



Top Five Reasons Why I WASC

By Eric Saibel, Assistant Principal, Sir Francis Drake High School

I just finished a four-day [ACS WASC](#) (Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation visit at a nearby public high school — my third time volunteering as a visiting team member.

Somewhere in the midst of dozens of class observations, hours of poring over the school’s self-study report, and numerous meetings with staff, students, and community members, I stopped and asked myself a simple question: Why do this?

After all, it’s not as if my own job will magically take care of itself; I don’t (yet) possess Mickey’s magic broom from *Fantasia*.

It’s time away from my family. It requires me to open up even more mental bandwidth (a stretch for sure, especially in the Ides of March of our school year) to take in *all* that has happened and is happening at a school I most likely know nothing about. And *then* I’m asked to think about what *needs* to happen at that school over the next three to six years...

So, why do it, when normal life is already tough enough? When I walked out of our parting presentation to staff, I composed a Top Five almost instantaneously:

1) Service: I am a public educator. I am a product of public education (in fact, I had attended grades 4–7 in the same district as this recent school I visited). People working in public education are my colleagues; students experiencing public education are *our* responsibility and future adults in our shared society. There are 1,000 students in whom I have an immediate stake in seeing navigate a safe, healthy path to happiness and success, in school and beyond; there are many thousands more that I care about just as much.

2) Connection: Ideas know no boundaries. During our visit, I met the coach of a global technology entrepreneurship program and competition for young women — he was more fired up about getting girls into technology than many sports coaches I’ve seen at the late stages of a tight game. I witnessed a librarian who was the hub of an energetic, bustling, sometimes boisterous library culture (one of the rules was definitely not “Be Quiet!”) which was also the research hub of the school. I witnessed a school culture so accepting and non-assuming that a group of boys practiced their free-style dancing in the cafeteria *during lunch*. Over the course of my three visits, I have had my eyes opened by new ways of thinking and doing — and I’ve brought seedlings of those ideas back to my own school.

3) Challenge: The ACS WASC process is a transparent, inclusive accountability measure that helps schools and communities identify their successes while focusing honestly (sometimes painfully) on areas that need real work. Great schools and organizations learn to do this as a normal, embedded practice — so much so that it becomes the default culture. But so many schools are not there yet; the ACS WASC process is an opportunity for everyone to look in the mirror together while opening up their school to outside eyes. We should all try it more often.

4) Reflect: It is easy for us, in the bubble of our individual school sites, to think we have left no stone unturned. But an examination of another school's *entire* program — along with sweeping panoramic views of its history, traditions, climate, and living culture — lets you quickly know that there are many roads leading to Rome. And some are better paved, more scenic, and with better roadside amenities than you have thought up at your own site. I don't mean they have more money to throw at problems; I mean they have invested more in the *human capital* it takes to bring great ideas and practices to the forefront and not let them get stymied by "This is the way things have always worked" and "You're new here — pipe down!"

5) Pure, Selfish Curiosity: What can I say? I love my school, but distance can make the heart grow fonder. These visits are like being a tourist doing "Education Travel" — I see the sights, snap some pictures, meet new people, speak a slightly different language (every school has its own dialect), and come back home with new memories made. The only thing missing are the hours idling by the poolside...

The teams I've been on have been made up of incredible, dedicated educators who have the same sense of curiosity, service, and professionalism that inspired me to take the plunge. I count them among my growing cohort of colleagues in this wonderful profession we share.

How do I feel after four days of non-stop observation, conversation, reflection, writing, editing, and meeting new people? Tired, sore, stressed and totally, completely fired up by the students, staff, and community members I met, the energy and culture I witnessed, and the specific practices and programs at the school that my own students and staff would gobble up.

[Here's](#) how you can be a part of a visiting committee — buckle up. Visit the ACS WASC website at www.acswasc.org for further information.