

THE STANDARD

From the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools

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Message from the President Henry G. Cram Ed.D

For those of us in education, a new year begins in September not in January. New Year's Day has never held the same significance for me as it does for friends and family. It's rarely a time of reflection and resolution, but the beginning of the second half – which is mostly a replay of the first half of the year with a few snow days thrown in. To me, it is the start of the race to June when there might finally be time to take stock and to plan to avoid the same mistakes next year.

But approaching the New Year that way is a lost opportunity. That became apparent to me when the district where I was superintendent switched to a semester block schedule. The change provided an important reset for both teachers and students. We were all given a second chance to get it right. A chance to fix mistakes and make changes, to do better, doubling the opportunity to get a fresh start. It had a powerful impact on the staff's morale, the students' motivation and certainly made the race to June less urgent and much more productive.

While not everyone has the opportunity for a full rest in January, the beginning of a new year should be a time to personally and professionally take stock, to reflect on our goals and to reset for a better result and not settle for a replay with the same result.

On New Year's Day I was watching clips of interviews with celebrities about their new year's resolutions. The one that stuck with me was Jerry Seinfeld. He said if there was something important he wanted to change, he just started doing it and didn't wait for the beginning of a new year. It was sage advice from a comedian who built his career by talking about nothing.

At MSA, we begin the new year with a staff retreat during which we review the first half of the year and talk about things we can change to improve our membership services. Some of what we discuss is slated for the summer or the next accreditation cycle, but we take the opportunity to make the improvements we can make now.

As you begin the second half of your school year I hope you seize the opportunity that the start of a new year provides to take stock and begin to move toward the changes you are contemplating.

The opportunity may be lost if you wait for the Educator's New Year!

Wishing you continued success in 2015. ||

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2014-2015 workshops?**

Register online here.

MSA-CESS Recognizes Schools for Programs of Distinction

The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS) recently recognized Ossining High School in Ossining, N.Y. and the American Community School in Beirut, Lebanon with its newly introduced Programs of Distinction award.

The award provides external validation of an accredited school's accomplishments in specific areas of expertise and enables schools to take accreditation to the next level.

Ossining High School was recognized for Programs of Distinction in Music, School Counseling, and World Languages. The American Community School in Beirut was recognized for Programs of Distinction in Early Childhood Education and World Languages (Arabic).

"Our Programs of Distinction award recognizes high-achieving schools for their ongoing accomplishments in specific areas," said Henry G. Cram, Ed.D., president of MSA-CESS. "These programs are models for other academic programs throughout the world."

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 21st Century Skills, Global Literacies, World Languages, Visual Arts, Music, Early Childhood Education, Service Learning, School Counseling and STEM Education.

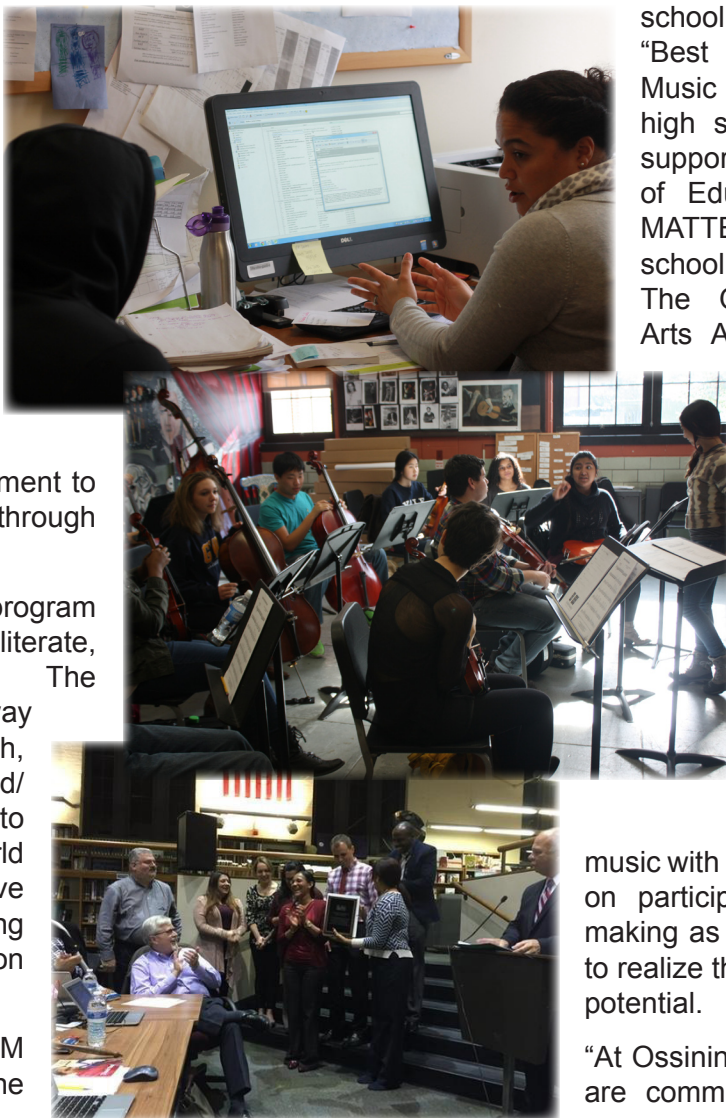
About Ossining High School

With 1,300 students, Ossining High School serves an increasingly diverse community of students in the town of Ossining, N.Y. located in West Chester County. Students come from 59 different countries and speak 46 different languages.

The Ossining Union Free School District has a comprehensive K-12 Counseling and Development Plan to provide individual academic, personal, social and career development to support students from "First Steps" through high school graduation and beyond.

The district also has an exemplary program in developing students' bilingual, biliterate, and cross-cultural competency. The program provides students a pathway to acquisition and proficiency in French, American Sign Language, Italian, and/or Spanish. Graduates are expected to obtain one high school credit in World Language, but many students go above that requirement, therefore receiving an Advanced Regents Diploma upon graduation.

For the past three years, the NAMM Foundation has recognized the



school district as a "Best Community for Music Education." The high school has strong support from the Board of Education, Ossining MATTERS (a local school foundation), and The Ossining Cultural Arts Advocates. Each

of these groups has donated time, money for scholarships, musical instruments, and sound equipment for use in the schools. Ossining High School offers a strong course of study in

music with a strong emphasis on participation and music making as ways for students to realize their full expressive potential.

"At Ossining High School we are committed to providing

MSA-CESS Recognizes Schools for Programs of Distinction (continued)

an academic, artistic, athletic, and altruistic environment for all students,” said Principal Josh Mandel. “The Middle States Programs of Distinction award validates the work of our teachers, staff and community in ensuring we uphold our commitment and equip our students with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century.

About the American Community School in Beirut

The American Community School of Beirut is a PreK-12, century-old educational institution that welcomes students with various backgrounds into a community that values diversity and excellence. The student body represents approximately 47 nationalities with Lebanese students accounting for about 44 percent of the total population.

English is the medium of instruction at the school, but students are also proficient in other languages and knowledgeable of their representative cultures.

The Arabic program offers a comprehensive language program that aims at developing students’ Arabic skills and knowledge and awareness of Arab cultures. The program is designed to address and respond to the language needs of both Lebanese and international students enrolled at the school.

Arabic is offered from nursery school through middle school to all students, as it is the first language for many and also because of the school’s strong belief in the importance to learn both the language as well as the culture of the host country.



The Early Years sections of the school includes two classes of nursery (3-4 year olds), three classes of kindergarten 1 (4-5 year olds), and three classes of kindergarten 2 (5-6 year olds). The school day for kindergarten students is from 7:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and the teachers stay for at least two hours after the students leave to collaborate, plan, and prepare. The Early Years program has one principal and 18 full-time classroom teachers. Every nursery class has three teachers, and each kindergarten class has two teachers. In addition there are three Arabic teachers, a music teacher, a physical education teacher, an Altierista and a teaching librarian. Collaborative planning, team teaching and shared responsibility are integral aspects of the Early Years program. The program wholeheartedly embraces the Reggio inspired approach to Early Childhood Education, which focuses on emergent project work.

Parent teacher conferences are scheduled twice a year and additionally, the teachers meet on a needs basis with parents throughout the year.

“The American Community School of Beirut sets high expectations for ourselves and our students,” said Head of School Hamilton Clark. “This recognition by MSA affirms that we are meeting and exceeding those expectations with world class programs that further our mission of empowering students to become creative problem solvers who live well balanced lives and serve Lebanon and the world community with understanding and compassion.”

To learn how your school can apply for MSA-CESS’ Programs of Distinction award, visit our website or contact info@msa-cess.org. II

Volunteer Voices

MSA-CESS can only do the work we do around the world with the support of a vast network of dedicated and talented volunteers. As we enter a new year focusing our sights on growth and improvement, we recognize that our volunteers can both teach us and learn from one another. We asked some of our experienced MSA-CESS Team Chairs to share their advice for successfully leading an accreditation Visiting Team. Whether it is your goal to lead your first accreditation team this year or you are looking to refine your current style of leadership on your next visit, we hope these tips from the field will be valuable to you.



César Wazen
Lebanon/Qatar

"Primus Inter Pares" (First among equals) is my way of assuming my role of team chair. Remember you were a new team member not so long ago. At the same time, take responsibility of steering the team discussion in the right direction. You may know more about the accreditation protocol and visit management than your fellow team members, however, they know at least as much as you in their areas of expertise so let them express themselves and listen to their ideas.

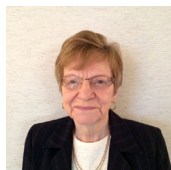
Encourage them to share their opinions and not keep their thoughts to themselves. Team meetings are the best forum for that. The consensus you reach at those meetings is what builds the team up for the rest of the visit.

Finally, remember that you all will be together as a team only once so try to squeeze in, during this limited time you are together and with all the work expected from you and your team, some socialization activity. You deserve it and will enjoy it.

**The MSA-CESS
staff have
new email
addresses!**



**Please visit our
website and
update your
contact records
for us.**



Vilma Goetting
New York

I have enjoyed the opportunity to serve on Middle States Visitation Teams for more than 20 years, both as a team member and team chair. Although formally I am retired, my "free" time consists of tutoring refugees, hospice work, spiritual guidance, and numerous grandchildren activities. Volunteering with MSA continues to hold a special place in my life.

As a team chair, I strive to convey a sense that each team member contributes special talents to the group and has a necessary voice so that together we can complete a thorough and successful visit. During our short stay, taking time to know and appreciate one another's gifts supports our task of being "critical friends" to the school community we serve.



Joseph Goode
Pennsylvania

My best practice comes in an acronym I use with the term T.E.A.M – TONE, EVIDENCE, AFFIRMATION, MISSION. Set the TONE for the team early, giving expectations, setting boundaries and putting them at ease. Emphasize EVIDENCE, making note of all things they observe, hear in discussion (noting quotes when possible) and read in documents reviewed. Understand we are there to provide AFFIRMATION of what the school has given us in the protocol documents. Finally, keep our focus on the MISSION we have, the task we have agreed to undertake and complete, not allowing ourselves to get distracted by issues or information that does not relate to the criteria of the protocol.

Be Prepared to Take the Risk

Education is not just about sitting in a classroom and listening to a lecture. Experiential learning has been on the rise for the last several years offering significant benefits:

- Engaging students in problem solving and connecting disciplines in a way that memorization of facts cannot
- Pulling students out of their comfort zones
- Requiring them to think in new, profound ways
- Connecting students to local communities while immersing them in global communities
- Helping them to become creative, caring, capable, and engaged human beings

Students at International Schools have tremendous opportunities for experiential learning.

The opportunities for experiential learning may lead students into unique situations and let them see first-hand how others live, especially those in poorer areas than they may have previously encountered. This allows them to witness how the majority of people live in the countries where they study and get a greater feel of the overall environment. While this may create risk, it is a huge opportunity for young minds to see a different way of life in a more personal way, which can be a spark for global changes to poverty, environmental decay, or cultural misunderstandings.

Clements Worldwide can work with you to create liability coverage for these types of risks and ensure these worthwhile trips can become a vital part of your curriculum.



Don't let the fear of risk stop your school from offering a rare educational opportunity. II

Clements Worldwide is the reference when it comes to meeting the insurance needs of the international school community around the world. For over 30 years, Clements has worked with more than 200 international schools and universities around the world, offering flexible international school insurance programs, including individual & group health, property coverage, life insurance, and much more.

Have you updated your School or Individual Volunteer Profile for this year?

Profile updates help us to serve you more efficiently.

Please go to www.msa-cess.org and login using your User ID and password.

**Don't have that handy?
Contact iraatzs@msa-cess.org or
dsisbarro@msa-cess.org**

