WASC Words of Wisdom

We polled our newer WASC members and asked them to tell us what they found of value from serving on a WASC committee and what advice they would give to new WASC members. We received an overwhelming response and wanted to share some excerpts of the responses with you here. More of the interesting responses can be found on our website. Many thanks to all who responded.

My most pleasant experience was getting to know the WASC visiting team members and the school’s staff. While observing classrooms and interviewing students, parents, and staff members, I learned how critical schoolwide changes are needed for continued progress. Attend WASC training, know the WASC report inside and out, and prewrite a draft based on the report for your section ahead of time.

PATTI LABA — Governor Sanford B. Dole Middle School — Honolulu, HI

Every committee person benefits from being a critical observer of teaching and learning in another setting. Every serious teacher appreciates being both affirmed and being called to renew their commitment to students’ growth and development. Do all that you can do to come prepared, enthusiastic, and positive about the benefit of this splendid experience.

MARIE CLAIRE VALENTEEN — Diocese of Stockton — Stockton, CA

Taking the time to see a school from all facets does so much for the perspective that we bring back to our own sites. The most rewarding part of a visit is having had the pleasure to see all of the inner workings of another school.

SHAWN MARSHALL — Norte Vista High School — Riverside, CA

Serving on a WASC team is a unique experience for a classroom teacher to get a view of an entire school. You really can’t do this at your own school. There are a lot of caring teachers who want an opportunity to tell you the wonderful things they are doing.

ELIZABETH BARTOLOMEA — Ulysses S. Grant High School — Valley Glen, CA

I have served on two visiting committees and both times I came away with ideas that I could take back to my school to use. Because of the nature of the visit the administrators and teachers are very willing to share what they are doing, what works, and what may need to be changed.

BLAIR PETERSON — Mont’ Kiara International School — Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

I have learned so much about the WASC process and how schools run. My own school benefited from my participation. I enjoyed working with the other team members and learning about the school.

TERI SPRECCO — El Cajon Valley High School — El Cajon, CA

I have never served on a team when I did not come away with new ideas that enhanced my educational professionalism. I (we) are not alone. There is a big wide world out there with fellow educators facing the same set of challenges I face and collectively there are creative answers to most of our problems. Listen, reflect, encourage. Don’t come with your own agenda.

ROHN RITZEMA — ACSI North — Sacramento, CA

Since serving on a committee I have recommended the experience to colleagues. It was fantastic professional development for me. The experience gave me an in-depth view of how another school addresses the needs of their students.

NICOLE GLENTZER — Woodlake Union High School — Woodlake, CA

I would recommend serving on a Visiting Committee. It is a great opportunity to learn about other programs and methodologies used. You can walk away and say to yourself, “I’ve learned something new today.” You find people who want to share and help.

TESS LAKE — Kern Union High School District ROC/P — Bakersfield, CA

Read, read and reread the self-study to have a broad understanding for the visit. Conduct the visit with an open mind and remember that things are not wrong even though it is not “the way we do it at our school.”

PAT NIXON — Charter Oak High School — Covina, CA

During a visit, you spend so much time in great detail looking at the FOL model that you gain a great fluency with the material. I immediately went back to my school, looked at WASC recommendations we had been given, and they were so much easier to address with my new fluency with the model. Truly one of those rare things in education — a win-win.

CRAIG COTTER — Five Acres School — Altadena, CA

Participating on a team is a great opportunity to challenge one’s observation and writing skills. The knowledge gained in curriculum development and school improvement is priceless. My advice is to read and do your homework.

TIM CULBERTSON — Pacific Grove Adult School — Pacific Grove, CA
Although serving on a visiting committee adds a significant amount of work to an already overloaded schedule, it is, in my opinion, one of the best forms of professional development for a teacher or administrator. The committee process not only solidifies the expectations of an acceptable educational program, but provides perspective beyond the walls of one’s local, daily enterprise.

WES JOHNSTON — Immanuel Christian School — Ridgecrest, CA

Do your homework. Attend the earliest training session you can. Read the self-study thoroughly. Do your prewrite thoroughly and thoughtfully. If you’re not sure what to do, ask your chair for help.

KATHY BURGARDT — American High School — Fremont, CA

Helping the school staff understand that accreditation is part of a process for school improvement and student learning, and not something to be feared are all rewarding experiences. Take that first step by becoming a team member and assist our educational system by understanding and helping others understand learning.

STAN HA’O — Honoka’a High & Intermediate School — Honokaa, HI

We have an innovative small school; all of us are trying new things. It has been helpful to see how other schools/teachers have solved the same conundrums our school faces.

PHILIP HORNE — The Met High School — Sacramento, CA

Being on a team gives you a view into how a school works, the power of a strong leadership team, and the benefits students receive from such leadership. It gives you motivation to continue in your own school and lets you see where your own strengths/weaknesses lie.

LAURA ALVARADO — Thomas Jefferson High School — Los Angeles, CA

By visiting other schools, we are providing valuable support and, essentially, improving education in general. It’s exhilarating to look deeply at other schools’ programs, to learn from the choices they made, and to be inspired by another group of dedicated, creative educators. I fully expected not to like much of what I was about to see, being convinced that my school was the best. It was humbling and thrilling to see great teaching and learning happening in a completely different setting.

CAROLINA GOODMAN — Sherman Oaks, CA

The opportunity to see another school and discuss the findings with the other members of the visiting committee increased my appreciation for subjects and ways of doing things that I would have not seen on my own.

MAGGIE LONDON — Technology High School — Rohnert Park, CA

Being on a Visiting Committee allowed me to understand accreditation process clearly. The educators I had the pleasure of working with helped me tremendously in my profession as an administrator. This is a learning experience and the challenges you face during the visit will benefit you.

GWEN SAGAPOLUTELE — Fa’a Samoa Marist High School — Pago Pago, American Samoa

Meeting other colleagues at the schools I have visited and seeing their love for their students and meeting the students and hearing them speak about their school has been one of the most enjoyable aspects. Secondly, serving on a visiting committee helps me as a principal to recognize the great things we are doing as a school and helps me to be prepared for our school’s next accreditation visit.

JANET FOGH — Vacaville Christian Schools — Vacaville, CA

I felt serving on a WASC team was one of the best pieces of professional development I have ever done. The positive experience of seeing education in action from a unique perspective. Be prepared to work hard.

ERIC DANHOF — Etiwanda High School — Etiwanda, CA

Serving on a Visiting Committee allowed me to learn about innovative approaches and thoughtful strategies around student achievement and observe these programs in action. I appreciated the opportunity to work with a fellow educator to provide insight and reflections to a school working to provide appropriate educational opportunities for all students.

JOHN LEE — California Charter Schools Association, Los Angeles — Los Angeles, CA

It is good to know that the recommendations we put in a WASC report are ones that will truly be the impetus for positive change for a high school. I have been impressed by the courteousness and mutual respect that everyone has during the process.

SHELDON SMITH — Paso Robles Joint Unified School District — Paso Robles, CA

Serving on a Visiting Committee is an opportunity for professional growth, it gives you a chance to visit other schools, meet other educators, and learn about other programs that may be different from yours. I learned a lot about the importance of being prepared.

MARY SEGOVIA — El Monte-Rosemead Adult School— El Monte, CA

Being on a self-study visit proved to me that a group of people with a common purpose and commitment can accomplish some amazing things in a short time.

MARIYN SAUCEDO — Beaumont High School — Beaumont, CA
Educators of diverse experience and backgrounds come together to examine a program with the result of program enhancement. After reading the self-study, the process of meeting the educators and seeing the program at work is the most rewarding part of the experience.

JANET MACLEOD — Evans Community Adult School — Los Angeles, CA

Serving on a visiting committee has been one of the most rewarding professional activities in which I have participated. Not only do committee members have the chance to share from their own experiences but they gain so much from the schools they visit. The opportunity for concentrated reflection with other educators on best instructional practices and how these impact student learning.

WILLIAM TACKETT — International Christian School — Hong Kong, China

Serving on a Visiting Committee has provided me with the opportunity to see the full picture of how WASC benefits a school and its community. I have been able to present my colleagues with a clear vision of the WASC process and goals, and we can then present to our community the many benefits the WASC process provides for our students.

JANINE HARRINGTON — Pine Hills Adventist Academy — Auburn, CA

Stay in touch with how intimidating the WASC process can be. Many individuals may be a bit nervous about your visit. You can do a great deal to build up value in and appreciation for the WASC process through what you say and how you conduct yourself while on the visit. I’d encourage a Visiting Committee member to emphasize that the visit is designed to help the school in the pursuit of its mission, not to purely serve as a measuring stick or evaluator.

JIM SCRIVEN — Grace Lutheran School — Modesto, CA

It helped to broaden my perspective, and encouraged me to think about what I could take back to challenge my own school with. The relationships that you develop with other team members and key school members last far longer than those you make at regular conferences. I love meeting the high-quality, passionate educators that make our international schools so special.

CHRISTINA JUPO — Chiang Mai International School — Chiang Mai, Thailand

I would recommend serving because it is more valuable a tool for professional development than any conference I have attended. Every time I serve I take back great ideas and it also validates what we are doing at our own site. I developed an understanding for capacity at the site — mine and the visited school.

LEW KERNS — Woodrow Wilson Classical High School — Long Beach, CA

Serving on a WASC team makes you more conscious of your own teaching style and makes you re-examine your methodology. The quickly developed camaraderie among the visiting committee has always been a rewarding part of my WASC experience.

TODD GLAESER — Lutheran High School of San Diego — San Diego, CA

Getting to talk with the students in the focus groups and with teachers one-on-one and in small groups is at the top when it comes to rewards of serving on a team. We are all in the same business of educating students, but the seeing the variation and diversity of how that is carried out can be eye opening.

THOMAS TAN — Jurupa Unified School District — Riverside, CA

Preparing for and serving on a visiting committee is the best professional development I have had. There is no better way that I know of to become so well-informed about all of the components that make a school tick. Working with my fellow Visiting Committee members has been a pleasure on both of my visits. I have learned a great deal from their perspectives and experiences.

BRYAN BROCKETT — Torrey Pines High School — San Diego, CA

The difference of perspective is invaluable to any educator as they are forced to take a more holistic outlook of education. Its application when returning home is immediately apparent. I learned a lot when I visited classrooms and met with the various stakeholder groups. The issues at various schools seem to be similar.

JOHN JENCKES — Thai-Chinese International School — Samutprakarn, Thailand

You should love what you are doing! You should also be able to write and ready to work hard during the accreditation visit. Make sure that people understand that they need to prepare for the visit.

ANN ANTAL — McKinley Community School for Adults — Honolulu, HI
Serving on a WASC team allows you to see how schools work to meet the needs of students and to meet educational professionals who have a passion for their jobs and students. How rewarding it was to try to help a school improve.

LINDA WHITSON — San Pedro, CA

Each time I have gone on a visit to a school I have learned so much. I learned how other people address the issues that we face at our school. I have gotten great ideas for more efficient running of the school, how to encourage parent and student participation, and ways of dealing with the kinds of problems that arise in administration.

LAURA BERQUIST — Mother of Divine Grace School — Ojai, CA

Since we all go through the WASC process at some point in our teaching career, I can empathize with both sides of the experience having gone through the process as a committee member and as a teacher. It is all about the students and their learning experience no matter what school they are attending. My advice would be to learn from the experienced members on your team. Work hard but also enjoy the experience!

CATHY STOLL — Grace Lutheran School — Huntington Beach, CA

Being a member of the WASC visiting committee was one of the most rewarding professional development experiences of my career. I felt privileged to be part of a professional team that completed the job in such a short period of time. The first team I worked with were hard-working, flexible, and most importantly, all had a great sense of humour.

CAROLE MONDIN — American International School of Guangzhou — Guangzhou, China

Not only has my participation provided me with better insight into the WASC process, but I have learned a great deal from committee members and the faculties of the schools I have visited. Avoid the urge to make comparisons with your own school’s initiatives. Every school is unique and deserves to be approached with an open mind.

KAREN BAIER — Seoul International School — Seoul, Korea

I highly recommend serving on a visiting committee. As a district office support provider, I am better able to help our high schools, especially in the areas of data analysis, program planning, and evaluation, because of my WASC experiences. It’s also been super helpful as I’ve worked on the Single Plans for Student Achievement with our high schools, because the WASC action plan must be integrated.

ALLISON ADAMS — San Bernardino City Unified School District — San Bernardino, CA

As an administrator I love to serve and to also send various members of our staff as we always bring back ideas for our own school. Most of all, those of us who have served have learned how the process works and so we were well prepared to lead our school when we went through our first visitation.

SHEILA COLEMAN — Crystal Cathedral Middle School / High School — Garden Grove, CA

It gives one a much greater overview of the educational system; excellent opportunity to meet and network with other professionals and get great ideas for your own school, district, and/or position; certainly gives one a greater understanding of both the WASC process itself and its importance.

MICHAEL SINCLAIR — Bravo Medical Magnet High School — Los Angeles, CA

From each visit I came away with at least two or three good, original ideas for improving programs at our school while gaining a fresh perspective on “the big picture.” The most rewarding aspect of serving on a visiting committee in both instances was meeting and interacting with other professional educators for a fairly intense three-day effort to accomplish our task.

LARRY UTSLER — Santana High School — Rowland Heights, CA

WASC is supposed to be a supportive process and the goal is to encourage schools to perform at the highest level and in so doing, to successfully serve as many of our students as possible. We’re not there to “catch” people making mistakes; rather, we’re there to support them in fixing them.

ALEXIS CALA — Metropolitan Arts and Technology High School — San Francisco, CA

I have observed “Best Practices” in action! I have been able to bring back new ideas to implement at my school site and district. As much work as is involved in a visit, the team members have always worked as a “team.” My advice is to be flexible.

DEDE SMITH — Hesperia Community Day School — Hesperia, CA

Serving on a Visiting Committee is a great way to learn how schools work and to get a better understanding of how many different ways there are to learn and to educate. Keep an open mind and really listen to what schools, students, faculty, administrators and parents tell you.

REBECCA WOOD — Fairmont Preparatory Academy — Anaheim, CA

You can do it! It may seem overwhelming when you are preparing for your first visit, but just take things one step at time. You have all the materials you need, your committee chair is there to guide you, and the other committee members will support you as well. You will not regret the experience.

LORELEI CEJA — Desert Mirage High School — Thermal, CA