



## TAKING ACCREDITATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL: WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

Message from MSA President Henry G. Cram, Ed.D

*Taking Accreditation to the Next Level*, our new strategic plan for the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS), was officially adopted at the Fall 2017 Commission meeting.

Developed over the past two years, the plan reflects what we have learned from our previous improvement planning processes and demonstrates our growing understanding of what we all need to do to ensure we are continuously improving.

*Taking Accreditation to the Next Level* can mean several things.

For example, quantitatively, it means continuing to improve metrics like member satisfaction, which has risen consistently over the past several years. Tracking data from the biannual member surveys from 2010-2017 indicates member satisfaction has continued to increase on four measures, including improved school performance, educational program alignment, school governance and organizational change.

From the perspective of the *Lessons Learned Activity*, completed by members seeking re-accreditation, *Taking Accreditation to the Next Level* provides a qualitative meaning as well. Using that lens, we found we have improved on our use of technology, expanded and strengthened our cooperative relationships, developed new protocols, like *Systems*, *Sustaining Excellence* and *Programs of Distinction*, added categories of membership, and improved our organizational capacity and the quality of our member services.

Throughout the strategic planning process, we gained greater insight into the importance of accountability, the use of technology to manage the improvement process, the value of applying the latest research and proven practices, and the necessity of engagement and collaboration in promoting, sustaining and attaining improved school performance. *Taking Accreditation to the Next Level*, therefore, means that as an organization, MSA-CESS will use that knowledge and understanding to provide our members with updated standards, more protocol options, networking opportunities, access to more educational resources and increased quality member services.

In the coming months and throughout the implementation of our new strategic plan, our goal is to demonstrate that what *Taking Accreditation to the Next Level* really means is that MSA-CESS and our members are leading the way in continuously improving school performance.



Henry G. Cram, Ed.D

Happy Holidays  
and a Happy New Year  
from the MSA-CESS Staff!

Our offices will be closed  
December 25, 2017 to January 1, 2018.

### Also In this Issue:

Systems Approach to Accreditation Looks at Big Picture

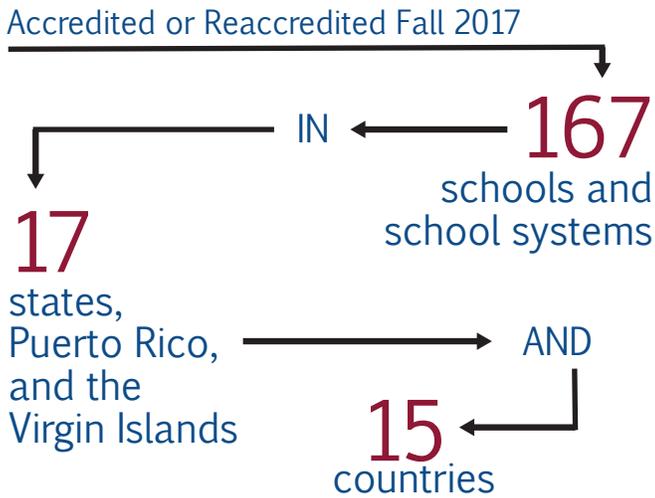
More than 165 Schools Earn Accreditation, Reaccreditation

Q&A with MSA Commissioner Michelle D'Antonio

Middle States Offers Accreditation Protocol Specific for CTE Schools

## MORE THAN 165 SCHOOLS EARN ACCREDITATION, REACCREDITATION

The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools voted at its biannual meeting this fall to accredit or reaccredit 167 schools and school systems in 17 states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and 15 other countries.



Among the schools that earned accreditation or reaccreditation are 40 Catholic schools and several learning service providers as well as non-degree granting career and technical post-secondary institutions.

“I can personally attest to the value of accreditation as it has significantly helped our school system establish and achieve goals through strategic planning, curriculum alignment and coalition building,” said Middle States Commissioner William W. Crist, school superintendent for the Diocese of Syracuse. “As a result, our student performance continues to steadily improve, and our faculty and staff along with our parents share in our mission to ensure all children have access to high quality education.”

A full list of schools and school systems that earned accreditation or reaccreditation is available [here](#).

## SYSTEMS APPROACH TO ACCREDITATION LOOKS AT BIG PICTURE

Congratulations to the Point Pleasant Beach Public Schools in Point Pleasant Beach, N.J. and the Eastern Christian School Association in North Haledon, N.J. for earning accreditation using the Middle States Systems Protocol.

Examining and evaluating schools as a system looks at the big picture and is a cost-effective approach to accreditation that helps ensure that the curriculum aligns as students progress from pre-K through 12th grade.

To learn more about the Middle States Systems approach to accreditation, click [here](#).



Eastern Christian School Association, North Haledon, NJ



Point Pleasant Beach Public Schools, Point Pleasant Beach, NJ

**SHARE!**

Don't forget to pass along this newsletter to your school community so that they can take full advantage of being a part of the MSA network.

## Q & A WITH MIDDLE STATES COMMISSIONER MICHELLE D'ANTONIO, HEAD OF SCHOOL, MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF CHAMBERSBURG

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*Commissioner Michelle D'Antonio talks about the flexibility of the Middle States accreditation process and the importance of celebrating accomplishments. What's on this Wonder Woman's playlist? Read this short Q & A to find out.*

**Q. Why did you choose a career in education?**

A. I have always loved to learn, and to share that love with others. I like to find ways to get people of any age excited to learn something new, regardless of what it is.

**Q. How long have you been involved with Middle States and why?**

A. I've been involved with Middle States for 12 years. I believe in the power of accreditation to keep a school focused on improvement, but also on maintaining standards in core areas. I appreciate the Middle States flexibility that allows for differences in learning organizations to be true to their individual missions, while meeting those standards and continuing to strategically plan for improvement.

**Q. What do you see as one of the main benefits of Middle States accreditation?**

A. The Middle States self-study process does identify what needs to be improved, but it also identifies what your school is doing well. It is important to acknowledge the strengths of your school and to celebrate what you do well, what you have accomplished, what is unique, and what brings smiles to the faces of your students, families, faculty, staff, board and community.

**Q. Who inspires you and why?**

A. I am inspired by most people I meet. Every day, I am inspired by children, especially my own, as they are accepting of others, regardless of differences, easily forgiving of others, and they laugh often.

**Q. What books are on your nightstand right now?**

A. The books I read are a diversified group! My favorite book of all of all time, Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities* that I purchased in Paris at the Shakespeare and Company Bookstore across from Notre Dame. The second is *The Principles and Power of Vision, Keys to Achieving Personal and Corporate Destiny* by Dr. Myles Munroe. I love to read books that inspire, motivate and encourage me to be more than I was yesterday, and this is one of those books. The third book is *You Say Goodbye and We Say Hello: The Montessori Method for Positive Dementia Care* by Tom and Karen Brenner. Our Montessori staff has been working with a local Memory Care Program to create interactive activities for our students to share with the residents at the Care Community. My mother and the relatives of some of our staff members are living with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, so the research and activities give us hope and an opportunity to make a difference.

**Q. What songs are on your current playlist?**

A. My current playlist is a mix of genres that I run to. Some of my favorites are:

- Don't Stop Believing – Journey
- Pressure – Billy Joel
- Walking On Sunshine – Katrina and the Waves
- Poker Face – Lady Gaga
- We Don't Run – Bon Jovi

**Q. What is one thing about you that might surprise people?**

A. Being in a leadership role usually requires being fairly serious and dressing in a professional manner. However, I have three fabulous boys, two wonderful nieces, and a brother, who have taken "dress for the job you want" to a whole new level. We go to the large Comic-Con in Philadelphia, and dress as superheroes, or sometimes villains, and have fun taking photos and seeing all the great artists. My favorite is always Wonder Woman.

## MIDDLE STATES OFFERS ACCREDITATION PROTOCOL SPECIFIC TO CTE SCHOOLS

At Middle States, we know that there is no one-size-fits all approach to accreditation. That's why we offer an accreditation protocol specifically developed to meet the unique needs of career and technical (CTE) schools.

Here are just some of the benefits:

- Middle States accreditation is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and, therefore, accreditation through the approved protocol can be used to establish eligibility to participate in Title IV financial aid programs for adult students.
- The Middle States accreditation protocol for career and technical schools aligns well with various quality assurance programs, including ISO 9001.
- Middle States accreditation can reduce time preparing for APE Chapter 339 CTE program reviews.
- Middle States accreditation for career and technical schools is valid for ten years, while many agencies accredit for only five years.
- Middle States can accredit institutions with both secondary and postsecondary programs as part of one self-study and evaluation visit, saving time and money.
- The Middle States accreditation protocol evaluates both technical and academic programs in the same self-study and evaluation process, encouraging alignment and integration of those programs.
- As a non-profit organization, Middle States keeps the cost of accreditation low. The peer review process involves volunteer educators, and schools generally pay an application fee and annual membership fees to maintain the term of accreditation.

To learn more about accreditation for CTE schools, contact Dan Rufo, Director of Accreditation, at [drufod@msa-cess.org](mailto:drufod@msa-cess.org) or 267.284.5041.

## PROVEN PRACTICES: ST. FRANCIS PREPARATORY SCHOOL MUSIC PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION

As part of our commitment to serving as a resource for our members, we will periodically share proven practices from our member schools so that other educators may benefit from lessons already learned.

St. Francis Preparatory School in Fresh Meadows, New York was the first school ever to be recognized by MSA-CESS for a Program of Distinction in Music.

Click [here](#) to learn about their award-winning music program and how they have successfully integrated the program throughout the curriculum.

If your school has a proven practice that you would like to share, please contact Dan Rufo, Director of Accreditation, at [drufod@msa-cess.org](mailto:drufod@msa-cess.org) or 267.284.5041.



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