WASC Words of Wisdom

We asked our most-active, longest-serving group of WASC volunteers for their comments on a number of issues. We hope that you will find their responses to be as compelling as we did. They not only provided great advice for newer volunteers but offered some fascinating historical background on the accreditation process as well. Enjoy!

The importance of the schoolwide criteria cannot be overlooked when reviewing a school. The schoolwide criteria are broad yet succinct in its purpose. There have been two major changes that have evolved over the years that have had tremendous effect on schools. First, the move towards "continuous improvement" as a major focal point has helped schools consider that accreditation is a process not an event. Second, the development of the schoolwide criteria based upon research has strengthened the outcome of the self-study and visiting team review.

My most memorable experience has been during an accreditation review when a school comes to understand the importance of data to drive school learning and operations.

WILLIAM WONG — WASC member since 1990 — Served on over 45 WASC teams

The most important piece of advice that I would give to new WASC Visiting Committee members is to read the school’s document carefully and then be sure to document your response in your prewrites. It goes without question that attending training is THE most important advice. The change from writing the school report by departments to writing by areas, i.e., curriculum, assessment, etc. has been, for me, the best change.

My most valuable WASC experience has been the visit made to a school in Saipan. The school children were all living below the poverty level yet to see them you would never know. The parents were all involved and the school climate was superior.

JOANNE BOBELE — WASC member since 1986 — Served on over 40 WASC teams

Be prepared. Every hour a member can prepare before a visit is worth three hours during the visit. Your experience will be far more positive if you can focus on editing for accuracy rather than having to create and compose while under the tight timeline of a visit.

Since 1980 when I did my first WASC visit, the accreditation process has continually evolved and adapted to provide schools a proven model to achieve school improvement and success.

The cumulative opportunity to visit many different schools and settings over the years, to observe the varied levels of learning found in different states and countries, and to see the commitment to students has been a fabulous learning experience for me.

JAMES JOHNSON — WASC member since 1980 — Served on over 30 WASC teams

Notes to a new VC member:
- Concentrate on their issues
- Do your part
- Watch and listen to learn
- Wear comfy shoes
- Enjoy the incredible experience

LOUISE ROBERTSON — WASC member since 1981 — Served on over 60 WASC teams
When you are asked to write a portion of the draft Visiting Committee report prior to the visit, it is very important that you meet the deadline the chair has set for submission of your writing. That allows the chair to get everyone's perspective of the self-study and school and then distribute to each committee member the total draft Visiting Committee report so that they have the same information before the Committee ever meets at the school site.

My first experience was with WASC Form C which dealt mainly with facilities and equipment of the school. Then we moved to Pursuing Excellence which began to focus more on curriculum and student learning. Focus on Learning is an apt name for the current process because it is a holistic analysis by the school staff and by the Visiting Committee. It truly has become a school self-improvement process.

Schools that have really analyzed student learning and instruction and decided what they need to work on in their self-study and then act upon their own strategies for improvement make re-visits a joy because they can applaud their own progress and the Re-Visit Committee can also applaud that progress. Secondly, when the Visiting Committee suggests a critical area for improvement and the school undertakes to make the suggested improvement, it is great to hear comments like, "We were not completely happy with what the Visiting Committee suggested. But after the visit, we decided that the Visiting Committee's suggestions were valid and now are happy that we made the changes and improved in the ways they suggested."

JOHN BEACOM — WASC member since 1986 — Served on over 30 WASC teams

If you are new to serving as a member of a WASC Visiting Committee, you are about to begin the best professional development and learning experience of your life as an educator. Please listen to your chair, share with other committee members, view the school you are visiting with open eyes and an open mind, and you will learn more that you have ever imagined possible. In addition you will help the school in providing continuous progress. You may also find that your new role in WASC will turn into a lifetime commitment to helping schools improve. You will also see some good ideas and programs that you will be able to take back to help improve student performance at your school. Finally I encourage you to get relax, and prepare to work very hard.

WASC has continued to evolve over the decades. I think that the most significant change as been the improvement of the process to focus on student learning outcomes, and measuring student performance and school improvement based on measurable data. The WASC improvement process is now a continuous cycle and provides a structure for school improvement as an ongoing process.

My most valuable experience has been to visit many different schools in different parts of the world, to observe how each school provides education to help all students learn, and I was able to take many good ideas back to my school. My most memorial experience has been to return to a school to observe how the school implemented and internalized the WASC process to the benefit of the students, staff, and community. I can think of one particular school that embraced the Focus on Learning Process as the vehicle for continuous progress and improvement at the school over several years. When the process was implemented by the administration and staff as a regular part of their monthly staff meetings and staff development process, the school continued to make significant progress in improving the education for all students on an ongoing basis. It has been a privilege and honor for me to be able to assist the schools in implementing the WASC accreditation process.

ROLLIN GRIDER — WASC member since 1980 — Served on over 62 WASC teams
Perhaps the most important thing for a member is to realize that you are a vital member of the team with certain responsibilities:

1) Do your homework and be well organized! The team counts on every member to be well informed as this is a very collegial process.
2) Don’t be afraid to ask questions and really listen to what others have to say about the school and the process.
3) There’s always more than one way to “do it,” so be willing to accept what others suggest and work together for the best outcome for the school.
4) Be open and transparent throughout your time on a committee.

The accreditation process has changed to ensure that all stakeholders are now involved plus it is more process-oriented than when it was “product” driven. The Focus on Learning criteria better showcases a school’s improvement and allows both the school and the visiting committee to get a true picture of the school’s strengths and areas for improvement.

It is difficult to single out one most memorable or most valuable experience. Visiting a school in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where all the maps showed only Palestine and no Israel was certainly an eye-opener; co-chairing two schools in Bangkok that were operated by the same organization, yet were quite different in their approach; the school in San Diego that I visited less than a week after 9-11 where the students held a memorial ceremony for those who had lost their lives in the attack while we were there; the midterm revisit of a school in Southern California that had changed so dramatically that it was hard to believe they had once been on the brink of collapse and were now a high functioning, goal-oriented school where both students and teachers were happy and doing a fantastic job have all been memorable for many reasons. Every visit I have made has been of great value. I feel that I always come away with more than I have given. The opportunity to see educators in action with young people enthusiastic and really caring about school is both exciting and satisfying.

JANET KNOEPPEL — WASC member since 1988 — Served on over 50 WASC teams

Preparation is essential for an effective and enjoyable school visit. Read and reread the school’s self-study. Do your assigned pre-writing early and send it to the chair. During the visit, be thinking about the visiting committee’s end product, Schoolwide Areas of Strength and Critical Areas for Improvement. Work with fellow visiting committee members and the school to have the school’s action plan address the important needs of the school and be appropriately fleshed out and doable. You are there to advance the school’s efforts to improve. The WASC training and preparation for both school personnel and visiting committee members has leaped forward with the very helpful WASC website (www.acswasc.org). One can access WASC principles and purposes, content of training sessions and schedule, protocols for self-studies, templates for reports, sample forms and letters along with guidelines for visiting committee members and chairs. There is even a template for the visiting committee’s presentation to the school stakeholders at the end of the full visit. WASC service is a wonderful way for retired educators to continue to provide service. On the 2010 visit to Sunnyside High School in Fresno, our visiting committee had four active and four retired educators. The blend of broad experience with current knowledge and awareness brought about a beautifully functioning and most collegial visiting committee that made a valued contribution to WASC, the school, the community and the profession. We retired educators left the school with a great feeling of fulfilling a need and being validated again as worthy professionals.

I am a retired educator. My last professional position, Professor of School Administration at CSU Stanislaus, concluded in December 2004. Previously I retired as cross country coach at Lincoln High School in Stockton in 2003. Earlier I retired from the superintendency of Lincoln Unified School District in 1990. Altogether I completed 52 years of active service in education. I have served on 111 visiting committees for WASC. 79 of those were as chair. My first assignment was in 1972 for the Western Catholic Education Association at St. Elizabeth’s School in San Francisco. My first assignment directly for WASC was in 1975 at Southwood Junior High School in South San Francisco. My most memorable assignment was as chair of the Kamehameha High School visiting committee in Honolulu in 1998.

TOD ANTON — WASC member since 1975 — Served on over 111 WASC teams
In writing up your sections, make sure that the Areas of Strength and Key Issues at the end of the section, for example, Student Support, are referenced in the narrative for that section. It is like writing a summary paragraph in an essay. The writer should not introduce a new topic that has not been mentioned in the preceding text and the conclusion should reference what has already been written.

I think Focus on Learning allows the Visiting Team to be more thoughtful and analytical in how it approaches its responsibilities. The criteria serves as guidelines for the VC to tailor its remarks to the uniqueness of each particular school and recognizes that there is no cookie-cutter formula for school improvement. For example, when listing the Schoolwide Areas for Improvement in Chapter 4, the VC can write more than one sentence for each and use examples to give more clarity to the recommendation.

One of my most memorable experiences was when I went to observe a 3rd grade class overseas. After a few moments in the room, I noticed that there was no teacher. Then the students started coming up to me asking if they could go to the bathroom and if I was their teacher. Since there was no phone in the room or other means to contact the office, which was on the other side of campus, I decided to teach them a math lesson while waiting for the teacher to show up. In the meantime I was supposed to be meeting with an elementary and secondary principal. Finally, not wanting to leave the children alone too long, I ran down to my temporary office down the hall, where I found the two principals impatiently waiting for me and informed them that they needed to get a teacher down there ASAP. Turned out there was a miscommunication about a substitute teacher.

HAROLD BUSH — WASC member since 1987 — Served on over 80 WASC teams

My advice would be that you are part of the visiting team that will study and validate how the school goes about developing programs and procedures that promote student learning. As you attempt to help the school understand what is working at their site and what changes, if any, that need to be made, remember to reflect what you are experiencing and how you might apply what you are observing at your own schools and classrooms. This FOL process often has as much of an impact on visiting team members as it has on the visited staff.

In the process before FOL, the WASC emphasis was more focused on the condition of the buildings, school budgets, the size of the library, the way teachers taught and the effect these and other conditions had on preparing the students for learning. We judged a successful school more on the things the school possessed rather than what actual learning was taking place at school. Finally, today, the school staff is actually looking at student test scores to determine the steps that need to be taken to ensure that students are really learning and that what teachers do in the classroom leads that outcome.

My most valuable/memorable experience was several years ago, I was observing the classroom of a third year math teacher. At the end of his lesson, he turned to me and asked if I had any questions for him or the students. I asked the students how this lesson related to the schoolwide learning outcomes that they were supposed to be learning. They had no clue! The teacher quickly turned to me and said "we only teach the standards here." I then asked what the big ESLR sign on the wall behind him was all about. He said, "Oh, those are for the teachers to think about as they prepared their lessons." Earlier in the year when I did my previsit to the school, I had asked "what was the most important thing that the staff wanted students to know when they left their class or graduated. They all stated variations of the items mentioned on the ESLR chart and not one mentioned a standard. Later, when the Visiting Committee came together with the staff, there was discussion about how are students suppose to know what the purpose of learning is unless you tell them in advance. Osmoses may work for plants and animals but maybe not so well for students. This story has been a good teaching tool to stress with school staff the importance of teaching both standards and expected student outcomes and to also inform students what is being taught and why.

JIM CASWELL — WASC member since 1980 — Served on over 30 WASC teams
The WASC visit is not about catching the school doing something wrong. The goal of the self study process is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school program for students, so work with the school team like you are working with the staff members at your own school, so that when you leave the school have a workable plan to further develop and enhance their self improvement process.

In the past you could almost complete the entire visiting committee report by just reading the school's self study report. Since the emphasis is now on LEARNING, it is essential that you talk to the students, look at the results, and work with the school to develop an action plan that will help them continue to improve and meet the needs of all of their students.

The most memorable was cutting a visit short on Monday, because no one on the team could find any evidence of any student learning anything or any teacher trying to teach anything. The school was subsequently closed by the Superintendent and the students sent to other schools in the district. The most rewarding was, after working hard with a school that was struggling to find their identity during their first full WASC visit on an action plan and getting all stakeholders involved, to be a part of the revisit committee three years later and see that the school took the recommendations to heart and implemented them and much more and is now providing a quality program for all students with representatives from all groups.

RICHARD PUPPIONE — WASC member since 1993 — Served on over 27 WASC teams

Take off whatever hat you usually wear such as “teacher”, “administrator”, “counselor”, and put on a WASC hat that includes all aspects of accreditation. Remember at all times, we are visitors and our task is to look at the school from the perspective of community support, resources, tradition, students and staff. We do not judge the school but make suggestions that will move the school ahead to challenge students during the next accreditation cycle. Our suggestions should be reasonable, clearly stated and tie to WASC Criteria, California Content Standards, and site goals.

The most noticeable improvement has been a process of collaboration and positive suggestion. The “Commendations” and “Recommendations” that were written when I visited my first school in 1979 were an evaluation of each department and areas of the school, often leaving a site to compare instead of grow. Today, the focus is on what moves the school ahead, challenges students and accomplishes current “Growth Needs”.

I’ve had so many memorable experiences that it is hard to state just one. I feel honor to have the responsibility of serving on teams and take this responsibility seriously. It is a wonderful feeling to guide a team through the process; the team members see real outcomes at the end of the visit and see the WASC experience is worth the time away from their own school responsibilities. I have visited schools with student populations from 8 to 2000+ and find that the same challenges are present at all schools. Each school is unique but we are all there for one reason, to make suggestions that will continue to prepare students for the world beyond high school.

KAREN ANDERSON — WASC member since 1981 — Served on over 40 WASC teams
Participation on a WASC visiting team can be one of the most comprehensive professional development opportunities available to an educator. The more that you are able to contribute to the team and the process, the more that you will be able to derive from the experience. Utilize those around you that have WASC experience as resources in preparing for your visit. One of the strongest features of focus on learning is the networking that emanates from participation and there is a wealth of talent to answer questions and assist you in preparations.

I believe the focus on the six-year continual improvement cycle for all students has established a strong base for schools to work on sustained growth and achievement. This data-driven model has enabled WASC to be more closely aligned with all school reform documents and has woven the Focus on Learning process into the fiber of all schools.

I find that valuable experiences occur annually through my exposure to a variety of learning communities during WASC visitations. The policies and practices that schools enact in response to meeting the needs of their learning constituents provides insights that are often replicable to other schools. These experiences in diverse learning communities continually inspire and motivate me as an educator and a visiting team member.

SHEILA FOLAN — WASC member since 1992 — Served on over 25 WASC teams

Make sure you attend the training session; communicate frequently with your chair; come thoroughly prepared for the visit; and don’t be afraid to ask questions.

The Focus on Learning process has helped all schools to look for yearly, continuous improvement. The most successful schools in the accreditation process are schools that use FOL to always look for ways to improve!

Having the opportunity to chair team overseas in Hawaii, Korea, and Japan. I have also made a huge number of new friends and, as a result, have learned ways to make my own school better!

PAT LICKISS — WASC member since 1988 — Served on over 25 WASC teams

The best piece of advice is to follow your Chair’s lead, complete your previsit assignment, and most of all thoroughly enjoy the experience.

The focus that has changes since I started in the early 1970s is that we are now zeroing in on the educational process for better student achievement. Also, WASC has worked diligently to ease the stress on the school staff.

My most memorable experience, wow, that would be difficult after over thirty years, since I have enjoyed visiting places throughout the world that I would not have had the opportunity to do. The memories are many because the people that I have met have been so gracious. My trip to Dubai shortly after 9/11 is one of my most memorable ones – the travel and security that we went through was definitely assuring to our safety. Thanks for the opportunity to share.

RICHARD FRAGALE — WASC member since 1973 — Served on over 35 WASC teams

My advice for new Visiting Committee members is to be prepared by staying in contact with your chairperson, thoroughly reading the self-study, and completing the pre-writing for your assigned sections. Then be prepared to enjoy yourself as you meet fellow committee members, the staff at the school, and the students. The three and one-half days of the visit will be the best professional development you have every experienced!

WASC has become more student centered. Earlier formats were more focused upon what teachers said they taught and now the focus is on what and how students learn. The changes have mirrored the change to
My most memorable experiences revolve around joint accreditations with other agencies such as the Council for International Schools. These experiences provide an international perspective on the similarities of educational systems and a world-wide network of new acquaintances.

**VALENE STALEY — WASC member since 1987 — Served on over 35 WASC teams**

For new or beginning chairpersons, my advice would be to follow the guidelines and time frames as set forth in the Handbook. If all team members follow through, you should have a full draft of the VC Report ready for discussion on the first day you meet with the entire team. Be sure that they come with no other commitments.

During my past 25 years of service, the greatest change has been the use of technology in presenting training sessions, the provision of templates of needed documents, the ability to contact both school and VC team members on a timely basis, and producing the final VC draft at the end of the visit.

My most memorable experiences were the two VC assignments to two different international schools in Hong Kong, China. Working with international team members was truly a pleasant, learning experience. Those teams also included an administrative assistant to assist the whole team.

**HENRY MORITA — WASC member since 1984 — Served on over 35 WASC teams**

In the spring of 1970 I served on my first Visiting Committee – Sutter High School, in Sutter, CA – with Ed Finnuchi, Principal of Roseville High School as the Chair. It had to be close to ACS's birth because my “number” is 177. I’ve only met 1 WASCateer with a lower number, and that was many years ago. While WASC, the “umbrella” organization was founded in 1962, I believe that the ACS came a bit later. I believe that Wes Berry — while listed as the second Executive Director of WASC — was the first for the Commission. At any rate I’ve greatly enjoyed working with all the Executive Directors since 1969-70: Wes Berry, Lyle Sieverson, Don Halverson, Don Haught (for whom I also worked as a high school principal), and David Brown. I was on the Commission during Don Halverson’s tenure and served as President of WASC in 1990-91.

My favorite experience(s) always involves my most recent visit(s). In the 2009-2010 school year I chaired 2 full visits. And I discovered — “happened into” is a more accurate description — a very effective procedure. While it may not be possible in all circumstances, it worked well in both a large and small school last year. The VC finished our report — essentially all but a final edit — on Tuesday night. First thing on Wednesday morning, we met with the school’s leadership team for the final edit and revision. They — the school’s leadership team — became a real partner in the final draft; this created a buy-in of unique dimension. We followed with a noon, lunchtime, presentation that allowed everyone to attend. (This proved advantageous for all groups including parents and community, students, Board Members and District Office staff, etc.)

Over the 40 years I’ve been doing WASC visits — more than 80 at latest count — I’ve enjoyed all my experiences. However, when I think back on them, there are some that do stand out. I’ve done 15 or so “out of area”. This includes Papua New Guinea (Aiyura Elementary and Ukurumpa High School), Egypt (twice) for CITA and Southern, in both Alexandria and Cairo (these coming when I was a national superintendent for the Republic of Kazakhstan). I’ve been to American Samoa (Pacific Academy and Tafuna High School) and to a North Central Accrediting Commission’s high school, McQueen H.S. in Reno, NV. I also chaired the first “joint venture” accreditation with ECIS (European Council of International Schools) at Jakarta International School. (During the years I was Principal of the American Overseas School of Rome I attended ECIS conferences and did another accreditation for them in Copenhagen, Denmark).

To the frequently asked question: “What advice do you have for new chairs?” To all chairs, actually, my admonition is simple: Look always, first and foremost, for ways and means to help. In this day and age especially, rarely do schools need more criticism and additional comments of a negative thrust. I unfortunately hear too many stories of chairs that obviously were on a “witch hunt”. Being tough and firm is far different than pushing pet — too often personal — ideas, projects, theories and
concerns. Every year I hear 2 or 3 stories about “the abuse of power” on the part of chairs (and even sometimes experienced committee members who attempt to manipulate the chair into some personally motivated, hard-line position). We need to enhance our profession and all our schools, not be part of the misguided public attack squad.

When I espouse the above position, “hardliners” often argue that I’m too soft or too easy. I counter with an experience I had a few years ago. I was chairing a large, famous urban high school that had never gotten anything but a 6-year term. I had a superb committee and we agreed, early-on, that this was a school in real trouble. I talked with Don Halverson and we gave the school a 6-month-only term. I even called the Board into special session on Wednesday and gave them a detailed explanation of what was happening and why, with clear direction on what they needed to do to save their school. The school community responded positively, and I truly believed that we “saved” the school. Wise chairs know when to be tough and corrective and when to be helpful, supportive and still insightfully productive. They know what the real issues are and what battles can be won and what causes advanced. Simply “ripping them apart” serves no purpose but some misguided ego enhancement.

As I look back on more than 40 years of “doing WASC’s” I can honestly attest to the simple truth: I’ve enjoyed every experience I’ve had with accreditation and I feel like I’ve done some important and valuable work for the institution I love so much — the American high school. We all want to make a difference with our endeavors for the institution we care deeply about; accreditations gives us that opportunity again and again. And as I look back on a half-century of working in education, I can proudly say that my career has been near magic — and that all the Visiting Committees I’ve served on count as crowning achievements in my life.

JAMES ROULSTEN — WASC member since 1970 — Served on over 80 WASC teams

Attend the orientation. Read the WASC manual. Approach your visit with an open mind. Do not compare the school that you are visiting with yours or offer suggestions based on how you do things at your school.

Placing greater emphasis on student learning and supporting objective data is a major improvement.

There have been many memorable and worthwhile experiences. Most have involved meeting interesting people on the visiting committees and at the schools. My most worthwhile experience took place, when I chaired visits to the Seoul Foreign School in Korea and the American School In Japan located in Tokyo. Both of the schools that we were visiting were private schools; however, the headmasters arranged to have me visit public schools in both cities. What I saw in both public, college prep high schools only confirmed what I thought and the American media and politicians refused to report. In both countries, students in the 9th grade were selected, based on grades and test scores, for further education beginning in the 10th grade. Only the very top students were selected to attend a college prep high schools. Many of these high schools were actually affiliated with universities, so the key for students was to get into a college prep high school. Admission to college was usually not a problem. The public schools that I visited were all exactly alike. The classes were large as many as 60 students in a chemistry class. The labs and facilities were old and archaic. The teachers were no better or worse than ours and generally not as good as those in the two private schools that we were visiting. The visit took place in 1992 and yet there were few computers or other technological gadgets. There were no swimming pools, athletic stadiums and etc. One thing was immediately apparent. The students were serious and extremely well behaved. A large percentage of our so called “college prep” students would never qualify for a college prep high school in Japan, Korea as well as most foreign countries. Furthermore, based on my observation, these foreign countries spend far less on public education than we do. The public school principal in Tokyo lamented that he wished that he had near the funding that the American School did. Without a doubt the, major difference had to do with the students. They with, few exceptions, came from two parents, stable families who valued education. The parents did not meddle in their schools. Foreign students could not attend public in either country. There were no campus guards and there were no police cars parked in front of the schools. To compare the achievement of these highly selected foreign students on tests with our high school students is not intellectually honest. There is a major cultural difference and it has nothing to do with school financing. It has to do with the student population and their families.

BRAN YAICH — WASC member since 1980 — Served on over 50 WASC teams
Keep an open mind and leave any preconceived notions of how a school should be at home. Always be open, helpful and courteous with many “please” and “thank-yous.” Speak to as many individuals as possible and include everyone: teachers, students, custodians, parents, secretaries, grounds men, bus drivers, cafeteria people, etc. Although I realize that this is just common courtesy, it is essential to a good working relationship among all members of a team.

The focus has changed from an attitude of “we’re here and we’re looking for bad things,” to “we’re here and we want to find ways to help you improve your program.” I think this is in part due to the Focus on Learning approach, and the increased use of primary data where the school itself can analyze the data, see where improvement is needed, and can then develop a more reasonable and accurate action plan.

Memorable: I was in the registrar’s office looking over the way credits were calculated, and just talking to the registrar. A young helper entered and began to file some of the permanent record files.

“Do you keep these records in perpetuity?” I asked.

“No,” he answered. “I just file the old ones in the bottom drawer.”

Valuable: We went on a visit to a particular high school, and could tell from reading the self-study document that there were a few problems that hadn’t been addressed. As we spoke to the teachers, students, and others at the school, it became obvious that the assistant principal wasn’t completely honest neither in reporting data nor in dealing with some of the staff. Although he was very affable to us.

The school was awarded a three-year term of accreditation, and in three years, four of the original members returned to the school anxious to see the improvement we anticipated. There was no improvement, none of our suggestions had been implemented, and the former assistant principal was no longer working at the school. After careful consideration and with heavy heart, we recommended a one-year term.

Why was this a valuable lesson? The principal is the standard-bearer, the person who sets the criterion by which the school operates. She allowed the assistant principal to assume the blame for which she was ultimately responsible. This experience reminded me to always look deeper, not be satisfied with the obvious answers and remember that our responsibility is to the students.

JOAN DELZANGLE — WASC member since 1980 — Served on over 35 WASC teams

It has truly been a professional privilege to be involved in the WASC process. Having been a team member and chair for numerous committees since 1975, I certainly learned early on the importance of doing your homework prior to the visit — i.e., read the entire Self-Study carefully, complete your preliminary writing, etc. You need to “know” the school you’re visiting before you arrive! For many years, the WASC process seemed to focus primarily on high schools. I am pleased that K-8 schools, both public and private, are now involved.

My most memorable WASC experience occurred in 1990 when I had the opportunity to go to Hong Kong and Singapore to chair accreditation teams. It has also been a real learning experience to chair teams that visited schools with unique programs (i.e., Connecting Waters Charter School in Waterford, Summit Preparatory High School in Redwood City, Design Science High School (9-13) in Fresno).

DEAN WELIN — WASC member since 1975 — Served on over 35 WASC teams

To new members: observe how students are engaged in the classroom and on campus. Talk with students. Ask them what they do in the classroom, what kind of labs do they have, how much homework is given, do they write a lot, is time allotted for class discussions, and do they feel challenged? Are their concerns acknowledged, both in the classroom and on campus? Try to put yourself in the shoes of the students.

WASC has evolved from a ritualistic type, formula-driven assessment process into a dynamic,
interactive process where the improvement of student achievement is the focus, thus Focus on Learning.

I think the time spent in overseas visits to different cultures has been most rewarding — to see the emphasis on learning, with so little resources to improve the overall lot of each child; the dedication of teachers in ill-equipped classrooms; and being invited into peoples’ homes and to observe their daily routines — those are the things we bring back.

JOHN KEEGAN — WASC member since 1987 — Served on over 35 WASC teams