

UPDATE

Week of November 5, 2007

FOCUS ON LEARNING: WHY REINVENT THE WHEEL?

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation process called 'Focus on Learning' is a guide for school improvement and validation. All high schools are familiar with WASC accreditation and its importance for their graduates. However, more and more public elementary and middle schools throughout California are utilizing the accreditation process. Private and parochial elementary and middle schools have utilized WASC accreditation for years to validate their programs in the eyes of their consumers. Isn't it time for LAUSD to consider this valuable and respected means for our Program Improvement Five schools and all other schools if resources permit?

There is much to be gained by using a tried and true accreditation process. First and foremost is credibility and validity. 'Focus On Learning' is based on a complete overview of a school's leadership, curriculum, assessment and accountability, instruction, and school culture. In other words, every aspect of the school is considered; not just the obvious standardized test scores. Second, and equally important, is the total involvement of the school community to complete a comprehensive self-study to analyze school strengths and to identify improvement needs. The self-study also emphasizes the use of all data sources including standardized test results. District (also Local District) support for the school is analyzed as well. Third is the observation by a WASC Visiting Team composed of educators from throughout the State who have demonstrated accreditation competence in their own right and who have been trained by WASC in 'Focus On Learning.' The Visiting Team provides the objective mirror by which the self-study is assessed.

AALA recommends that the Superintendent strongly consider WASC accreditation as the primary method for assessing our schools. There is no need to build a new system of accountability when a perfectly creditable and valid system already exists, and is used by colleges, universities and employers to assess high schools and most private and parochial elementary and middle schools. How better to encourage high achievement at all low-performing schools than to give them an assessment blueprint that works. Self-study is a continuing process for school improvement based on doable action plans.

AALA encourages all administrators and teachers to learn more about the value of WASC accreditation for their schools. AALA encourages the Superintendent and the Board of Education to support the accreditation process with needed implementation resources. Let's not reinvent the wheel when a perfect wheel already exists.

For more information about WASC accreditation go to www.acswasc.org and access On-going Accreditation Process; Public California; Full Self-study (contains self-study documents for all California public schools including elementary and middle/junior high schools).