

**MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS**

**Committee on
Institution –wide accreditation for PK – 12 Schools**

**REPORT ON THE
ACCREDITATION FOR GROWTH
MID-POINT REVIEWER**

**Maryland School for the Deaf
Frederick, Maryland
Columbia, Maryland
Dates of Visit – February 22 and 23, 2007**

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I. INTRODUCTION

The *Accreditation for Growth (AFG)* process is a five to seven year accreditation protocol available to the member schools of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Focusing on a preferred vision of the future, *AFG* utilizes a strategic planning model to ask schools to develop two to four measurable student performance objectives as the lynchpin of an assessment of growth in school improvement. The process requires schools to establish a planning ethic, develop a five to seven-year strategic plan, and meet established standards.

Committing to *AFG*, the Maryland School for the Deaf has agreed to the following:

- 1) It has committed to focusing on the end result – improved student performance– as the primary priority for school improvement efforts.
- 2) It has committed to operating from a vision of where it wants and needs to go with the mission and beliefs serving as a unifying force for change.
- 3) It has committed to including a varied spectrum of stakeholders in the process of continually defining a preferred vision, in developing the means to get closer to that vision, and in implementing action plans developed by these stakeholders.
- 4) It has committed to a process where progress will be continuously reviewed.
- 5) It has agreed to participate in a peer review and external validation process by accepting outside visitors.

Developed by the Commission on Secondary Schools (CSS), *AFG* requires schools who have committed to *AFG* to be visited every seven years by a team of volunteer educators acting as critical friends to validate the school's plan and to assure that standards are being met. At the two and one half year mark in the seven-year cycle, a one person, one-day visit is arranged to review the school's progress. The Mid-Point Reviewer is specifically charged with examining:

- The continued wide-spread acceptance of the plan
- The culture of planning and review that indicates that the school has been critical and reflective about its progress
- The projected ability of the school to meet its accreditation obligations within the cycle

The Mid-Point Reviewer to the Maryland School for the Deaf spent fourteen hours discussing the current status of the school's *AFG* plan with staff, administrators, and students. Although the visit was brief, the Reviewer interacted with over forty individuals who were able to convey the commitment of the school to its strategic plan and the role it plays in the life of the school.

II CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

The Maryland School for the Deaf (hereafter known as MSD), with campuses in both Columbia and Frederick, is a State Operated Program that serves the community of Deaf children that reside in the State of Maryland. The mission of MSD, as clearly evident is to provide access to the same curricular materials that hearing students in public schools in Maryland are required to undertake. This goal, to have students who are deaf held to the standards set forth in NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND, is central to their *AFG* Action plans.

To this end, students at MSD are exposed to the same curriculum and state mandated tests that all public school students participate in throughout the state of Maryland.

III Mid-Point Review checklist

The Mid-Point Reviewer examined evidence that:

COMPONENT	Limited/No Evidence	Sufficient/Some Evidence	Satisfactory Evidence	Exceptional Evidence
Planning				
A committee or team representative of the school's stakeholders continues to oversee, review, and make decisions about the strategic plan for school improvement.				#
Key individual(s) are in place to ensure the continuing nature of the process, and are successful in fostering that culture.				#
Documentation exists that illustrates how the plan has been reviewed at least annually.				#
A general understanding of the planning process and plan is found among the members of the school community.				#
SUMMARY:				
Is there a viable internal monitoring process that has put an accountability system in place for monitoring the accomplishment of the action plan?				
<p>There is viable, internal monitoring system in place. The implementation teams, responsible for the monitoring of the action plan, met on a consistently regular basis. There is evidence of communication between both campuses. Quarterly meetings, which require a great deal of administrative support and logistics, are held to share information. A yearly update to the entire staff is scheduled and occurs before the end of the school year.</p> <p>There was significant evidence that the action plans were all being enacted and monitored. Teams that met with this reviewer brought copies of action plans that were indeed "working documents". Completed goals were highlighted and were consistent with the documents left for this reviewer.</p>				
Has the annual review process provided continuous evaluation and a dynamic process that shows flexibility in modifying action plans?				
<p>The action plans incorporate and infuse test results as a primary base for reaching its intended goals. Significant success has been made in its plans and the data indicates that significant student growth has been made in many areas. In some instances (math in the elementary program and the Frederick campus), the goals have been met.</p> <p>In another area, analysis of year 1 and year 2 data indicates that the projected annual yearly growth was not realistic. Movement has been made to address this change.</p>				

COMPONENT	Limited/No Evidence	Sufficient/Some Evidence	Satisfactory Evidence	Exceptional Evidence
Content of Plan				
Growth in student performance as shown by the measurable student performance objectives are evident, or the school community can identify why growth did not occur and has adjusted the action plans to produce the desired growth in the latter half of the 5-year cycle.				#
The objectives remain the primary focus for improvement in student performance with significant changes to the objectives occurring only after consultation with Middle States staff.				#
Action plans have been updated to reflect more detail in the latter half of the 5-year cycle.				#
SUMMARY:				
Are school improvement efforts aimed at student learning, student performance, and student results?				
<p>School improvements are strongly evident. Curricular and technological changes have been implemented to create additional opportunities for students to meet the yearly objectives toward obtaining AYP. New technologies, such as Smart Boards, have been implemented across both campuses (including dormitories) to provide the visual aid and opportunities for interaction which long have been of paramount importance for deaf learners. Alternative curricular materials that take advantage of access to technology that includes both campuses have been introduced. One such example is a software program called STUDY ISLAND. Designed to mesh with The Maryland State Standards, it is created to give students numerous experiences in preparing those requisite skills necessary for success in obtaining passing grades on state mandated tests.</p>				
Organizational Growth				
The school is using data to inform its decision making regarding its plan for school improvement.				#
Appropriate changes to membership of committees have been made to reflect changes in school's structure, personnel, etc.				#
The school has committed the resources (human, monetary, etc.) necessary for successful implementation of the plan.				#
The planning process, as well as the plan, is evaluated each year.				#

SUMMARY:

Is a culture of planning evident as shown by the development of long-term strategic action plans that integrate program, services, facilities, and support to address growth needs?

There is strong evidence to support this statement. The action plan seen by this reviewer showed a thoughtfulness and pro-activity that I found impressive. Much thought was given, and effort shown regarding the development of curricular, communicative and support strategies that would enhance the successful completion and implementation of the action plan. The implementation teams meet regularly and share information with both the curricular committees and the administrative structure. As mentioned previously, opportunities for open campus communication exists, which requires a significant amount of administrative support.

It is worth noting again that there is a tremendous coordination among facility in supporting the goals of the action plans. A great deal of time is dedicated to having the Implementation Teams meet with the staff in their departments. In interviews with faculty, it was widely noted that they strongly felt that they could freely give feedback and voice opinions to members of the Implementation Teams, and that those opinions would get back to the Teams at their regular meetings.

There is also strong evidence that new staff members are quickly immersed into Implementation Teams or Curriculum Committees. However, during interviews with new members, this reviewer got a sense that several didn't feel that they were fully indoctrinated into the goals and objectives of the Action plans. A suggestion would be to review the orientation procedures for new staff.

Is there a climate of inclusiveness with evidence of continued involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the planning process?

There is significant evidence of communication with the variety of stakeholders. Up to date information regarding AFC is evident on both the MSD website and in their by-monthly publication. At the conclusion of the Mid-point review, this reviewer was asked to present his findings to the Board of Trustees for MSD. A culture of information sharing closely exists, and there is significant institution-wide pride in the outcomes.

IV Mid-Point Review Objectives Narrative Review

The action plans crossed over three areas of focus: Informational Technology, Reading and Mathematics. The Action Plans in each of these areas focused on the obtaining mastery in the variety of state measures used by the year 2011. This was done to be in compliance with NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND.

The variety of assessment devices used are noted on the MSD website.

The yearly percentage of anticipated growth to measure AYP was based on the collection of baseline data, subtracting this number from 75 (the percentage of mastery outlined in NCLB) and averaging the difference over the remaining years.

1- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OBJECTIVES

The objectives for Information Technology (IT) differed from both the reading and math objectives in that there was no year expectation for improvement. Baseline data was collected and a slated goal that 75 percent of students at a variety of age levels (0-4, 4-10, 1-13, 14+) will use technology for learning activities was evident. However, there was no percentage of yearly growth evident. While there is significant evidence of progress (7 of the 9 instances that data was collected showed a positive growth), there was no indication of the yearly expectation.

As this observer noted, there has been substantial and significant increases in the use of Technology at Maryland School for the Deaf. Virtually everyone interviewed sang the praises of the improvement of technology and the training provided in its usage. Therefore, I feel the data in this IT section to be secondary to the observable gains actually made at Maryland School for the Deaf.

2- READING OBJECTIVES

The method of data collection and measurement was directly related to Maryland School for the Deaf goals of being in concert with No Child Left Behind's slated literacy goals of language proficiency by the year 2011. Baseline data was collected and annual growth was broken down into equal increments. In essence, the discrepancy between baseline and 75 percent proficiency was divided, with the result being the expected annual growth.

A review of the pages labeled Reading Objectives on the MSD website shows significant areas of improvement and huge discrepancies between years. The objectives tend to take several "snapshots" of students throughout their years at the Maryland School for the Deaf. However, this data does not provide reliability from year to year at a specific grade.

Care should be given to have testing be both grade and child specific. Upon completion of their educational experience at the Maryland School for the Deaf, a student's portfolio should take a look at their individual patterns of performance at each grade level. Additionally, data should be collected, analyzed and synthesized at each testing level. This would be a key indicator to denote areas of strength and weakness as the Deaf student continues through the education program at the Maryland School for the Deaf.

The additional use of assessment tools, plus State mandated testing at grades 4, 6 and 7 indicate there will be more avenues for gathering data toward the slated goals of the reading objectives.

3- MATHEMATICS OBJECTIVES

The structure of the data collection and analysis is similar in nature to the reading objectives in the previous section. Again, the yearly percentage of expected gain is based on the collections of baseline data, the expected outcome in 2011 and the discrepancy

between baseline and expectation. The difference is amalgamated of the years into equal percentages.

As with the reading objective, the pattern of objectives being “met” or “not met” seem more grade-centered than child-centered. This reader sees a pattern of achievement that tends to skip years, as if the objectives being met are more based on the levels of the students rather than the interventions. Care should be given to “track” and “chart” classes throughout their sojourn through the testing years. A truer measurement may not be the annual growth, but the patterns of growth at the first, third and fourth, fifth, eighth and tenth grades. The measurement of patterns of achievement may give a truer indication of growth. Conversely, a yearly measurement at each grade level (i.e. comparing a third grade level from one year to the next) may yield wide variations of scores.

V CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There were numerous instances of the *AFG* process and the three action plans being an alive and vibrant component of life at MSD. A visit to their website is evidence of the commitment that the Maryland School for the Deaf has toward the objectives of their plans.

Across all three action plans I reviewed (reading, math & technology); there were numerous instances of those plans being in place. Communication among the implementation teams, and the programs they represent, was significant. Meeting time was dedicated weekly for the implementation teams to meet and then to share information about their programs. Information flowed both ways as constituents felt empowered to address concerns and offer suggestions to the implementation teams. Faculty felt that their request for materials and training were being taken back to the implementation teams for discussion and serious contention. Also, there was an obvious planning for structures to insure continued improvement and involvement. The designation of content area leaders (CALs) on the Frederick campus was further example of attention to improve communication between departments and disciplines.

In the opinion of this reviewer, the entire Faculty of the Maryland School for the Deaf should be commended for the pride they take in their work, and the dedication show toward successful completion of the goals set forth in their *AFG* Protocol. The manage to keep these goals in the forefront of their work, there is obvious communication among the various stakeholder groups in leadership roles and, most important there is an obvious “buy-in” among faculty. The reputation that MSD has earned at the national level as one of the leading institutions in the field of Deaf Education is obviously well earned and I wish to congratulate them on the exceptional work they do and the dedication they show to students who are deaf.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenneth Morseon
Mid-Point Reviewer