

**THREE-YEAR-TERM REVISIT
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

FOR

HERCULES HIGH SCHOOL

**1900 Refugio Valley Road
Hercules California, 94547**

West Contra Costa Unified School District

April 27-29th, 2014

Visiting Committee Members

Mr. Michael Arredondo, Chairperson
High School Principal, Retired

Ms. Amy McNamara
Principal, James Logan High School

I. Introduction

General Comments about the school, its setting, and the analysis of student data:

The setting: Hercules High School is a 12 year old public school located in a suburban setting in the larger urban area of San Francisco's East Bay. The school has a large Asian population (42%), a significant African American population (28%), with the rest composed of Hispanic and White students. About 33% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

Significant Developments since the 2011 visit: Since spring of 2011, there have been significant changes to Hercules High School. Principal Guy Zakrevsky was promoted to district office in 2012 and a new principal, Ms. Jen Bender, was appointed to the position in the summer of 2012. In addition, most of the administrative team has changed since the last visit. The school's accreditation was changed from 6-12 to 9-12 with the middle school and high school becoming separate entities, each with their own site council. When she took over in 2012, Ms. Bender had the responsibility of implementing a new discipline approach, and worked with the site collaboration team to create Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) at both campuses. In addition to the administrative shifts, there have been other key changes:

- The school received a grant from the state to focus on school climate and creating better conditions for learning.
- The site is now beginning to implement Restorative Justice as an approach to school discipline.
- The high school increased the second counselor's position from .6 to 1.0.
- Morning collaboration time was added weekly within the school day for two years and then moved outside the school day, as the bell schedule did not have enough instructional minutes.
- Collaboration now takes place on Wednesday afternoons once a month.
- Lynda Cartwright, who served as the WASC Chair for several years, retired.
- Teacher leaders who were instrumental in the last WASC process, Michael Taylor, Allen Goodman, and Anh Nguyen left the district.

After two years of leading the staff, a vote of no confidence was held and Ms. Bender will be leaving HHS after the school year. It is not clear how many of the school's administrators will return in the fall of next year. The district is currently in the process of selecting 2 new principals to lead HHS and HMS.

School's analysis of student data: In the Progress Report, HHS has API data and High School Exit Exam data. They have listed significant subgroup data and noted 2 areas of concern: Exit Exam scores for African American students and low SED

students.

The above data is the only data presented in the report, and no analysis has been done with the data, other than to note areas of concern for two groups. In conversation with the school's WASC Committee Chairs, the following was revealed:

- Student achievement data is not regularly shared, discussed, requested, nor utilized to create goals.
- Members of the committee indicated they did not know their school's graduation rate, A-G completion rate, EAP data, or failure rates in their own departments. They said they did not discuss data with any degree of regularity.
- The committee chairs did indicate that in some departments (math, ELA) they do give district benchmarks and load the results into Edusoft, but math indicated they do not discuss the results or create any goals based off of the results. They did not know if every teacher administered the benchmarks.
- Data was not used to set any WASC goals or generate the WASC Progress Report.
- After the Visiting Committee left the principal advised the committee that the ELA Department had received data in the 2013-14 school year but did not use it to set specific goals and has recently started having some discussions of the data.

II. Follow-up Process

In 2011 following the last WASC visit, the principal worked with the staff and created a collaboration schedule that called for 70 minute mandatory meetings every Wednesday on a late start schedule. This new schedule was implemented in 2011-12 school year. Two of those Wednesdays were to be used for monthly staff and department meetings. The remaining days were to be used for collaboration on student achievement and professional development.

According to the WASC Committee Chairs, during the 2011-12 school year, the only time WASC was discussed was the fall of the year when a revised WASC Action Plan that included the addition of Goal #4, was presented to the staff. When questioned, none of the committee chairs knew who had rewritten the action plan. The revised plan is included in the WASC report but it lacks most of the components of a real action plan. It lacks student achievement targets, a means to measure success or a specific timeline for evaluating the results of activities planned. It is just a list of activities for the 2011-12 school year that repeats itself with minor changes from goal to goal and year to year.

In the 2012-13, the staff became increasingly hostile to the new principal and her attempts to implement policies that aligned school discipline with state

regulations. She was responsible for the implementation of the new Restorative Justice Discipline system selected by the previous principal and mandated by the district. Staff took issue with her enforcement of work practices around timelines, remaining on site and the use of personal necessity days.

During this time staff members began not attending the mandatory collaboration meetings. In the spring of the 2013 the school was informed that the new bell schedule did not meet the state requirement for instructional minutes. It was decided to return to the old bell schedule and collaboration participation became optional with minimal participation. In August of 2013 Principal Bender reintroduced WASC and attempted to begin the process of writing the WASC report for this year. No one volunteered to be part of the process and the join 6-12 grade process was contentious. Finally, in October of 2013, Marc Armstrong agreed to become the WASC Chair but it was not until January, after the WASC Progress Report was officially changed to 9-12 grade, that the first WASC meeting took place. In January 2014 the first WASC meeting, the staff took exception to the way Principal Bender began the meeting. At the end of that meeting four committees were created with each committee assigned to write the update of school progress on the action plan. At the second January WASC meeting staff requested (and Principal Bender agreed) that the principal was not to be part of the process.

In February of 2012, Marc Armstrong provided each committee with a data pack and a template to assist them in writing their report on progress toward their goals during the past three years. During the next 6 weeks the committees wrote their sections.

This process resulted in an electronic copy of the first draft of the report being received by the Visiting Committee Chair about one month before the visit. He was unable to print a hard copy because of formatting problems and informed the school of this. A few days later a hard copy arrived in the mail that was unreadable, again due to formatting problems. It was clear when reading the electronic copy that except for one group, the rest of the staff took this opportunity to vent their frustration toward the principal. There was no substantive evidence or progress listed. At best this draft could be called a very rough draft. It was filled with negativity, blame and reasons for inaction. No effort was made to look at student data to even generate responses, comments or action steps. Student achievement data and goals were absent.

The Visiting Committee Chair called the WASC Chair and expressed his disappointment and concerns about the quality of the report. Two weeks before the visit a second report was mailed to both the visiting committee members. This was an edited copy with consistent fonts and no information cutoff due to formatting. However the negative tenor of the report remained and many areas of the report and the statements of progress were left blank.

At the Monday morning meeting between the visiting committee, focus group chairs and the WASC Coordinator, yet another copy of the report was presented to the visiting committee. This report did fill in the blank areas of the report and was further edited to be less offensive, but it contained no new data to support any additional comments.

The visiting committee received three drafts of the Progress Report. After reading the third draft it was still impossible to determine if any progress had been made on increasing student achievement. While the third draft was an improvement, it contained no additional data or evidence of thoughtful analysis and goal setting. When questioned as to why so very little data was referenced in the report, the committee chairs stated that they didn't have access to the data. However, in a matter of minutes, the visiting committee was able to access more data from the CDE website about Hercules than was included in the report.

III: School's Progress on the Critical Areas for Follow Up

The WASC committee left HHS in 2011 with nine areas for critical follow up. They were:

1. Face to face communication needs to be improved in several areas: Principal to staff, administration to staff, and administration to students.
2. Collaboration is the cornerstone of the school plan. For the collaboration to be effective, it was felt that active participation by the administration in training and implementation was critical as well as ongoing commitment to staff development in the collaboration process.
3. There was a lack of technology available to students and a need for a plan that addressed outdated equipment and resource availability.
4. There needed to be a school wide systematic implementation for implementing instructional strategies, developing common formative assessments and analyzing data to improve student learning.
5. There needed to be stronger outreach efforts to include parents of students in underachieving subgroups to actively participate in the school community.
6. District support is critical to the implementation of the school's action plan. The district needed to provide Professional development training for school wide collaboration. They needed to also monitor and support the administrations active participation in the collaboration initiative.
7. All students need a 4 year plan that is updated annually.
8. The career center needed administrative support to coordinate an outreach program with counseling that begins in 9th grade.

9. There is a need to reinstitute and nurture teacher leadership to provide a voice for all staff members. This includes the collaboration council and other leadership training opportunities for more teachers.

In the spring of 2011, the staff took the 9 critical areas and created 3 goals in which they would address all the critical areas for follow up. During the summer a fourth goal was added and the following was presented to the staff:

1. Increasing college readiness for all students.
2. Increasing representation for underserved subgroups in advanced and AP classes and reducing the achievement gap for underserved groups.
3. Creating and developing a culture of professional teacher collaboration and community.
4. Increasing communication between all stakeholders (district, administration, teachers, parents, staff and community members).

Between fall of 2011 and January 2014, nothing besides the creation of the four goals was done with the WASC plan or critical areas for follow up. In 2014, the staff was divided into 4 multidisciplinary groups that looked at the goals. The staff was instructed to list actions in place to support the goal, barriers, critical areas of follow up from the WASC committee, and evidence of actions.

The school listed the following progress on goal #1:

1. Increasing College Readiness:

- The school increase the second counselor position by .4FTE to support this goal.
- There is a plan to add career center staff in the fall of 2014 (**Critical area #8**).
- The school has a homework center open one day a week and informal tutoring is offered.
- The school has increased FAFSA applications by 22%.
- Four Year Plans are now in place for all 9-11th grade students (**Critical Area #7**).
- College workshops and fairs have been held on campus.
- Two AP courses have been added (Human Geography and Environmental Science).
- In 2013 the district funded the PSAT for all 9-11th graders and the SAT for all 12th graders.
- The academy for tourism and hospitality has been implemented grades 10-12.
- Counselors have increased the number of classroom presentations.

- CSU East Bay staff have presented to students about EAP data.
- Computer labs and wifi have been added, increasing student access to technology **(Critical Area #3)**.
- Benchmarks have been developed in ELA and math aligned to CCSS.

The visiting team was able to validate that the counselors have made significant progress in creating 4 year plans, increasing FAFSA applications, holding college workshops and fairs, and giving the PSAT/SAT to students at no cost. However, there is no data to measure the success of these efforts. The EAP college readiness rates are not known to staff, AP pass rates are not known to staff, PSAT and SAT data is not being collected or published to staff. The A-G completion rate, failure rates in classes and the graduation/cohort dropout rates are also not known, published for staff, or used in the Progress Report.

The school listed the following progress on goal #2:

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

- Open access to AP classes, although it is noted that more students are failing the AP exam because “they are not really ready to be proficient at the college level” **(Critical Area #5)**.
- The school has a homework center open one day a week and informal tutoring is offered.
- SAT tutoring, although there is only “anecdotal evidence” of students reporting increased confidence during the test.
- Greater participation in and better than average results on new ELA benchmarks.
- Broadening AP training to more staff.
- Writing curriculum for CCSS standards.
- Mandatory study hall for football players.
- Academic Intervention through Read 180 program.
- Use of Power school **(Critical Area #3)**.
- Admin provided training in Restorative Justice, Gender Spectrum training **(Critical Area #2)**.
- Admin attendance at ILT and monthly department meetings **(Critical Area #2)**.
- Multiple Method and SIOP training **(Critical Area #4)**.
- SBAC benchmark collaborations **(Critical Area 4)**.
- District funding of extra hours of collaboration **(Critical Area #6)**.
- Cathy Stevens training in spring of 2013 for collaboration. **(Critical Area #6)**.

In discussions with focus group chairs, they admitted that the focus groups did not look at grade data, AP data, EAP data, benchmark data, Read 180 data, or whether the academic interventions (study hall, tutoring, after school homework help) had a positive effect on the students that attended them. Despite the data provided regarding the relatively poor performance of African Americans on CAHSEE in both ELA and Math, no direct interventions with those students seem to have taken place. Anecdotal evidence was given – i.e., “students reported tutoring was helpful.” In the focus group chair meeting, it was noted that after 2011-2012, collaboration was haphazard and contentious, as many grievances and arguments among staff prevented collaboration. In 2013, the bell schedule changed to the early release Wednesdays, and according to one teacher, “although every other high school in the district believes that teachers are supposed to stay, collaborate and have meetings, for us it is believed to be optional.”

In classroom visitations, the vast majority of classrooms were using traditional instructional strategies (lecture, “Round Robin” reading, worksheets, workbooks, Q and A). There was not a lot of student work in classrooms, although resource posters were hung in many classrooms. An increased use of technology was apparent, and four language arts teachers had assignments that were aligned to the Common Core Standards.

The school listed the following progress on goal #3:

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

- There are now two SSCs – one for the high school and one for the middle school. The SSC has streamlined its funding process. **(Critical Area #5)**
- The principal has provided statistics and data at staff meetings
- The staff has discussed gaps.
- The collaboration council in 11-12 and 13-14 scheduled trainings. **(Critical Area #9)**
- The WASC team has met since January 2014.
- Teachers received technology in November 2013.

In 2012 infighting between the middle school and high school resulted in the elimination of the Collaboration Council. It was replaced by two independent ILTs. In interviews with the focus chairs, the visiting team was unable to validate whether data was regularly provided to teachers, as the report claimed. The focus group chairs indicated that data was only presented once, in the fall of 2013. According to the report, in 2011-12, staff was collaborating under the late Wednesday schedule. In 2012-13 the collaboration schedule became controversial and fell apart, with teachers doing no collaboration until the WASC process started in January 2014.

There was unable to validate from the evidence provided that in the last two years,

teachers have collaborated regarding student achievement or instructional strategies.

The school listed the following progress on goal #4:

4. Increase communication between all stakeholders (district, administration, teachers, parents, staff and community members.

- Weekly phone calls from principal to families **(Critical Area #1)**
- Weekly email from principal to staff **(Critical Area #1)**
- PowerSchool **(Critical Area #5)**.
- Teachers using a variety of tools to communicate
- Incentives to attend Back to School Night, Open House.
- ILT meetings.

The principal has attended department meetings, called student homes weekly and emailed staff weekly. She set up meetings with staff after concerns were raised about the direction of the school. In January of 2014, she was asked not to attend any more WASC meetings, and then received a vote of no confidence in February.

While PowerSchool is a valuable asset to the school, it was mentioned in the focus committee meeting that not all teachers are using it, resulting in frustration by parents who cannot track student progress. It was stated that it was a contractual issue and teachers were not required to use it and make it visible to parents. Communication at all levels remains an area of concern.

B. Additional Areas for improvement:

As relates to the Critical Areas of Academic Need, the school has made progress in the areas of technology and the four year plan for all students.

Supporting underserved students and collaborating to improve student success remain key areas that have little evidence of progress. The inquiry process that is fundamental to WASC of examining student data, making goals, taking action steps, and examining results is absent at Hercules High School. Data is rarely viewed or discussed by staff. Lack of teacher leadership, union/administrative fighting and widespread staff dissention has created a toxic school culture that is preventing the school from achieving at high levels.