



WASC Words of Wisdom — 2011

This year, we asked our WASC volunteers for their comments regarding how the WASC process helps to foster school improvement. We also asked them to share the effective ways they have observed how schools assess the degree to which the schoolwide student goals are being achieved. We hope that you will find their responses to be as compelling as we did. Enjoy!



WASC is a partnership developed with schools, the Accrediting Commission for Schools and the California Department of Education. The WASC/CDE criteria are goals used by educators to challenge all students to reach high achievement using sound educational practices. A student profile developed by the staff in preparation of the school's self study provides the teachers and administrators with a roadmap of who their students are and what is necessary to challenge each student toward academic achievement. Critical growth areas developed by a team of professional educators during a WASC on-site visit provide the staff with goals to promote new heights of student achievement through annual evaluation and adjustment of curriculum based on student assessment, both written and performance based.

Three years ago I visited a continuation school and the Visiting Committee identified Critical Growth Areas that addressed:

- The need to implement a schoolwide reading and writing program.
- Develop assessments aligned with California Content Standards.
- Develop measurable ESLR descriptors to identify student growth in achieving the ESLRs.
- Explore and integrate technology into instruction and project based learning.

The staff, during the revisit this past spring, provided evidence of student growth to the Visiting Committee. The staff greeted us with a big thank you for giving a new direction that engages students in the school program. The staff indicated that they worked hard but the results are remarkable and they were appreciative of the challenges they faced when the visiting committee concluded the visit. Today the students have shown the following examples of achievement.

- 100% passed CAHSEE in 2010-11 on first attempt.
- Enrollment in Algebra has increased.
- Students are enrolled in and have passed English courses at the local community college.
- The staff has attended several conferences that resulted in curriculum revision.
- Initiation of a service learning project graduation requirement.
- Development of a new schoolwide Action Plan based on meeting most of the original goals and the desire of the staff to promote continued student success.

KAREN ANDERSON — WASC member since 1981 — Served on over 50 WASC teams

An outside eye can be very valuable in reviewing a school, and the WASC accreditation process provides this. In preparing for the WASC visit, a school closely examines all the essential areas of a good school, setting goals for those areas that need strengthening.

The first thing schools need to do is make sure that students know and understand the schoolwide student goals. This might be achieved by posting them prominently in the classrooms, including them in the daily bulletin (one at a time), making a bookmark listing the goals in a simplified way, etc. Teachers (all the English teachers, for example) can also ask the students to list individually how they have achieved or are working towards the various goals. Compiling the results should show how and if the goals are being achieved.

Another way that is often done is for teachers to examine various samples of student work to see which (if any) goals are being addressed. Departments can share the results.



JACQUELINE ANDERSON — WASC member since 1994 — Served on over 10 WASC teams



The WASC self-study process offers the most effective way for a school to address the 21st century skills needed by students as they face global challenges of the future. The most valuable way for a school to assess student outcomes that I have observed is through thoughtful orientation, both at the program and class levels, including pre-testing followed by post-testing upon completion of the program or course. A school that is diligent, thorough, honest, and accurate while completing all components of the self-study will find that the process itself results in their finding the most efficient means of evaluating the success of the school's purpose and student goals. A clear direction for a future action plan is easily formulated at the conclusion of the self-study.

JANET ARNEY — WASC member since 1988 — Served on over 20 WASC teams

WASC is an extremely effective process for continuing school improvement to the exact degree schools: 1. Embrace the concept of continuing improvement and 2. Correlate their internal improvement efforts to the WASC process. The actions plans, if carefully crafted with delineated timelines, measures of success, reporting out procedures, and measures of accountability, provide the school with a process to gauge their ongoing efforts to impact student achievement in a positive direction. Schools that recognize and address both their strengths and weakness and address both candidly in their self-study are much better equipped to move forward in the direction of continual improvement. Those whose primary concern is the term of accreditation and try to diminish, conceal, or ignore their areas of weakness and hope the visiting committee will not discover them are only hurting kids. The Effective School Researchers (Lazotte and Meany) said years ago, "Schools are either improving or declining, there is no plateau on which to rest," they were absolutely correct and this is, in my opinion, a basic tenet of the WASC process.



ERNEST BOONE — WASC member since 1991 — Served on over 12 WASC teams



As educators learn new and innovative practices and adapt to ongoing policy expectations, they must address future challenges of their students in multiple ways. The WASC accreditation process of continuous improvement in schools focuses attention on discovering and successfully implementing ways to achieve core goals related to student learning. When approached in the true spirit of continuous improvement, the process allows the entire school community to maintain a focus on the possibilities and opportunities of the school's goals and programs as well as the barriers. School leaders and staff are able to make decisions based on attaining the most positive results for students, rather than on adhering to or maintaining an established system "of the way we do things around here." Because students vary so much in their learning needs and are greatly and unpredictably influenced by external forces outside of

school, effective educational practices are continuously evolving and changing to meet a wide range of needs. This, in turn, means that the persistent and collaborative analysis of the reasons for differences between goals for student learning and actual student performances can be the engine that drives coherent, collective action for improvement and growth. It also means that change is a constant, ongoing adaptation of current practices and programs in effective schools so that student success and progress are at the heart of the matter. School leaders can then inspire, persuade and influence others by their own actions and attitudes in cultivating a school and community culture of high expectations for all that values one another's expertise, collaborates on behalf of all students in the school, and holds students and one another collectively accountable for results.

The National Research Council identifies three critical elements that underlie good assessment:

- Cognition: What do we know about how students learn?
- Observation: How do we create situations that allow us to observe student performance?
- Interpretation: How do we draw inferences from performance?

These three concepts are essential for a successful and meaningful WASC self-study as well. As schools continuously monitor progress and engage in the self-study process, they work in steady, systematic fashion to improve their results and strengthen what they know about how their students learn. This emphasis is based on distinct measures or indicators of outcomes and goals that guide improvements in teaching and learning and signal to external audiences how well their programs and organizational priorities are functioning. As schools examine how their students learn best, their reliance on evidence usually leads to examining teaching practices



and learning opportunities across the school to better observe and learn about student, teacher and program performances that are having the most success. Schoolwide goals are central to defining such success and as Richard Stiggins argues, “to assess accurately, teachers and administrators must understand the achievement targets their students are to master. They cannot assess (let alone teach) achievement that has not been defined.” By emphasizing schoolwide goals and teaching student content standards, by clearly describing characteristics of proficient levels of work and performance expectations, and by evaluating the depth of student understanding on specific course expectations, school teams create an intense focus on clarifying what students need to learn and monitor progress over time.

Collaborative discussions provide valuable insights on meeting varied student needs and adjusting instructional strategies and program goals. Such discussions lead to important understandings about making interpretations and inferences from relevant data. If an inference about learning is a conclusion about a student’s thinking processes based on performance, then the professional judgments every teacher uses in the classroom can be applied to the WASC processes. As school teams take an in-depth look at what currently exists and what needs to be improved in their program, they interpret and share findings and evidence about their own institutional effectiveness and use their conclusions to make decisions and improvements. The entire school community better understands and commits to the school’s goals, priorities, and accountability measures.

NANCY BROWNELL — WASC member since 1999 — Served on over 18 WASC teams

The WASC process of self reflection and review are important factors that are necessary for improvement. Often in schools, we are very busy doing the job of educating children and responding to the various mandates from the Federal, State, and Local governments while responding to the demands of parents and community, it can become quite easy for teachers and administrators to be overwhelmed. The accreditation process demands that we stop and ponder what we do on behalf of children, daily, while noting the politics of all the other constituencies. The WASC process demands that schools ask – “Is what we are doing right for ‘all’ children?”



The amazing power of the ESLRs is that schools are forced to ask themselves, as they write the ESLRs, “Do these learning goals reflect our vision, mission, and goals for every student and are they measurable?” “How do we know that we are doing what we say or purport to be doing for every child?”

When I visit with schools these are the major questions that I want answered over and over again.

SUSAN CHARLES — WASC member since 1988 — Served on over 18 WASC teams



The WASC accreditation process under the Focus on Learning format enables schools to plan, institute, and evaluate all of the components of instruction in a formal manner that can be shared with all stakeholders. In these challenging budget times, I firmly believe schools that use FOL concepts in their schoolwide plans are far more successful than ones that view FOL as another report they are required to do.

In my experience of chairing WASC visits to large comprehensive high schools, continuation high schools, non-public special education schools, and county run court schools, I have come to believe that the concepts professed in FOL can be applied to all instructional settings. Standards-based instruction that includes evaluation of student learning in a timely manner is a great way for schools, parents, and administrations to

evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction program.

My own experience as a site administrator, district administrator in special education/child welfare, and as an elected school board member has prepared me to be an effective chair that values additional WASC training. Today, I still see a need for additional training of central office administration and school board members. The above identified groups often believe that a WASC visit should be viewed as a “police” agency action and that the responsibility for a successful WASC accreditation falls primarily on the site principal. In these budget crises times, limited administrative staff who claim to not have the appropriate time to devote to WASC accreditation, I asked that they review district priorities and mission statements. WASC is a solution not an additional task.

HENRY COWLES — WASC member since 2001 — Served on over 12 WASC teams



The WASC accreditation process leads the entire school community through an honest and productive analysis of a school's strengths and limitations. This leads to a continuous school improvement process as participating schools strive to meet rigorous, research-based standards and 21st century skills.

STEVE COOVER — WASC member since 2000 — Served on over 15 WASC teams



When the WASC team comes to a school, it brings with it the expectation that the members possess certain standards to which the school will be held accountable. It is as if the team has knowledge of competent authorities or standards to which the school will be judged and adjusted. A standard could be anything from test scores, to relationships, to programs. Schools want to be tested and shown the criteria to be reached.

Setting standards fosters school improvement and is implicit in the self-evaluation process, during which the school develops an action plan for the future to encompass new ideas, technology, and skills which lead to global competencies. Standards, Action Plans, and the Visiting Team are the elements of the impetus for change.

In general, schools have developed programs, rewards, and individualization techniques to achieve schoolwide goals:

- Schoolwide programs include Small Learning Communities, Avid, Edusoft, and many other *programs*. The environment of the school will determine the best program for the school.
- Increased parent or community participation in school activities especially on a one-to-one basis. For example members of the community assist seniors with their senior projects. FFA members receive help from local farmers; service clubs sponsor individual students, etc.
- Rewards for achievement are another incentive for increased accomplishment. For example, the Renaissance program where there are awards for good grades, and raised grade point averages. Special treats such as movies, or pizza parties, are effective as inducement for completion for some projects.
- Individualization of help and increasing self-esteem through big sister, or big brother programs, link crew, peer tutors, or special computer programs to increase learning and thinking skills.

The degree to which schools achieve success should be based on the schoolwide learning expectations. The students' success isn't necessarily based on how many students took AP classes, or are going to attend four year universities, but on are they going to be successful citizens in a democracy with the ability to use technology and think clearly and rationally.

JOAN DELZANGLE — WASC member since 1980 — Served on over 43 WASC teams

Schools that do the best job of providing their students with skills necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century are those that have comprehensive, clearly defined, understandable, and measurable student outcomes. There is no better method than the WASC Self-Study process for bringing together all of the school's stakeholders — staff, teachers, students, parents — to reflect and agree on what every student needs to know upon completing the school's program. The most effective schools I have visited review regularly their student outcomes and consistently measure their students' progress in achieving them. When the school's stakeholders know, agree upon, and measure their student outcomes, everything else (curriculum, instruction, assessment, student support, action plans) follows.



ANN DESMOND — WASC member since 2002 — Served on over 33 WASC teams



There is nothing better than a school preparing for the WASC accreditation process. Every company in America has an "end of the year" report. The great aspects of the company and areas to conquer in the coming years. This is OUR report. Schools have the opportunity to have an ongoing, objective look at themselves and a "common assessment" based upon the same criteria and data as all other schools. By clearly and honestly evaluating ourselves (ongoing) it is easy to celebrate what is going well, easier to improve learning for all students and therefore ... look forward to what is on the horizon.

At a recent WASC visit, I was very impressed by their effective use of Google docs to garner everyone's input and to get constant feedback on additional comments made by colleagues.

NADINE ELWOOD — WASC member since 1998 — Served on over 24 WASC teams

A school's self-study that emanates from the WASC process has increasingly become that breathing, living document that is reflective of the school's learning community. Employing the six-year improvement cycle allows for the staff to regularly review and align their action plan with the critical academic needs of their students. The schoolwide development and assessment of expected schoolwide learning results continues to evolve in schools as they consider the necessary future skills of their students that will be part of a global society. Schools are utilizing multiple indicators such as ESLRs to ensure that all students are college and career ready in order to reach their postsecondary goals.



Utilizing the Self-study format, schools have become adept at employing data informed means to assess the meeting of schoolwide student goals. Schools have recognized the need to fully hear and reflect the needs of their many stakeholder groups and do that through many grassroots approaches. Often these successful approaches take the form of hosting community forums on and off campus allowing for multiple mechanisms for input. Additionally, schools continue to employ technology to allow parent and community members to partake in school improvement via videoconferencing, webinars, and online surveying.

At the school site level, the use of professional learning communities has greatly expanded opportunities for staff to delve into the meeting of schoolwide student goals. A further focus on assessment and collaboration within common courses has aided in providing a greater breadth of data for review.

SHEILA FOLAN — WASC member since 1992 — Served on over 32 WASC teams



The accreditation process serves as a catalyst of the ongoing school improvement process. It provides the means to affirm the strengths of our school as well as refining the Schoolwide Plan for Student Achievement for the self-discovered areas of improvement. WASC also serves as an accountability process to ensure that all schools provide the academic and personal support of all learners. WASC assisted our school in particular to refine our Goals for Grads (ESLRs) to ensure that we design, institute, and measure the 21st century skills throughout the curriculum.

STEVE GRAYBEHL — WASC member since 1999 — Served on over 15 WASC teams

The WASC accreditation process helps schools to self-reflect, analyze data and develop plans of action that continuously leads to increased achievement for all students. The process helps schools continuously implement instructional change that prepares students for their futures as the leaders and developers of our ever-changing global society.

As a WASC chair and visiting committee member I have witness school come together to develop a vision for student success. With a clear vision of the goals for student achievement, I have seen schools backwards plan programs of studies and support for students. Continuously monitoring these programs and support has led to increased student success and preparation for college and careers beyond high school.



MARTIN GRIFFIN — WASC member since 2001 — Served on over 18 WASC teams



Effective 21st century skills and global competencies: One of my 2011 school's has a mentoring program of Senior Students mentoring 9th graders on usage of time and support services at the school. Other schools are consistently using Cornell Notes in mathematics, ELA, Science classrooms. More and more of the schools are using Smart Boards with the clickers for student responses in mathematics and powerpoints with videos and pictures embedded. Another high school encourages students to bring their laptops to record information. Computer lab time is embedded in many of the courses these days.

Schoolwide Learning Goals assessment has been an "aha" moment for many schools. WASC supports them in taking the time to "drill down" whether the goals are relevant, current or need to be changed. Purposeful walkthroughs not based on WASC but with probes to understand their goals has proven helpful. Surveys that are not broad but focused have helped schools to find out specifics from students. Peer reviews and cross-curricular discussions have proved great strides in knowing what happens for the students throughout the day. The metamorphosis that occurs in genuine examination of their school continues to transform school staffs and communities. Purposeful listening has changed and removed filters. As one school told me, "What a difference WASC has made for us! We now know who we are and where we want to go to increase our students' learning."

KATHLEEN GRUBB — WASC member since 1998 — Served on over 14 WASC teams

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of the positive experiences that I have had over the years as I have visited many schools whom were effective and some that needed work. In my experience, the key to effective schools is strong leadership from a principal who is willing to share power and who values the knowledge of the faculty. The WASC accreditation process is most effective in this situation as it fosters collective improvement. When the principal encourages collaboration and provides time in the weekly schedule for teachers to get together to address issues there is a positive result with all feeling that their ideas are valued. If the school has structured (WASC format) and collaborative focus groups that are ongoing, there is an opportunity for continuous sharing based on recent data collection. The focus groups as designed by WASC focus on the schoolwide student goals. Schools that have a clear vision for what success for "all students" means and are able to show by various means that students are achieving are able to achieve their goals. One effective way that many schools have found to demonstrate success is through project-based learning. When students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and at what level through collaboration they can achieve, they are being prepared for the future. In the future people will need to work together to solve complex problems. The development of these skills is necessary if students are to function effectively regarding global issues. The WASC process provides a very important framework for building an effective process to deal with the challenges of the future. Schools that have embraced technology as they look at the future needs of students are ahead of those who are unable to deal with change. This is a major issue.



JANE HAMMAKER — WASC member since 1996 — Served on over 22 WASC teams



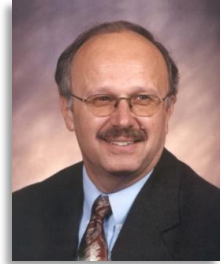
While making WASC visits, almost without fail, I have heard teachers and administration comment on how the WASC accreditation process has helped foster school improvement by getting ALL staff to collaborate about what it takes for students to succeed. Even before Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) became fashionable, WASC provided the overarching topic of student success to frame learning-centered discussions at school sites. WASC's dynamic Action Plan, always looking for ways of meeting the needs of today's students, compliments the continuing improvement model and encourages reflection on the needs of students today and in the future.

The schoolwide student goals (Expected Schoolwide Learning Results or ESLRs) fit well with the alternative schools where I often visit, helping schools to address both behavioral and academic success. Most schools struggle with ways to effectively assess the degree to which schoolwide student goals are being achieved, but some have found success informally by incorporating Individual Learning Plans with growth areas centered around the ESLRs and providing a time for self-reflection. (Students assess their success/challenges with the ESLRs and set goals for continued success.)

SHIRLEY HARGIS — WASC member since 2000 — Served on over 16 WASC teams



Ever tried to focus a pair of binoculars to clearly identify an object in the distance? Binoculars have to be continually focused and fine tuned as the object in the distance changes complexity, backdrop, and the viewer's perspective. WASC's "Focus on Learning" allows individual schools to continually focus and fine tune their "binoculars of student learning" through the lens of the self-study process as each school focuses on its mission for teaching 21st century skills and global competencies.



21st century criteria are applied to a wide variety of learning opportunities in WASC schools throughout the global community of educators and learners. Schools utilizing the WASC "Focus on Learning" process are challenged to measure their perspective of quality student learning for the 21st century and the related global competencies. One WASC accredited international school I had the opportunity to visit identified realistic and meaningful 21st century worldwide course standards to measure each Expected Schoolwide Learning Goals in the areas of literacy and mathematics, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual growth. This private school identified measurable learning standards at each grade level for each their ESLRs. The staff used a variety of strategies and interventions to teach the well defined and measurable standards. Using the WASC ESLR criteria, they fine tuned their "lenses" and were able to assess areas of student learning. Student achievement is validated through student performance indicators within schools, articulation and fine tuning feedback from a Visiting Committee, and the ultimate validation of their achievement process by the WASC Commission.

It is my observation from completing a wide variety of WASC visits that schools passionate about preparing students for the 21st century measurably benefit from the research and implementation found through Focus on Learning. The identified and articulated process allows each school to intensively view their collaborative planning, appropriate instruction and measurable student learning results via their WASC/FOL school binoculars.

GARY INGRAHAM — WASC member since 1999 — Served on over 30 WASC teams



As a recently retired high school principal and someone who has chaired many WASC Visiting Committees, I have seen how valuable the accreditation process is from the perspective of a school leader as well as a WASC representative. I always stressed to my school community the importance of using the WASC/CDE accreditation process as a way to improve what we do to help all students succeed. By looking at the criteria set forth in the FOL document, our school was able to review what we were doing to educate our students and to further develop our courses to address the needs of all students. The yearly review of our schoolwide goals and action plans allowed us to be more effective and successful. As I have worked with schools over the years as a chair, I have stressed this concept with them as well. Schools who take a serious look at what they are doing for students are the ones I have found to be the most successful in terms of the accreditation process as well as schoolwide improvement. WASC provides this opportunity and it is clear there is no better way to assure program improvement and the best for our students than the WASC accreditation process.

PAT LICKISS — WASC member since 1989 — Served on over 34 WASC teams

Through Focus on Learning, for the past twenty years or more WASC has been the accreditation leader in focusing schools on the development within students of 21st century skills. The WASC accreditation process requires school leaders to look beyond the day-to-day, tyranny of the urgent type issues and examine more fundamental questions related to how effectively the school is preparing its students to thrive and contribute in the 21st century.



HARLAN LYSO — WASC member since 1990 — Served on over 22 WASC teams



Today's students live and will work in a constantly changing world. Gathering information and making informed decisions about next steps is the WASC process. Schools that follow this ongoing school improvement model better identify and provide for 21st century student learning needs and global competencies. Schools that successfully assess the degree to which student goals are achieved have the regular involvement and participation of all — teachers, students, administrators, parents and community members. They evaluate a wide variety of disaggregated student achievement data that is systematically shared, discussed and analyzed in both home and focus groups. Rubrics are used extensively. Successful schools use research-based



programs based on student needs and interests, and their expected learning results reflect this.

SCOTT MANGRUM — WASC member since 1999 — Served on over 17 WASC teams

Foster school improvement: The accreditation process is all about community collaboration. In our busy lives as educators, with declining resources and increased accountability, WASC fosters the one opportunity we have... to talk about strategies on how to make good schools great.

Important future challenges: Schools often work in isolation especially in rural parts of the state. Bringing in experienced colleagues from other regions of California through WASC provides a much needed objectivity to challenges all schools share.

Schools assess: All schools and districts have now become conversant in the language of assessment. What has been really exciting is the ability of the greater school community to measure school success. Parents, support staff, the business community have all become aware of how their schools are doing and how they measure up to other regions of the state.



MICHAEL McCOY — WASC member since 1994 — Served on over 19 WASC teams



The WASC accreditation process challenges schools to take an honest look at what they are currently doing to help students reach their highest potential and prepare them for the demands of the 21st century. When schools use the process with fidelity, they find that they are often times doing many things right. Likewise, they are better able to identify areas that need improvement and receive assistance in developing a plan to address those areas.

In order for schools to assess the degree to which the schoolwide student goals are being achieved, they must first take an in depth look at what are their student goals. The WASC process helps them do this. Once they have clearly identified what they want students to learn and achieve, they can better determine if they are reaching those goals. This has been observed in schools through an honest look at disaggregated data and best teaching practices.

SHELLY MOREIRA — WASC member since 1998 — Served on over 16 WASC teams

Using the WASC research-based prompts to evaluate what is effective and what needs attention in conjunction with the study of data and stakeholder discussions provides schools a framework to create an action plan. The revisiting of that action plan on a regular basis helps the school focus on the changes needed to adjust and pursue appropriate activities to prepare students for a productive future.

Many schools use hard data that they gather about their desired achievement of students. However, it is the school that provides opportunities for students to personally demonstrate their achievement through portfolios, exhibitions and/or some type of personal connection with the school's (ESLRs) student outcomes that can say "our students leave us with what we have determined is important for them to be prepared for whatever their future may bring." An example — the girl who described her growth through her years at the school on one of its ESLRs in her college application essay.



BARBARA NUNES — WASC member since 1986 — Served on over 50 WASC teams



Innovative, challenging ideas come from those that are able to "dream." As I watch schools accept the WASC challenge, work together and plan, I am always amazed that the challenges of 21st century skills and global competencies are being met and exceeded so that the graduates are able to meet those challenges and excel in the workforce. When this happens, everyone "wins" with the students being prepared to accept the future with confidence.

The WASC accreditation process provides a "scaffold" for a self-study of the school. The focus of the process becomes the student and how the student learns. It is not a process to be feared, but one to be embraced. The



process asks the school to look carefully at the way students are performing and determine areas of needed improvement. The school is free to determine what actions they will take to make that improvement and goals that will be good for all involved to reach. The process uses a simplistic approach that is continuing, and with collaboration from all stakeholders helps the school to grow in the direction of the goals.

Each school, large or small, rich or poor, public or private, K-12 or Adult/College can benefit from the self-study process. By looking directly into the “heart” of the school, analyzing how students are learning, and feeling both the warmth of knowing the job is well done, yet still can be improved, the body of the school comes together sharing in the experience and rejoicing in the recognition. The learning of the “needs to improve” areas provides both focus and direction. Participation in focus groups allows all participants the opportunity to have their ideas heard. The utilization of an Action Plan gives the school the opportunity to build a step-by-step, task-driven plan that all can agree upon for progress.

Effective ways of assessing the degree to which the schoolwide student goals are being achieved that I have observed are as follows:

When students have been involved in the decision-making process, in setting the schoolwide student goals the desire to achieve those goals is stronger. I have observed students working with other students to help them achieve higher test scores, complete projects, and practice for performances. It becomes the “spirit” of the school, one of everyone helping each other. Teachers, administrators, students and parents become partners, working toward common goals.

Teachers have designed the assignments assigned to tie them to the student goals demonstrating how each objective works toward the outcome. Eventually, the student is able to assess the lesson, and determine how their learning individually contributes to the overall performance of the school. In one particular instance the course outline not only stated the objective of the course, but tied it directly to the student goals of learning. At the end of the course, students selected the goals that had been met. Since it had to be signed by both the student and the parent, the parent could then see how the course would benefit the student in not only learning the material but what specific goals the student would be trying to achieve. It was much more than having the goals posted in each classroom. However, posting the goals can be helpful too. Students in one class used the “posted” goals to measure what they had accomplished with each assignment before they submitted it for a grade.

Awards, acknowledgements, trophies, certificates, and “pats on the back” are always welcomed. Winning seems to be the most important attainment whether it is being named as a Valedictorian, or a scholarship winner, or a member of a team that just took the International Prize in Robotics or the Culinary Arts Completion. School communities are also desirous of attaining a six-year accreditation, being named a Model School, or having your school represented as a strong institution. Striving to be the best you can be is always in front of the student, the parent, the staff of the school, and the community during the WASC process. Since the WASC process is a cycle, it has assisted in keeping the school moving forward, adapting to challenges, utilizing new ideas, and putting those ideas into practice.

KAY PALUSH — WASC member since 1999 — Served on over 24 WASC teams

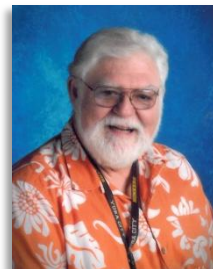
Focus on Learning provides an obvious and logical framework for ongoing, schoolwide improvement. Utilizing *Focus Groups* for regular curriculum development and improvement of instruction is, for most schools, a natural and wise choice. The structure and inclusiveness of *Focus on Learning* makes it an appropriate base for school improvement.

I recently worked with a high school in Northern California that has adopted a *Focus on Learning*-based schoolwide structure for all curricula development and instructional improvement. A WASC Coordinator is now a regular, permanent, funded position, similar to a coach or other extra-pay position.

All Focus Groups are “permanent” — not just a 5 or 6 year cycle — and ongoing work groups. Each reports twice a year to full faculty meetings. The WASC Coordinator regularly updates the school’s report, and publishes it twice a year, for the staff and Board. They could be ready for a full WASC visit at any time.

Chapter 5 and the schools Action Plan are regular faculty meeting agenda items. Each Focus Groups deals with the “areas for growth” in their Focus Group area and the Action Plan at all their meetings. This structure and attention to the intent and specifics of Focus on Learning provides this school with a workable, appropriate and comprehensive approach to on-going school improvement.

JAMES ROULSTEN — WASC member since 1971 — Served on over 50 WASC teams





WASC helps a school community identify its areas of strength and areas for growth. The WASC process is truly a cycle. It begins with critical self-analysis, proceeds to action planning and implementation, and returns to reflecting upon progress since the last cycle began.

We are working on a system of portfolios for all students where the ESLRs are the basis for students to procure and analyze evidence of having achieved schoolwide goals. Students internalize those goals, identify work samples that show themselves and external constituencies the extent to which they have individually achieved the goals, and present those portfolios to panels of community members and school staff.

MARK RYAN — WASC member since 1999 — Served on over 6 WASC teams

In my experience the WASC accreditation process fosters school improvement by forcing schools to look in the mirror and closely examine their program but more importantly, that program's effectiveness. In other words, schools have to ask themselves, what are we doing and is it working? If it isn't working what isn't working, why isn't it working, and how do we fix it? Without that self analysis schools are more likely to stay in a rut of status quo.

In the self-evaluation process, one of the many things a school should look at is their effectiveness in terms of preparation of students for the 21st century and global competencies. In the accreditation process a school should ask: Are we adequately preparing our students for their futures? What data can we find and analyze that will tell us if our students are ready? How can we evaluate our overall program and instructional strategies in terms of student readiness for their postsecondary goals?

The most effective schools have teacher buy in and the push for change and effectiveness is bottom-up not top-down. One school I visited used grade level teams to analyze student scores on standardized tests, benchmark exams, CAHSEE and CST practice tests, etc. and then used those results to drive instruction. The school also was very adept at celebrating student success. By celebrating student success the school sent the message to its stakeholders loud and clear — we want you to do the best you can and when you do we are proud of you.



DUSTIN SAXTON — WASC member since 2003 — Served on over 10 WASC teams



California API and federal AYP monitor the academic growth crucial to student success, but not skills such as digital literacy, collaboration, problem solving, and global awareness that are necessary for student success in the digital and global economy of the 21st century. WASC *Focus on Learning* provides a framework for schools to establish and monitor holistic student goals that include 21st century skills as well as core academics. The task of schools cannot be preparation for success solely in the local or state economy. Schools must prepare students for competition in a global economy. WASC's work with a wide range of schools including international schools throughout the Pacific Rim allows teachers and administrators to evaluate their programs through a common lens that stresses global competencies.

In Viet Nam, international school students presented a senior project demonstrating mastery of student goals within the context of a mandatory community service requirement to a panel of UN officials. In California, students completing summer internships in architecture presented a formal project summary to a panel of architects. What grace under pressure while demonstrating achievement of 21st century skills!

VALENE STALEY — WASC member since 1987 — Served on over 44 WASC teams

The WASC Process requires all stakeholders to work with each other to discuss many aspects of the schools program that effects student achievement. When completed correctly all stakeholders (custodians, secretaries, parents, community members, teachers, classroom PARAS, nurse, librarian, counselors and administrations) HAVE really sat down together and discussed the issues that include but are not limited to the five focus group areas. All home groups (departments have also discussed these focus group issues and have provide input to ALL The focus groups based on their home groups perceptions and beliefs. While many school go through the process, due to limited resources and cut backs some sites are forgetting or unable to include some of the support staff in their meetings and discussions. This could cause additional stress on the site when groups are not included even if it is a budgetary or



contractual reason.

In this climate of cutbacks and contract concerns sites that have been the most successful in establishing effective ways to assess schoolwide student goals have empowered their staff to make connections with their students. Most sites focus on the use of systems like DataDirector to monitor student achievement. They then use systems like ParentConnect to provide this information to parents and guardians.

However, the most effective sites understand that all staff members touch the lives of their students. These sites understand that the custodian, the groundskeeper, an office aide can sometimes be even more important in the lives of the students since they live in the same community as the students. Students look toward adults and get motivation from many different areas. These sites can then use the input from numerous different stakeholders to assess the degree to which the schoolwide student goals are being achieved.



SUSAN WEINSHANKER — WASC member since 1992 — Served on over 18 WASC teams



The WASC accreditation process is a very powerful tool designed to assist in realigning educational settings into effective learning environments that prepare students to meet the demands of an ever changing world. WASC offers an opportunity for schools to conduct an in-depth self-analysis of its educational system every six years and to adapt the full process into on-going structures that systematically validate student learning each year. The full process guides sites in examining and aligning schoolwide structures, curriculum and instruction, reliable data collection and application, expected student learning goals, and the systems that direct change, planning, training, and budgets. Conducted in partnership with the site's staff, students, parents, and community members, the focal point of the WASC process is driven by student learning outcomes. This is an intensive, extensive, and necessary process that endeavors to assist schools in raising the achievement level for all

students through the use of continually updated, relevant practices that emulate the global competencies required for postsecondary success.

The WASC process is incredibly powerful as it validates student learning through the student's demonstration of what he/she knows and can do. Schools that effectively approach this challenge translate each goal into tangible student outcomes that demonstrate the skills required for mastery, develop common rubrics for instruction and assessment, break learning into sequential parts amid increased rigor, and infuse the teaching commitment across grade levels and throughout the curriculum ensuring all students are involved each year; goal attainment relies on effective instruction, student practice, and real-world application. These schools also validate student learning regularly and use common tools, activities, and demonstrations from which clear data can be collected, compiled, compared, analyzed, and used to drive educational change. This is no easy task.

The most difficult goals to assess are those that reflect important school community values and beliefs ensuring all students develop strong personal qualities (i.e., informed and productive members of society, effective communicators, life-long learners, quality producer, etc.). Here are three examples from past visits that meet this challenge fully. One school recognized that successful Senior Project presentations required a great deal of teaching and student practice. To accomplish this the staff developed shorter projects for each grade level incorporating common skill, expanding the rigor and length with each grade level (i.e., 9th worked one quarter, 10th two quarters, etc.), and requiring students to present to the public. Another school successfully assisted its community by performing clearly defined Community Service Plans that are real-world and based in student demonstration and future thinking. Each grade-level plan delineated the effective skills to be attained, became more challenging yearly, and relied upon teachers as coaches for student success. In the final example, Student Lead Conferences were designed to support students in becoming responsible for their education by setting personal performance goals, evaluating individual learning characteristics, identifying support resources, monitoring achievement, and reporting an evaluation of progress in an annual conference with parents and school staff.

SUZIE WIESE — WASC member since 1990 — Served on over 29 WASC teams



In my opinion, WASC accreditation process makes the schools take a really honest assessment of their work and mission. Schools need to take time not only to address but examine in-depth preparedness of their students and teachers alike, to face challenges posed by changes in demographics and family structures, and superficiality being sufficient for competence, and the process makes the schools spend time to do so. Together, the self-study and the VC Report outline a clear path to improvement, and the process of monitoring the progress.

The WASC requirement to include results of Standardized Tests in the School Profile truly helps the schools face and address discrepancies between their goals and achievement progress. Mutual respect and trust between teachers and principal are the most needed and effective tools for honest assessment of the school's achievement.



VENDULA VOGEL — WASC member since 1998 — Served on over 20 WASC teams



The Self-Study, which the WASC accreditation process employs, is an excellent vehicle for initiating school improvement. It encourages all school stakeholders to actively participate in school improvement. The Focus on Learning edition of the self-study is especially effective in addressing the future challenges of today's students.

I really haven't seen any especially effective methods used in the schools to assess the degree to which schoolwide goals are being met. My sense is that the schools emphasize the schoolwide goals prior to and during the WASC visit. I think that there may be some valid reasons for this situation.

BRIAN YAICH — WASC member since 1980 — Served on over 57 WASC teams