to improve does not change. The *FOL*’s ongoing school improvement process enables all schools, at any point on the continuum of excellence, to define what and where they are and to develop goals so they can move forward, delve more deeply, and stretch beyond.

During the formal self-study process, *FOL* provides principles and guidelines so schools can design and implement plans based on feedback and evidence of student learning. The ACS WASC *FOL* process is based on the principle that clarity of expectations and quality feedback yield improved learning. By following the *FOL* process, one is implementing one aspect of a key finding from John Hattie’s meta-analysis: learning improves when teachers become students of their own teaching. While implementing the *FOL* process, a school learns about the efficacy of its own practices and uses the feedback gathered through the self-study process to design plans for future growth.

The *FOL* process transforms individual teachers and organizations when people collaborate to develop the skills needed to define and design their own pathways based on evidence that affirms their assumptions and conclusions. Daniel Pink’s research concludes that motivation comprises three essential components: mastery, purpose, and autonomy. Schools and teachers can become motivated to implement the *FOL* process when they realize that the overall purpose is larger than completing a report or complying with external guidelines. The autonomy of the learning process is inspiring, challenging, and rewarding.

The *FOL* accreditation process protocol allows autonomy for schools to modify the process to suit the skill level and developmental level of the school. Schools and teachers increase their knowledge, skills, and collaborative culture. There is no ceiling as to what a school can become. Through *FOL*, schools and teachers develop professionally and increase their understanding of the principles of learning and how to implement them. *FOL* provides embedded, ongoing professional development of the highest order, as confirmed by multiple research findings, such as those of Linda Darling-Hammond, Richard DuFour, James Stronge, the National Board of Certification, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The *FOL* accreditation process balances the need for constancy with the need for choice and change so that all ACS WASC accredited schools are able to design and deliver high-quality education that prepares students for the future.



Office Update

Northern California Burlingame Office



L-R: Joanne Cacicedo, Lino Gantan, Kristen Chow, Christine Toti, Alexandria Silva, Christian Punzalan, Frances Rivette, Alice Hauser, Judy Abbott, Cynthia Newton, Ari Nishiki-Finley, Francesca Lorenzo, Susan Lange, Kelly Richards, Elaine Wong, William Snyder, Albert Chan, Michael McCormick

Southern California San Diego Office



L-R: Luigi Zoni, Emily Barton, Denise Jagoda, Kathy Frazier, Brian Jensen, Ginger Hovenic, Alicia Hutchinson, Elizabeth Oberreiter, Jim Belcher

New ACS WASC International Personnel



David Ottaviano joined ACS WASC in July 2017 as the director of international accreditation services. Dr. Ottaviano most recently served as the head of GEMS International School – Al Khail in Dubai. He has extensive experience in school administration and ACS WASC. His tenure as a school head includes ten years as a public school superintendent in New Jersey and 21 years as the head of private, international schools in Serbia, Italy, Japan, Romania, and the UAE. Dr. Ottaviano has served as president of IB North Asia, vice president of East Asia Region Council of International Schools (EARCOS), and chairman of Central and Eastern Schools Association (CEESA). Dr. Ottaviano received a B.A. from Grove City College in Psychology, an M.A. in School Psychology from Montclair State University, and an Ed.D. from Fairleigh Dickinson University in Educational Leadership and Psychology.



Stephen (Steve) Massiah joined ACS WASC in July 2017 as an international consultant working with schools throughout Asia. He is based out of Bangkok, Thailand. Steve comes to ACS WASC after successful positions in international schools in Doha, Qatar; Seoul, South Korea; Bangkok, Thailand; and Hong Kong. Prior to this he was a principal in Toronto, Canada; an adjunct instructor at the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto; and an interim position (secondment) with the Ontario College of Teachers.



Alana Steward joined the ACS WASC team as a part-time international consultant in July 2017. After beginning her teaching career in her native Canada, Alana has been teaching and leading in schools in various countries for the past 19 years. She has travelled extensively with her family and has worked in countries including Macau, Kyrgyzstan, Singapore, Austria, and Japan. Alana is excited and honored to join the ACS WASC team.

New ACS WASC Staff



Brian Jensen joined ACS WASC in July 2017 as a coordinator in the ACS WASC Southern California office. Brian joined National University in 1998 and he successfully assumed positions in administration, online admissions, international programs, online education, and student services.

He served as director of administration for National University Virtual High School and later as associate vice president for the Division of Pre-College Programs, and most recently as vice chancellor, Division of Pre-College Programs for the National University System. He earned his B.A. and M.A. degrees in English Literature from Utah State University.



Michael McCormick joined ACS WASC in March 2017 in the Burlingame Business Department. Michael was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, coming from a very long line of San Franciscans. He earned a B.S. in Business Administration from the University of San Francisco. He has worked in many

industries, both for- and not-for-profit: accounting for cargo handler, biotech, and engineering firms; inventory control and accounting for a meat wholesaler, which included working inside a freezer; and income tax preparation. In his spare time, Michael enjoys hiking the hills of his neighborhood and most types of music and cooking. He follows the local sports teams: the Giants, 49ers, and Sharks.



Elaine Wong joined ACS WASC in February 2017 in the Burlingame Business Department. Elaine was born and raised in Delaware, where she learned firsthand the skills and challenges of business early on at her family-owned supermarket. She has enjoyed working in all aspects

of accounting for various businesses using and expanding on this early knowledge throughout her over 25-year career in accounting. She received a B.S. in Accounting from Hawaii

Pacific University. Elaine lived in Hawaii and the Los Angeles area before moving to the San Francisco Bay Area a few years ago to be close to her son, daughter-in-law, and very active three- and four-year-old grandchildren. When she is not visiting her family and friends, she enjoys day trips, going to vintage movies, and checking out local museums and craft fairs. Her hobbies include crafting, reading, and visiting historic sites in the Bay Area.



Luigi Zoni joined ACS WASC in April 2017. He has over 32 years of experience in customer service and sales territory management, including 24 years as a sales representative for a western region industrial distributor. Luigi has a B.A. in International Business Administration with a focus on finance. Most of his

time is involved with the Knights of Columbus, as a faithful navigator for his assembly, a past grand knight for his council, and serving a third term as a district deputy overseeing five councils; he also is the California State Coats for Kids chairman and San Diego Chapter and Southern California coordinator for the Soccer Challenge. Recently he took on the role as treasurer for San Diego Chapter Charities of the Knights of Columbus. His Catholic church involvement includes leader of the Pastoral Council and extraordinary minister for the Holy Eucharist. He is very involved with his two adult children and tries to make as much time as possible for them. His love for sports include adult league baseball, Huff 'n' Puff soccer, and USTA tennis. Forza AS Roma!





ACS WASC Membership, Accreditation Actions, and Committee Statistics, 2016–2017

ACS WASC Membership, 2016–2017

The school membership of the Accrediting Commission continued to grow during the 2016–2017 school year. Currently, approximately 134 applicant schools are preparing for their initial accreditation visit with ACS WASC.

EVALUATION AREA	# OF SCHOOLS 2014–2015	# OF SCHOOLS 2015–2016	# OF SCHOOLS 2016–2017
California	3,901	3,969	4,000
Hawaii	290	323	360
Out of State	58	59	59
Pacific Islands			
American Samoa	10	16	22
Federated States of Micronesia	1	1	1
Guam	40	44	49
Marshall Islands	5	5	5
Northern Marianas	1	1	1
Palau	1	1	3
Africa	6	6	4
Asia	242	231	249
Australia	1	1	1
Canada	—	—	1
Europe	3	4	6
India	2	2	1
Mexico	2	2	2
Middle East	34	20	8
TOTAL	4,597	4,685	4,772

Accreditation Actions, 2016–2017

ACS WASC accreditation is based on an accreditation cycle of quality, with a self-study visit occurring every five to seven years. Please visit the ACS WASC website for additional details.

Self-Study Visits	709
Awarded accreditation	
7 year	47
6 year	118
6 year with a Mid-cycle Visit	495
5 year	8
2 year	33
1 year	5
No status given	3
Initial Visits	214
Awarded initial accreditation	130
Awarded candidacy status	69
Denied candidacy status	15

Visiting Committee Statistics, 2016–2017

The 2016–2017 school year was a record year for visiting committees. Over 3,479 visiting committee chairs and members, many serving on multiple visits, participated on teams during this past school year. A special thanks to the chairs and members who served on the 1,704 teams during the school year!

Self-Study Visits	709
Initial Visits	214
Mid-cycle Visits	401
Probationary Visits	50
Special Progress Visits	40
Special Visits	21
International Mid-cycle Visits	25
CIS Preparatory Visits	7
CIS Five-Year Renewal Visits	1
Substantive Change Visits	231
Corporate Review Visits	—
SEP Previsits	1
Appeal Visits	4
Total Committees	1,704

ACS WASC Words 2017-2018

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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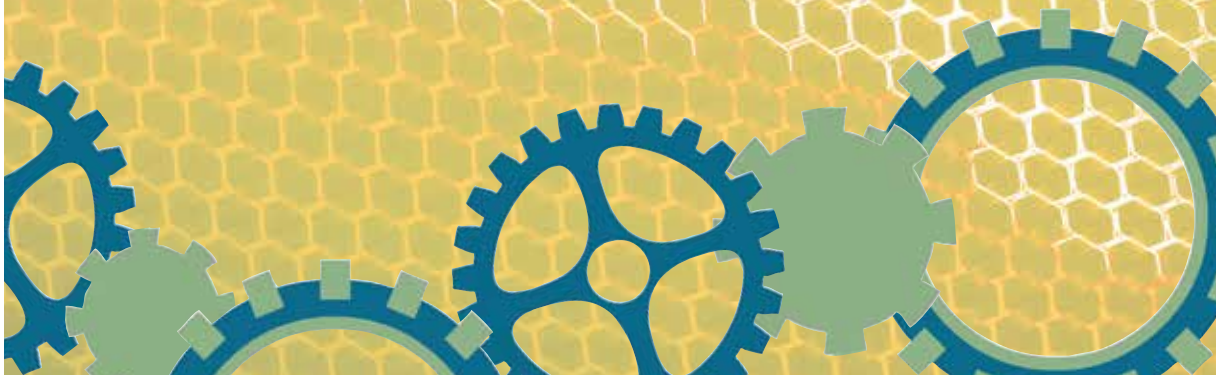
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