



IS ACCREDITATION THE ANSWER?

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

Over the past several weeks, I have attended a number of gatherings of school officials from across the country and around the world. Not surprisingly, the topic of discussion has always come around to what the future holds for education and what role and responsibility we have as school leaders in shaping that future.

Domestically, with the new presidential administration and Secretary of Education, we can expect that more and more state and local officials will have greater flexibility in determining how both public and private schools will be held accountable for their students' performance.

Internationally, an increasing number of education ministries are already working to identify the means and measures for improving their educational systems, as well as holding them more accountable.

In both cases, I cannot help but think about the important role the Middle States accreditation process can play. In fact, accreditation may be more important now than ever before.

Not only is accreditation a proven and cost-effective approach to helping schools and students grow and improve, but it also gives parents and the community assurance that their school – whether public, private or charter – meets a certain set of research-based performance standards.

Further, the Middle States accreditation process examines schools in a holistic way, supplementing student-testing data to provide a more complete measure of a school's performance and charts a strategic and realistic course for continuous school improvement.

Real improvement cannot be rushed. Real improvement requires time, community and student engagement, and sustained effort. Increasing student performance takes longer than short-term political leadership allows and will not always provide a monetary return on investment.

Education is not a business. Nor is it a monopoly to be improved upon with market competition, and it cannot be measured simply in terms of its immediate costs. Education is a public service and a community responsibility of enormous importance. In many ways, the value of education to society is immeasurable.

Moving forward, as education professionals, we should demand that the formulation of education policy, especially as it relates to determining a school's effectiveness and continuous improvement, not be left to novices with little to no school experience.

Education is transformed only with the input of experienced professionals who possess a deep understanding of the changes that must be made and a knowledge of the proven practices and action steps to make those changes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henry G. Cram'.

Henry G. Cram, Ed.D

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MARCH IS YOUTH ART MONTH

The arts have always been an essential component of the social and cultural fiber of societies around the world, dating as far back as the earth's earliest civilizations.



Throughout history, art in all its forms has served many important roles – from providing a window into our individual and collective ethos to delivering pure entertainment.

Here in the United States, we are celebrating Youth Art Month, designed to promote art and art education throughout the country.

Youth Art Month exists in large part to recognize art education as a viable factor in the total education curricular and as a necessity

for the full development of a global society and a better quality of life for all.

At the Middle States Association Commissions of Elementary and Secondary Schools, we agree 110 percent and believe that art education is something we should celebrate and encourage all year long.

In fact, through our Programs of Distinction initiative, we specifically recognize accredited schools that have exemplary programs in the areas of Visual Arts and Music.

MODELS FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AROUND THE WORLD

Programs of Distinction are models for other academic programs throughout the world.

Our Visual Arts Program of Distinction identifies programs of superior quality that are clearly articulated and comprehensive, led by qualified and talented instructors using research-based instructional techniques and strategies, and that allow all students to develop an appreciation for and an understanding of the visual arts as a valuable and expressive fine art form.

Our Music Program of Distinction recognizes schools and school systems that foster within students a deep appreciation for music as an expressive, creative art form, and where music education is recognized as an essential component of the social and cultural fiber of society and the school.

In addition to Programs of Distinction in Visual Arts and Music, Middle States also offers accredited schools the opportunity to be recognized for Programs of Distinction in Global Literacies, World Languages, Early Childhood Education, Service Learning, School Counseling and STEM Education.

The Programs of Distinction initiative enables schools to take accreditation to the next level. The review process helps already accredited schools identify strengths and areas for growth and provides inspiration and recommendations for attaining a high quality program.

For schools that feel their program still needs to grow and improve, this process is an excellent tool for self-assessment and external evaluation, and an effective guide toward attaining Program of Distinction recognition in the future. A detailed feedback report, including recommendations and resources, is provided.

To learn more about Programs of Distinction or to apply, call (267) 284-5000 or e-mail info@msa-cess.org. You can also visit us online at www.msa-cess.org

To date, the following Middle States accredited schools have earned Programs of Distinction in either Visual Arts or Music.

Music

- Calvert Hall College High School, MD
- Ossining High School, NY
- Fox Chapel Area High School, PA
- Carol Morgan School, Dominican Republic
- North Hills High School, PA
- Saint Francis Preparatory School, NY

Visual Arts

- Fox Chapel Area High School, PA
- Saint Francis Prep, NY

"Recognition from the Middle States Association is an honor and is a validation of the work we do here at Saint Francis Preparatory School to educate the whole person," said Principal Patrick McLaughlin. "We strive to provide a learning environment that enables all students to develop and broaden their spiritual, intellectual, creative, emotional, social, and physical abilities."

ENHANCED STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL SAFETY

As a global leader in school improvement and accreditation, the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools recognizes that school safety and child protection are critical to student outcomes.

But student outcomes aside, schools have a fundamental responsibility to keep children safe while they are in their care.

To say it is not an easy assignment is an understatement, as schools around the world face an array of threats every day.

While mass shootings and terrorist attacks make international headlines, physical, emotional or sexual abuse is also a real and serious threat to students. Though dependable statistics are hard to come by, the World Health Organization reports that a quarter of all adults say they were physically abused as children, and one in five women and one in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child.

Sadly, it must be acknowledged that some abuse occurs at the hands of teachers, who take advantage of their position and betray the trust of their students and the school community.

Regardless of the circumstances, schools have an important role in protecting children from abuse and neglect and providing a space where children can feel safe and secure. Because if children do not feel safe and secure, how can they learn?

That question is the heart of the issue when we talk about school safety.

The Middle States Association had the privilege last year of serving on the International Task Force on Child Protection, a broad coalition of volunteers and leaders representing a range of organizations involved with international education.

As part of our involvement, we helped develop a checklist of core and recommended recruiting practices for schools to use when screening and assessing candidates, with the goal of child protection.

We also recommended that annual training be required of and provided to teachers to



help them learn how to detect child abuse and feel confident in reporting it.

Perhaps most importantly, we came together with other accreditation and inspection agencies to endorse new, enhanced standards for child protection.

At Middle States, Health and Safety has long been one of the 12 Standards for Accreditation.

Overall, schools applying for Middle States accreditation or reaccreditation must demonstrate that they provide a safe, orderly, and healthy environment for teaching and learning that meets the health and safety requirements of the civil jurisdiction(s) in which the school operates. Schools also must have and implement policies and/or procedural guidelines to ensure the health and safety of students, the staff, and visitors to the school, as well as have and implement plans for responding to emergencies and crises.

As a result of our work on the task force, we revised a number of our quality indicators for our Health and Safety Standard to specifically address child abuse prevention and reporting.

Further, we added a separate section of indicators specifically for boarding schools. The full set of indicators can be accessed on our website at www.msa-cess.org.

By virtue of what they do and the innocence of those they serve, schools should be considered sanctuaries like houses of worship once were. They should be places within the larger society that are immune to the violence of the outside world.

Despite the instances of terrorism, school violence and abuse, schools still remain among the safest places in our global society. As leaders in education, through initiatives like the International Task Force on Child Protection and enhanced standards for child protection, we can keep them so.

Q & A WITH MIDDLE STATES COMMISSIONER ROBIN HESLIP, PH.D.



Superintendent of the American Community School (ACS) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Robin Heslip, Ph.D., discusses how she got her start in education overseas, the importance of supporting other women leaders and how she began collecting carpets.

Q. You began your career teaching social studies in Sparta, Wisconsin. How did you become Superintendent at ACS in Abu Dhabi?

A. It was always in my blood to be interested in the world. When I was teaching in high school in the early 1980s, one of the librarians would always go on these fantastic educational trips around the world. I decided I wanted to see what overseas teaching was all about. I attended a recruiting fair for international schools at the University of Northern Iowa, but I was not offered any jobs because I didn't have any overseas experiences. So, I participated in a visiting teacher program in Edinburgh, Scotland for a month and that seemed to do the trick. They knew I could "make it" overseas. Since then, I've worked in schools in Croatia, Argentina, Malaysia, Morocco, and Zaire.

Q. Why is it important to have more women leaders in education?

A. I've been in education for 40 years now, and when I first became an administrator it was not unusual to attend a conference and see most of the room filled with men with gray hair and suits. I quickly became connected with the few women in the room because we had a common bond. Interestingly, most of my mentors who helped me get into leadership roles have been men, but after attending a women's leadership symposium, I made it a mission of mine to be engaged in women's leadership and support women in their career journeys. My mother always supported me in being a strong, independent woman leader, and it's critically important that women's voices are part of the ongoing international conversation about how to improve education for students everywhere.

Q. What do you see as the biggest value in Middle States accreditation, especially for international schools?

A. Middle States brings a set of standards to international schools that are definitely needed. The accreditation process emphasizes the importance of self-analysis and reflection, which is critical to the process of growing and improving. For team members, the benefit of looking at and listening to the experiences of others helps you make the experience better in your own school.

Q. What is the most interesting place you've been to on a school visit and why?

A. If I was talking to you two months from now, I would say Iceland, but today I would have to say my first visit to Bahrain was the most interesting. It was so very, very different than anything I had experienced. When I got on the plane, there were four falcons tethered to the four bulkhead seats in the economy section of the plane!

Q. What is one thing that people may be surprised to learn about you?

A. People may be surprised to learn that I collect carpets. When I was on holiday one year in Morocco, I took a trip out to the desert and met a man who invited my friend and me into his house for tea. He had carpets piled up everywhere and rolled them out for us to see. That moment stuck with me, and today I probably have about 50 different carpets. One day, when I retire to my condo in Florida, I will have a room filled with carpets, and when I really want to remember that moment in Morocco and my other adventures throughout the world, I will roll a carpet out and think about the wonderful opportunities I have had in my 30 years overseas.



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