



CELEBRATING RESILIENCY

A Message from MSA-CESS President Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., C.P.A.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck earlier this year, some people started baking bread, others took up sewing, and I – like many – started running.

Actually, I started walking first, but over time, I gradually began to run more, and today I run at least five miles several times a week.

For me, having measurable goals has not only enabled me to deal with the pandemic, but has also helped me to grow.

In a sense, it's not unlike what we at Middle States ask schools to do through the accreditation process. Accreditation encourages schools to identify priorities for growth and improvement, set measurable goals to address the priorities, and then establish a plan to achieve their objectives.

It's also not unlike what we as an organization ask of ourselves.

Through our strategic planning process we set goals and objectives that guide our work throughout the year. Though this year was like no other, thanks to the tremendous work of our dedicated and talented staff, we were still able to achieve many of our goals, while also addressing the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

I am especially proud of our team for developing a successful model for virtual accreditation visits so we could continue to strengthen our services and meet the needs of our members.

In addition, our accreditation liaisons, who work directly with our schools, have gone above and beyond to stay connected and ensure that schools have the tools and the support they need to continue moving through the accreditation process.

I am also pleased that we have been able to reach more schools by expanding our outreach efforts, increasing our current strategic partnerships and developing new ones.

Looking ahead to the new year, one of our main goals will be to pilot our newly revised standards for accreditation so we can ensure they continue to reflect research-proven practices and remain relevant.

And once it is safe again, I plan to visit as many of our member schools as possible to celebrate their resiliency and see the changes in education that the pandemic has brought about.

In closing, I wish you all a happy and healthy holiday season, and hope you meet whatever goals you set for 2021 and continue your own growth and improvement.

Half-marathon, here I come!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., C.P.A.'.

Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., C.P.A.

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEWLY ACCREDITED AND REACCREDITED SCHOOLS

The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools voted last month to accredit or reaccredit 72 schools and school systems in 17 states, as well as Puerto Rico and eight other countries.

“Accreditation is the gold standard for measuring and advancing school improvement,” said Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., president of MSA-CESS. “Though the COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools around the globe to adjust and adapt to a new environment, they continue to demonstrate their commitment to collaboration, growth and ensuring their students have access to a quality education.”

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

TWO SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED FOR PROGRAMS OF DISTINCTION

The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools recently recognized the American School of Dubai for its Program of Distinction in Service Learning and Mt. Lebanon High School for its Program of Distinction in Visual Arts.

The Middle States Programs of Distinction initiative provides external validation of an accredited school’s accomplishments in specific areas of expertise and enables schools to take accreditation to the next level.

The Service Learning Program of Distinction recognizes schools that support broad-based inclusion of experiential learning through the application of higher order problem solving skills to address real life concerns.

“Service learning is integral to our school's mission and core values,” said American School of Dubai Superintendent Paul Richards, Ed.D. “Whether giving voice to the voiceless, engaging in the school garden, participating in school-related sustainable change, supporting local community partners, or becoming involved in meaningful conversations around global issues, our students have the opportunity to develop the critical consciousness necessary for informed action and contribution in a rapidly changing world.”

The Visual Arts Program of Distinction recognizes schools where visual art is seen as an essential component in the social and cultural fiber of all societies now, in the past, and in the future.

“We are proud to be recognized by Middle States for our commitment to visual arts,” said Mt. Lebanon High School Principal Joel Thompson. “Our visual arts programs help students develop their talent and teach them how to work cooperatively, apply problem solving skills, show responsibility for their own learning, and applying critical thinking skills.”

The Programs of Distinction review process helps already accredited schools identify strengths and areas for growth and provides inspiration and recommendations for attaining a high-quality program. MSA accredited schools are eligible to apply for Program of Distinction recognition for outstanding programs in Global Literacies, World Languages, Visual Arts, Music, Early Childhood Education, Service Learning, School Counseling and STEM.

To learn more about the Middle States Programs of Distinction initiative or to apply, [click here](#).



American School of Dubai Service Learning Program



Mt. Lebanon High School Visual Arts Program

STATUS REPORT: VIRTUAL ACCREDITATION VISITS

In response to the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Middle States in May 2020 made the difficult but necessary decision to develop a virtual accreditation visit model for schools approaching accreditation/reaccreditation in 2020-2021. Since our launch in August, we are pleased to confirm that 133 schools have successfully hosted their accreditation visit virtually.

Last month, due to the continuing health and safety challenges, the decision was made to continue the virtual visit model for Spring 2021 visits as well.

As the final accreditation visits of the semester conclude, we are reviewing post-visit survey data, conducting focus groups, and putting in place modifications as needed for our 2021 visits.

We received feedback in a post-visit survey from more than half of our team leaders and school leaders, in addition to one-on-one follow up communications with our staff.

The overwhelming feedback from schools was a sincere appreciation for the visiting teams, who volunteered while managing their personal and professional lives during the pandemic. We echo these words of appreciation and applaud both the schools who invited teams into their schools during this time, and the volunteers who shared their time and expertise.

Positive feedback on the virtual visit included:

- *The process worked- the elements of the accreditation visit were able to be successfully completed virtually.*
- *The efficient use of school resources to host a team virtually instead of onsite, and efficient use of time for volunteers*
- *Visiting Teams liked working with Google Drive to receive information and collaborate on review and writing*
- *Serving on a team became accessible to some people who would not have been able to serve on a traditional visit*
- *Flexibility to visit a school, or host team members, from outside of your geographic region*

However, there is always room for improvement. Although chairs and school leaders significantly responded that the process worked, several key challenges were identified including:

- *More coordination time needed than an in person visit*
- *How the required evidence is presented and when it is sent to the team*
- *Being able to complete all the meetings and writing in three days*
- *A feeling of missing out on the potential for more human connection and the unplanned parts of the experience*

Although we cannot address every concern that makes virtual visits different than onsite, and all of us are missing the in-person human connection with Covid restrictions, we have listened to the feedback from our schools and volunteers and implemented a number of strategies to further strengthen the process.

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AUGUST - DECEMBER 2020

133 
schools visited virtually

in 10 states and territories
 & 15 countries

with 268 
volunteers

65
online
small group
trainings



342
school
leaders and
volunteers
trained

Looking Ahead: SPRING 2021

111 
virtual accreditation
visits scheduled

in 11 states and territories
 9 countries

with 400 
volunteers needed

STATUS REPORT: VIRTUAL ACCREDITATION VISITS (CONTINUED)

(continued from Page 3)

Trainings are in full swing for Spring 21 visits and already more than two dozen schools and volunteers have attended early December workshops to prepare for spring visits. Google Drive folders and materials for all Spring 21 schools were sent last month, ensuring several months of preparation time to upload evidence and organize materials before each virtual visit. We have also committed to adding one additional volunteer to each visit wherever possible to decrease the responsibilities and workload of each team member. And finally, we've added additional support webinars and materials for our Chairs preparing to lead virtual visits.

We look forward to a successful next 100 virtual visits, thanks to the ongoing commitment and resiliency of our schools and volunteers!

If you are interested in learning more about our virtual visit process, we encourage you to attend:

TEAM MEMBER TRAINING FOR VIRTUAL VISITS

[Click here to for more information and to register!](#)



December 15
8:00-9:30am

February 1
2:30-4:00pm

*All times in EST

January 11
8:00-9:30am

February 11
8:00-9:30am

January 21
1:30-3:00pm

February 18
1:30-3:00pm

January 26
8:00-9:30am

February 23
8:30-10:00am



These 90 minute small group sessions are geared toward volunteers already assigned to a team, as well as those considering future service. Serving on a Visiting Team is the best way to prepare for your own school's accreditation visit, is a great source of professional development, and provides an opportunity to broaden your network with fellow educators.

HAPPY RETIREMENT TO ANGELA RUFO, ED.D.



Please join the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools in wishing Associate Vice President of Accreditation Angela Rufo, Ed.D., well in her retirement, effective Dec. 31.

Dr. Rufo joined Middle States in 2011 after serving as a teacher and principal with several Catholic schools throughout the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

During her tenure at Middle States, Dr. Rufo worked with more than 450 schools and school systems during the self-study process and throughout their accreditation term. Her contributions to Middle States have helped ensure that students around the globe have access to a quality education.

Thank you, Dr. Rufo for your commitment to Middle States and the schools we serve!

DEADLINE EXTENDED! SEND YOUR RESILIENCY VIDEOS BY DEC. 31

There is still time to send us your resiliency videos!

Send us a short (up to three-minute) video that demonstrates how your school is staying resilient, and we will select the top three to highlight in our newsletter, on social media and in other materials. All participants will be recognized for their submissions.

Submit your video along with your name, school name and contact information to skohn@msa-cess.org by Dec. 31 and help pay tribute to how Middle States schools have adapted and grown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MT. LEBANON HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER PATRICIA M. SHINE RECEIVES HENRY G. CRAM ACCREDITATION LEADERSHIP AWARD



Longtime Middle States volunteer Patricia “Trish” M. Shine, a writing clinician at Mt. Lebanon High School in Mt. Lebanon, Pa., is this year’s recipient of the annual Henry G. Cram Accreditation Leadership Award.

The award recognizes unsung heroes of the accreditation process who devote countless hours and energy to obtain and maintain accreditation of their schools.

“I am thrilled to receive this recognition,” Shine said. “I pour a lot of my energy into Middle States and think of it as continuing the legacy excellence in education.”

The award is named in honor of Henry “Hank” G. Cram, Ed.D., who served as president of the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools for 14 years before retiring in 2019.

Recipients are chosen because they have strong belief in and deep understanding of the Middle States accreditation process and a track record of creating and maintaining a school culture focused on continuous school improvement.

Shine has twice served as the Middle States Internal Coordinator at Mt. Lebanon High School and has been the school’s Middle States liaison for 14 years. She has served on 11 Middle States peer review teams, including six as chair.

“It’s so validating for a school to really step back and look at itself,” Shine said. “I love being a part of that.”

Shine joined the faculty at Mt. Lebanon in 2006, after teaching at Vincentian Academy in Pittsburgh – where she attended high school – for five years. Transitioning from a school with just a few hundred students to one with more than 1,500 was a challenge, Shine said.

However, serving as the schools internal coordinator for accreditation helped her find her place.

“I liked it, and I kind of got good at it,” said Shine, who described herself as “freakishly organized.”

Shine said she also enjoys serving on peer review teams because she always learns something that she can take back to her school and because it helps validate the good work Mt. Lebanon is already doing.

“Inevitably, I end up thinking ‘yeah, we’re good,’” Shine said.

For schools in the process of applying for accreditation or reaccreditation, Shine offered this advice:

- Stay organized. Make sure you put numbers on your survey.
- Start thinking about evidence/artifacts at the start of the self-study process.
- Delegate. That’s another way of staying organized.

Happy Holidays from Middle States

**Our offices will be closed for the holidays from December 24 through January 3.
We look forward to continuing our work with you in 2021!**