

THE STANDARD



JUNE 2020

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS



EDUCATION IS VITAL TO CREATING A BETTER WORLD

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

As the academic year comes to a close, there is little question that our world is in a vastly different place than it was when classes began nine months ago.

The coronavirus forced schools to shutter their classrooms and move almost overnight to providing education online.

Proms were held virtually in living rooms, sports championships were sidelined and graduations celebrated without the traditional pomp and circumstance that normally marks the milestone.

At Middle States, we were forced to postpone our spring peer review visits and to develop a solution for the fall that would ensure our schools continue to have the benefit of peer review in a healthy and safe manner.

You can read about our revised approach to peer review visits later in this newsletter.

Additionally, over the past two weeks, the United States has experienced widespread unrest in response to issues of racism and inequality that continue to vex our nation and that have drawn the attention of countries across the globe.

The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools stand against racism and are committed to fostering a more understanding, equitable, and just society, here where we are headquartered in Philadelphia, across the country, and around the world.

Education is vital to building bridges, nurturing empathy, understanding history, celebrating diversity and creating a better world. As an organization that promotes continuous improvement in our schools, we know that we too can, and will, do more.

In closing, I want to thank each and every one of you for all you have done and all you continue to do, especially during these extraordinary times, to ensure all students have access to a quality education.

Today's students are tomorrow's leaders, and as educators, you are providing them with the tools they need to build a better future for all of us.

Thank you. Please have a safe and healthy summer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Marie McCauley Ed.D. CPA'.

Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D.

Also In This Issue:

- Peer Review Visits to Resume in September
- Academia Maria Reina Navigates COVID-19
- Get With the Beat: A Music Program That Sings
- What's on Your Summer Reading List?
- Q & A with Carol (Ribeiro) DeFuria

PEER REVIEW VISITS TO RESUME IN SEPTEMBER

MSA-CESS will resume peer review accreditation visits in September with a revised approach that is mindful of the health and safety of our school communities and of our staff and volunteers.

Under this revised approach, peer review visits for the fall semester will take place using a blended method, fully virtually for many locations including the majority of international schools and virtually for domestic visits, with a one-day onsite visit by the visiting team chair if possible.

If the situation stabilizes for Spring 2021 visits, MSA-CESS may introduce the one-day site visit for all visits, or begin the shift to an expanded onsite visit under this new blended approach.

“Middle States has always believed in the power of peer review, and we are confident this model will enable us to be innovative, flexible, and supportive of our schools, while also ensuring the integrity and value of the peer review process,” MSA-CESS President Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., said.

In coming to this decision, MSA-CESS held a series of meetings and focus groups involving a combination of staff, member school leaders, commissioners, leaders and volunteers from past visiting teams. We also met with or collected information about how other accrediting agencies are handling upcoming visits.

Additionally, this is not a new approach for MSA-CESS. For many years, the organization has been conducting virtual visits for online school, and has also convened virtual visits for certain international schools when issues of security dictated.

Please see this FAQ for more information, and please do not hesitate to contact Dr. McCauley at Immccauley@msa-cess.org or 484.602.7986 with any questions.

COUNSELORS AT ACADEMIA MARIA REINA IN PUERTO RICO HELP STUDENTS NAVIGATE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This article was submitted by Department of Student Services at Academia Maria Reina, which holds a Middle States Program of Distinction in School Counseling.

As soon as the Governor of Puerto Rico announced that the entire island would be in a lockdown, Academia Maria Reina began the process of virtual learning through the digital platform Microsoft Teams. During the first days, the faculty was given virtual workshops to be able to master the platform. As an immediate response, each department continued to work as established in their syllabus. The Counseling Department continued to use Naviance as the primary tool for assigning tasks in our guidance curriculum, while Microsoft Teams was used by the counselors as a virtual classroom to host presentations on a number of topics including college admission testing, college applications and writing the college application essay. It was also used for sharing articles on COVID-19, as well as reflections on how to stay mentally, physically and spiritually healthy during the lockdown. Microsoft Teams was also used to assist in the process of monitoring academic progress as well as the main resource of communication with professors and students. ZOOM was another tool used by the college placement advisor to host virtual college visits and information sessions for students and parents.



Academia Maria Reina Department of Student Services

(continued on page 3)

Communication Key for Success

Without a doubt, one of the biggest issues our students and we faced during the lockdown as we engaged online/virtual learning was the use of extra Internet data and the stability of the system. Many of the faculty, staff, and families had to make an upgrade in their internet programs in order to work more efficiently, and some had to invest in equipment that they did not have. Also, this new norm of virtual learning is not meant for every student. We had many cases of students that in the beginning did not attend class because they would forget resulting in an absence. For these students to succeed, we had to provide them with the proper tools to organize themselves and keep up with a structure as if they were still present in the classroom. The key for success was the constant communication with the students as well as with their professors. Other issues that were of concern to the students were doubts about their summer plans, summer programs, AP exams, and college admission testing requirements.

Returning to School

Returning to the school routine involves many emotions for students, one of them can be anxiety. It is important to consider the mindset that is fostered before returning to the physical classroom. Our students will need to hear that their emotions are valid. On the one hand, for students, going back to school means that they will see their friends again, that there will be a more direct connection with their teachers and that they will retake the space that makes them feel that they are part of a community. On the other hand, for some it will mean facing the fear of separating from their families, of getting infected and/or not having the tools to adapt to the new reality. For others, it could mean coming back with the feeling that there was no closure of the previous school year.

Although each person is different and handles their experiences in a unique way, our effort will be aimed at facilitating the adaptation to a new structure, and to changes in routines and the school environment. In general terms, without limiting the variety of needs that may arise, before returning to the physical classroom students will need support in four main areas: the sense of security, emotions, interpersonal relationships and academics.

GET WITH THE BEAT: DEVELOPING A MUSIC PROGRAM THAT SINGS

MSA-CESS along with leaders from two member schools with Programs of Distinction in Music presented an online panel discussion last month on how to develop a world-class music program that involves and is supported by the entire community.

The presentation was originally scheduled for the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) Annual Conference in April, which was cancelled due to the coronavirus.

In the online presentation, panelists discussed how to weave music education into the fabric of your school, build partnerships, and successfully raise funds to support an award-winning program by using the MSA-CESS Program of Distinction process.



Lancaster Catholic High School

Additionally, they discussed how these music programs have transitioned to online learning during the pandemic and how they are planning for the future realities in their schools and within their programs.

Thank you to panelists: Tony Brill, Director of Fine and Performing Arts, Lancaster Catholic High School, Pa.; Robert Corbino, Ed.D., Music Department Chairperson, Saint Francis Preparatory School, NY; Robert L. Johnston, Director of String Studies, Co-Internal Coordinator, Saint Francis Preparatory School, NY, and Angela Rufo Ed.D., Associate Vice President, MSA-CESS.

To view a recording of the discussion, [click here](#).



WHAT'S ON YOUR SUMMER READING LIST?

Summer is here, and at Middle States that means it's time to squeeze in some extra reading. Here are some of the titles our staff have on their summer book lists:

Jeremy Basescu, Manager of Volunteer Services

"Imperfect" by Jim Abbott and Tim Brown

If you're missing baseball right now, this can bring you right back to the ballpark with an amazing story.

Sarah Berthely, International Schools Support Manager

"The Millionaire Next Door: The Surprising Secrets of America's Wealthy" by Thomas J. Stanley and William D. Danko

A fascinating book. Although it's very data-driven, there's a lot of practical financial advice that can be taken from it.

Mary Burke Ed.D., Associate Vice President

"The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates" by Wes Moore

This story is especially relevant today in light of the racial protests and fairness to people of color. It sheds light on the problem from a first-person perspective.

Audra Chin, Assistant Director, Accreditation Operations

"The Invisible Library" by Genevieve Cogman

Light and engaging for anyone that likes books with dragons and alternate universes.

Kelly Christian, Vice President for Operations

"The Great Alone" by Kristin Hannah

Nothing like 11 weeks of stay-at-home orders when you live in a city to make you want to read a book about going off the grid in remote Alaska.

Leslie Green, Manager of Membership Information

"Becoming" by Michelle Obama

Thought-provoking and inspiring, this memoir reveals the real and uncut life of Michelle Obama.

Shoshana Kohn, Communications Manager

"Where the Crawdads Sing" by Delia Owens

Expressive storytelling that connects our human lives with the wildness of nature.

Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., President

"Funny in Farsi" by Firoozeh Dumas

I have heard Firoozeh speak several times. Her ability to look at her experiences and keep so positive is inspirational.

Glen Mort, Ed.D., Vice President of Accreditation

"Ride of a Lifetime" by Bob Iger, Disney CEO

If you are a Disney fanatic like I am, you will love this easy read.

Dan Rufo, Associate Vice President

"Born a Crime" by Trevor Noah

A comedic autobiography of the growing up of Trevor Noah in South Africa.

We want to know what's on your list. Visit the MSA-CESS Facebook page and share your summer reading recommendations!

Q&A WITH MSA-CESS COMMISSIONER CAROL (RIBEIRO) DEFURIA



Carol (Ribeiro) DeFuria is a member of the Middle States Association Commission on Elementary Schools and president and CEO of VHS Learning (VHS, Inc.), a nonprofit organization providing supplemental online classes and blended learning opportunities to middle and high school students in more than 650 schools worldwide.

Because VHS programs are fully online, faculty and staff are accustomed to virtual accreditation visits. In this Q & A DeFuria shares her advice for schools participating in virtual visits for the first time and offers her thoughts on how the coronavirus may change education in the future.

Q. How can schools get the most out of virtual peer review visits, and what advice do you have for schools that will be participating in virtual visits for the first time?

A. Given our experience, we know that virtual peer reviews can be just as effective as face-to-face reviews, but we understand that this mode of interaction is new for many. To get the most out of virtual peer reviews, it's important to try to be clear and concise with interactions, being especially mindful of tone, which can be difficult to read when not face-to-face. It's also important to respond as quickly as you can to any inquiries (within 24 hours or less) and meet established deadlines for posting materials so that work can progress. Be respectful, professional, and courteous – just as you would be in person.

Q. How has Middle States accreditation benefited VHS?

A. Middle States accreditation has helped us reflect on and refine our processes and better serve our schools and students. Our accreditation has helped guide our

strategic thinking and helped us to be a better, more efficient, organization. I consider Middle States to be a trusted partner. The team at Middle States has always been incredibly helpful and supportive, and has helped us to improve as an organization and build a solid foundation for future growth.

Q. In what ways do you think the coronavirus pandemic will change how education is delivered in the future?

A. Schools will need to be much more flexible in the future. They must be more agile and able to pivot to different modes of education should schools need to be closed for any reason – natural disasters, weather issues, or a pandemic. The key to a successful transition is ensuring all students have access to the technology and resources they need to access learning in different ways and also ensuring they have a school liaison who checks in with them frequently to ensure they are on track. Virtual learning does not have to mean learning in isolation and students (and their teachers) will need more support going forward. School faculty and staff must have appropriate training on how to provide learning online and what constitutes effective long-term online teaching practices – not just stopgap measures for remote emergency learning in times of crisis. They are two very different things.

Q. What will this mean for existing online schools and programs?

A. Existing online schools and programs can help provide guidance to traditional schools to help them transition and become more flexible, with more of a focus on learning outcomes and asynchronous learning versus only synchronous methods.



Middle States Association Commissions
on Elementary and Secondary Schools

3624 Market Street, 2 West
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680

267.284.5000
610.617.1106
info@msa-cess.org
www.msa-cess.org

