

**PROBATIONARY VISIT
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

FOR

HERCULES HIGH SCHOOL

**1900 Refugio Valley Road
Hercules, CA**

West Contra County Unified School District

April 20-21, 2015

Visiting Committee Members

Patrick H. Lickiss, Chairman
Principal (Retired)
Trainer/Consultant – Accrediting Commission for Schools

Kenneth Gardner
Principal – Deer Valley High School

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I. Introduction (1/2–1 page)

Hercules High School is located in Hercules, California in the beautiful San Pablo Bay area midway between San Francisco and Napa. The City of Hercules is located along the Interstate 80 corridor, within thirty-minutes of San Francisco and sixty-minutes of Sacramento. The City maintains an abundance of open spaces and trails throughout the surrounding landscapes offering dazzling views of the bay from various locations within the city boundaries. Named after Hercules, the legendary Greek hero known for his strength, the town has thrived for over 100 years through three owners and five wars.

The city of Hercules has grown into a culturally rich community with a population hovering around 20,000 strong. Hercules has one of the largest populations of Filipino and Asian residents compared to other communities along the I-80 corridor. The largest make-up of the community is Asian (Filipino and various Asian) representing a combined 42.7% of the population. The White population represents 28% of the whole and the African American residents are at 18%.

The City of Hercules shares its border with two school districts. The majority of residents are within the West Contra Costa Unified School District boundary. West Contra Costa Unified School District is a K-12 district comprised of 64 schools, six of which are comprehensive high schools. The district serves approximately 30,500 students in grades K-12. Elementary schools serve K-6 and the secondary schools in the district serve either 7th and 8th, or 9th through 12th grade students. Hercules High School was originally established in 2001 as a Middle/High School serving 6th -11th grade students. Hercules celebrated its first graduating class in 2003. In late spring of 2014, the WCCUSD board approved a diversion from the established 6th -12th institution led by one administrative staff to a single middle school and a sole high school with separate administrative leadership. Hercules High School still shares a common address with Hercules Middle School. The two schools remain to be physically connected by an administrative complex and library buildings.

Hercules High School Accreditation History

West Contra Costa Unified School District utilizes the services of the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS/WASC) to verify that each of its schools educational programs provide high learning opportunities for all students as well as engaged in a process that continuously monitors school improvement focused on student achievement. Hercules Middle/High School (HMHS) was initially accredited in 2002 for grades 6th to 11th. The subsequent year, a substantial change accreditation was awarded for the addition of grade 12. A full self-study was completed in the spring of 2005 with HMHS being granted a six-year accreditation term. In April 2011, the school performed a full self-study to renew their accreditation. In June 2011, the school was granted a six year accreditation with a two-day midterm visit in 2014. In April 2014, the school produced a mid-term report to a visiting WASC committee and was granted a one year probationary accreditation through June 30, 2015. Hercules High School submitted a probationary mid-cycle review in preparation for a two-day visit in April 2015.

When Hercules High School completed their visit in April 2014, there were significant concerns noted by the Visiting Committee about the school's progress on previous critical areas

as well as efforts to thoroughly complete their self-study. Right after the Visiting Team departed, the school made a decision to undertake a thorough review of their school structure and efforts. This included a much more thorough analysis of student achievement data, which led to the completion of the current progress report. Over the past year, as the school worked to complete their current report, staff members did review the achievement data of their students in an effort to ascertain their progress in all areas, including CAHSEE results, CST's, SAT's and AP exams. These results did demonstrate the need to develop teaching methodologies to better address the learning challenges of all students. This is significant, as there was a change in administration at the school and a concerted decision to better address the needs of all students. For example, upon review of student data and the desire to raise the educational success of all students, a decision was made to allow any student the opportunity to enter an Advanced Placement class for the next school year. While teachers will still recommend that a student undertake the rigors of AP classes or bypass the opportunity, students will have an "open enrollment" opportunity. Committees were established following the 2014 visit to look at all data on testing to guide the school in making decisions relative to fully assisting all students.

In 2011, the WASC Visiting Team left Hercules High School with a list of Critical Areas for Follow-up that the school needed to address prior to a re-visit in 2014. During the 2014 re-visit, the WASC committee found a school that was dysfunctional and was experiencing infighting among their entire school community. Staff members reported that they were not at all involved in the process, that the Principal had prepared the report until the last minute prior to the visit, and that the staff had no confidence in the leadership of the school. At the report out by the Visiting Committee, the staff reported that they were embarrassed by the results of the Visiting Committee Report. While they agreed that the report, as presented, was accurate of the current preparation by the school, it did not represent what the staff knew to be the true story of Hercules High School.

The report by the 2014 Visiting Committee was very honest and very harsh. After the team departed, members of the school staff did an immediate reflection on what they had been told and decided to undertake efforts to improve the image of their school. Teams were put in place immediate in April 2014 to complete a top to bottom review of their effort and steps that needed to be undertaken to bring positive change to Hercules High School. The Principal and one Assistant Principal were relieved of their duties and the district undertook a search to replace them with a team to move the school forward in the future. The current Principal was brought over from Hercules Middle School and, with his newly created administrative team, made plans to move their school forward. In addition, the school district, in an effort to cure the major dysfunction that was apparent because the school as a middle-high school combination (grades 6-12), the schools were split. Separate administrations were created at both schools in the establishment of a middle and high school.

From July to August 2014, the current administration worked to create plans to prepare for the April 2015 WASC review for the school one-year probationary visit. In early August, the Principal and District Administration met with the Executive Director of WASC to discuss what the school and district needed to do to fully prepare for the current visit. One of the steps undertaken was to have a trainer from WASC come to the district to fully train staff from Hercules and other district schools to prepare for upcoming visits. This led to the creation of

committees lead by teacher leaders to move the school forward. During the current visit, the WASC Visiting Committee found a school that has truly transformed itself. From the start of school in September till the current visit, all aspects of the report preparation were transparent and there was participation from all segments of the school community. During the current visit, the committee was very impressed with the honesty and transparency of all stakeholders. From the time the current Visiting Chair was assigned, he, along with all stakeholders, received updates on the report preparation and results of schoolwide review of the process. During meeting with school staff, school leadership, parents, students, and district office staff, it was very apparent to the Visiting Committee that within the eight months since the start of the current school year, Hercules had virtually transformed their school from a dysfunctional school community in 2013-14 to a unified and much stronger school in 2014-15. While much still needs to be done in efforts for systemic improvement, the school is clearly on a path that will lead to a better future for the school.

II. Progress on Critical Areas for Follow-up/Schoolwide Action Plan

In 2011, the WASC Visiting Team left the school with nine critical areas for follow-up with a recommendation that a team return in 2014 to check on progress. In April 2014, the Visiting Team was disappointed to find a school that had made no progress on the recommendations of the team. As a result, the school was given a one year probationary status with the current visit to be conducted. Following are the steps that the school has undertaken to establish clear goals and to address the critical areas established by the previous Visiting Committee:

The staff took the 9 critical areas and created 3 goals in which they would address all the critical areas for follow up. A fourth goal was added and the following was presented to the staff: **Increasing college readiness for all students.**

Increasing representation for underserved subgroups in advanced and AP classes and reducing the achievement gap for underserved groups.

Creating and developing a culture of professional teacher collaboration and community.
Increasing communication between all stakeholders (district, administration, teachers, parents, staff and community members).

Following are the goals that were established to help guide the school and the critical areas each goal addresses:

Goal #1: Increase College Readiness for all Students

The school found alignment from this goal with the Visiting Committee Critical areas for follow-up numbers 5, 7, and 8. Parents and students all reported to the Visiting Committee that the school has made significant strides in this area. Parents feel that the school is doing an excellent job of communicating with them and in supporting students. Students feel that staff members at the school are reaching out to them and supporting them in class and through outreach efforts in counseling and the career center. Colleges are being brought to the school to inform and recruit students. The school is arranging for visits to local colleges and universities in an effort to assist students in making decisions for their futures.

All agree that the school is making a good start in this area and, under the leadership of the newly appointed administration, continued growth will take place in this area in future years.

Goal #2: Increasing representation for underserved subgroups in advanced and AP classes.

The school found alignment from this goal with the Visiting Committee Critical areas for follow-up numbers 5. For the current school year, all stakeholders reported that there is a need to address this concern in the future, which is being undertaken. Enrollment and sections were already established prior to the current administration being appointed. During meetings with students, teaching staff, and school administrators, it was noted that in future year's enrollment opportunities will be open to all students, though teachers will still meet with students to recommend whether or not they should opt for AP Classes. However, no student will be stopped from taking an AP class if desired.

During a visit to the AP Calculus Class, it was found that the class currently has a combination of AB and BC students. The teacher in the class was very happy to report, due to the support of the Principal, and if that if projected enrollment numbers for next year hold he would be able to have a class of AB and a class of BC Calculus next year. In addition the current projected course selection numbers reveal an increased interest in AP Environmental Science. The current enrollment is 28 students and the projected enrollment for 2015-16 school year is 85. This underscores the positive efforts on the part of the school to provide more AP opportunities for the students.

All agree that the school is making a good start in this area and, under the leadership of the newly appointed administration, continued growth will take place in this area in future years.

Goal #3: Creating and developing a culture of professional teacher collaboration and community.

The school found alignment from this goal with the Visiting Committee Critical areas for follow-up numbers 1, 2, 4, 6, and 9. Since the April 2014 WASC visit and throughout the summer and current school year, the Hercules staff has totally revamped this area. There is a new energy on the campus with support from site administration and district administration to give teachers the collaboration and professional development time needed to improve the development of and delivery of curriculum to the students of Hercules High School.

Staff members were excited to report to the Visiting Committee that they are being given the opportunity to develop and lead efforts in this area. With the support of the district there are now Instructional Leadership Teams on campus, with district coaches available to lend positive assistance and reinforcement to the efforts of site staff.

This appears to be the goal that has had the greatest success for the school and only supports this and all efforts noted above by the Hercules High School Community. The Visiting Committee enthusiastically praises the school and its leadership in this area. We are excited to hear of futures plans in this area.

Upon reflecting on the needs of the school in terms of communication, the Hercules High School Community developed the following as a fourth and additional goal:

Goal #4: Increase communication between all stakeholders (district, administration, teachers, parents, staff, community members)

The school found alignment from this goal with the Visiting Committee Critical areas for follow-up numbers 1, 2, 5, and 9. Between the completed 2011 visit as well as the preparation for the 2014 visit, it was the consensus of all Hercules High School Stakeholders that communication between the administration and all segments of the Hercules community had become non-existent.

With the change of administrative teams, there was a commitment to improve communication between the school administration and all stakeholder groups. During meeting with parents, students, and individual teachers it became very clear to the Visiting Team that communication has been greatly improved this year. Students reported that the Principal worked with students to create a Student Senate this year. Students represent their 2nd period class and bring concerns and/or comments from their peers to the meeting. Students were very complimentary about the administration and their willingness to hear and address student concerns promptly and efficiently.

This was another area that the Visiting Committee was extremely impressed with in terms of school improvement. We commend the administration leading this effort and encourage them to continue to focus on increased and improved communication between all segments of the Hercules High School Community. This effort will further strengthen the school and their initiatives.

III. Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

1. The entire Hercules High School Community for their efforts at immediate and systemic schoolwide improvement following the 2014 WASC Visit;
2. The Hercules High School Administration for their focus on the improvement of communication with all stakeholders groups, most notable in the creation of the Student Senate to address the concerns of the student body;
3. The Teaching Staff for taking a leadership role in the improvement of all Hercules High School initiatives;
4. The Teaching Staff for beginning to use data analysis via Illuminate and other reports in order to drive instruction;
5. The entire Hercules High School Community for their efforts at improving communication between and among all stakeholders;
6. The students of Hercules High School for embracing campus rule changes designed to make the campus safer and learning more conducive;
7. The Hercules High School Community for their sincere involvement in the review and revisions of the school's Mission and Vision Statements and ESLR's (SLO's).

Recommendations:

1. That the Hercules High School Community continue to address the nine critical areas of improvements identified by the 2014 Visiting Team in order to continue the Focus on Learning to provide their students with the best possible education;
2. That the Hercules High School Staff identify ways to measure student progress on the newly designed ESLR's to enhance the delivery of instruction to the students;
3. That the Hercules High School Staff continue the ILT process to drive teacher led professional development to transition to the Common Core and the NGSS and to create formative and summative assessment to increase student achievement.