My first experience with WASC began in 1962 when one of the founders and the first Executive Director of the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Leslie Hedge, asked me to accompany him on a candidate visit. Subsequently, I served annually on many different types of visits. When my predecessor, Dr. Lyle Siverson, retired, I became the Executive Director.

The Accrediting Commission for Schools of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges has been very successful since its inception. A major factor in this success has been the employment and support of veteran educators who believed in change rather than the status quo, and who were willing to keep the focus on student improvement through constant evaluation of the learning process.

My experiences were many and varied. I recall the time that the California Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Wilson Riles, wanted us to become part of the state school system or at least work out some arrangement for shared visits and studies. We worked with the state in some aspects of their Elementary School Improvement Project.

Another interesting experience was when several of the teachers at a private school enlisted the support of a Los Angeles television station in trying to discredit their school, especially the school’s administration. We were advised of the issue and were able to help defuse the situation in spite of the television hoopla. We were also able to convince the owners and operators that there was some merit in the teachers’ position, and we were able to help the school make some significant changes.

The overseas school visits were always interesting; here are some memorable anecdotes:

- A candidate visit to a school in Thailand during the heat of the Vietnam War. My wife and I were not permitted to mix with the other passengers but were picked up as the plane began to taxi to the runway. The students were not allowed to play on the playground because of the cobras. The cafeteria was also the officers club where we ate as the flyers returned from their bombing missions to Laos and Vietnam. (It took me back to my own days as a B-25 pilot during WW2.)

- A school in a copper mine area in the Irian Jaya section of Indonesia (once known as Dutch New Guinea) where the natives wore only grass skirts and gourds and dug for yams around the compounds.

- The realization that in many of the schools money was not a problem. An example was the issuance of a computer to each student as he/she enrolled in one particular international school. Their new high school was paid for in cash before it was built.

Many times I have been asked which schools were the best. My answer was always, “where the money was; not whether the school was public or private.” The best school I ever saw was a public school and the worst was a private school to which accreditation was denied. It wasn’t how the school was funded or by whom. It was good people with ample funds to provide the resources and hire the quality teachers and administrators to implement the programs they knew to be successful.

I rate my almost nine years with the Commission as the most rewarding of my 42-year career in the education business. Working with educators from all kinds of schools, public, private, or parochial, all striving to help schools improve so that their students could realize their highest potential often under great odds really continually inspired me. If “work” can be “fun” as well as rewarding, striving with the quality educators in WASC is such a place.

Don E. Halverson
ACS WASC Executive Director
1984–1992
I became Executive Director of ACS WASC in January 1993, just six years after the celebration of the 25th anniversary of WASC. My first awareness of WASC was in 1964, when as a new teacher in California, my school was just completing the process and the staff was invited to hear the Visiting Committee’s reading of the report. As the chair of the committee read the report of recommendations and commendations in a most serious voice, I was greatly impressed by the efficiency and accuracy with which the committee summarized the strengths and weaknesses of the school. I was inspired by that experience to respond positively a few years later when I was asked to serve on a committee.

Subsequently, I served on about 20 committees before becoming the Executive Director. I was constantly impressed with the amount of information the committees could collect, analyze, and report on in the short marathon visits. Much of my professional development can be attributed to my participation on these committees. During each visit, I learned something that could be used back in my district, and I was able to network with some of the most talented, committed people in our profession.

Some of the events that occurred during my time at WASC include the development of the Focus on Learning protocol, the integration of the WASC/CDE review process, the engagement of charter schools in the WASC process, moving to the offices on Airport Boulevard, the addition of a commission member from the private sector, and the purchase of an office building in Temecula to establish a branch office in Southern California.

During my time as Executive Director, I became increasingly impressed with the founders of WASC. These were men of great insight who established a wonderful plan for accrediting schools and assisting schools to improve themselves through self-analysis. In the book, History of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges 1962–87, Dr. Siverson, with the help of others, relates the early history of the association. Reading this work, one cannot help admiring their early efforts and dedication.

During my days at WASC, I was regularly impressed with the professionalism and competence of the Commissioners with whom I had the privilege of serving. These hard working folks regularly and cheerfully read a myriad of school reports and consistently rendered decisions and recommendations that were sound and productive. They were a harmonious group, tightly focused on the mission of WASC.

There is something magical about the nature of the WASC and its commissioners that results in great benefit to the schools it serves and to society. I am proud that I had the opportunity to be an integral part of this endeavor for ten years.

WASC has prevailed through good and difficult times for education in its 50-year history. I hope and believe it will endure as a positive force for high-quality education for another half century.

Donald Haught
ACS WASC Executive Director
1993–2003
WASC Golden Jubilee
June 30, 2012
Burlingame, CA