

Introduction

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the Committee on Latin American Schools, Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), visited the International School of San Salvador (CISS) in San Salvador, El Salvador on April 16-18, 2007. Hosting an onsite review team was the final step in the School's extensive efforts to attain accreditation by SACS.

During the visit, the School was asked to provide evidence to the review team that it:

1. meets the Standards for Accreditation;
2. engages in a continuous process of improvement; and,
3. implements strategies and activities that ensure it fulfills its mission and reaches its goals

During the visit, the Team was responsible for:

1. determining the School's status relative to the Standards for Accreditation;
2. assessing the efficacy and impact of the School's improvement process;
3. assessing the effectiveness of the School's methods for quality assurance;
4. identifying strengths of the School deserving of commendation; and
5. developing recommendations for strengthening the School.

The Review Team fulfilled its responsibilities by:

1. identifying relevant points of inquiry;
2. reviewing documentation provided by the School;
3. establishing and following a schedule of activities and interactions that provided for significant stakeholder involvement;
4. conducting interviews of a representative set of stakeholders; and
5. engaging in professional deliberations as a team to reach consensus on the School's status regarding each of the requirements for accreditation.

The Quality Assurance Review Team found evidence that the School provides many opportunities for stakeholders to participate in a meaningful way in its continuous school improvement process. Based on its review of the evidence, the Quality Assurance Review Team concluded that school personnel, with support from the school community, faithfully and effectively prepared for the Quality Assurance Review and conducted the SACS Guided Self-Study in the collaborative manner recommended by the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The Steering Committee coordinated the work of the other Committees: Vision; Profile; Salvadorian Curriculum; Planning; Results; and Communication, Logistics, and Hospitality.

In fulfillment of the SACS Guided Self-Study process, school personnel provided documented evidence for each of the Standards for Accreditation, summarized the continuous process of continuous improvement, and identified the methods and strategies it implements to ensure that it fulfills its mission and reaches its goals for the improvement of student learning. In addition to the summary of documentation the School provided the Quality Assurance Review Team, it gave the members ready access to all other information pertinent to the review, e.g., the improvement plan, student achievement data, policies and procedures, and financial data.

During the accreditation team visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed the Director, three other members of the administrative team, approximately 36 students, approximately 30 parents, and 29 teachers. Through interviews, observations, reviews of documents and other sources of information, the Quality Assurance Review Team:

- gained a school-wide perspective;
- gathered evidence corroborated by multiple sources;
- examined the context and capacity of the School in relation to its vision, mission, and beliefs; and
- applied the criteria for accreditation.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that a school provides evidence that it meets the 7 standards for accreditation. The standards are:

Standard 1 **Vision and Purpose**

The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

Standard 2 **Governance and Leadership**

The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

Standard 3 **Teaching and Learning**

The school provides research based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Standard 4 **Documenting and Using Results**

The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness

Standard 5 Resource and Support Systems

The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Standard 6 Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Standard 7 Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Summary and Overview

The Steering Committee coordinated and facilitated the school's compilation and consideration of evidence related to each of the 7 Standards for Accreditation. School personnel and other key stakeholders were involved in the compilation and consideration of the documentation for each of the Standards for Accreditation.

STANDARD 1: VISION AND PURPOSE

The mission statement, beliefs and values were developed following a series of facilitated sessions where staff and community members gave input. The School's staff and other key stakeholders carefully deliberated and participated in further facilitated sessions prior to formalizing mission, values, and belief statements. This process took more than one year to complete. Once adopted, the mission, values and beliefs were added to various internal and external publications of the School. The mission, values, and belief statements became the basis for designing the goal areas, objectives, and performance measures in the school's improvement plan.

The School's mission, values, and beliefs provide focus and direction for all stakeholders throughout the school community. Individuals are knowledgeable of the School's mission, values, and beliefs, philosophically support them, and use the School's mission, values, and beliefs to guide their work. Goals to achieve the mission, an accountability system to monitor progress, and a focus on teaching and learning are evident throughout the school.

STANDARD 2: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

The International School of San Salvador has a very stable leadership profile in terms of the actual leaders themselves. The General Director, who has written the School's policies and procedures and during the Self-Study process has updated them almost entirely, has been the owner and Director of the school since 1978. During that time he has established a very solid leadership team consisting currently of three heads or principals of early childhood, elementary and secondary. All of these administrators have

been at the School for at least three years and are clearly respected by the students and the greater school community and enthusiastically believe in the mission and purpose of the School. There is a strong sense of ownership by the students who play an active leadership role in the School's many extracurricular activities, especially through well-established student council leadership.

Two areas of concern were noted by the Review Team. One is the absence of a system that provides for analysis and review of student performance, particularly in the area of curriculum review to revise and update the curriculum with adequate time and involvement of the administrators and teachers in this process, making sure it is aligned with the School's vision, mission and beliefs. The second area of concern is the absence of formal evaluations for all employees, particularly the faculty and administrators. It is worthy of note that the Administration is working hard on this and the Principals reported they are in the process of establishing a tool and doing formal evaluations of the teachers they supervise before school is over this year. The Visiting Team encourages the Administration to continue to develop this vital piece of their job into a system that enhances the supervision and growth of their faculties and perhaps includes a self-evaluation and student evaluation reflection as well in the process.

Recommendations for Standard 2:

2.1 Establishes policies and procedures that provide for the effective operation of the school.

Given the policy manual has recently been revised by the General Director, it is important that these policies be shared with the greater school community, particularly with those directly affected by them, and that they are expanded and clarified when necessary to support the general well-being and smooth operations of the school.

2.4 Employs a system that provides for analysis and review of student performance and school effectiveness.

The School is encouraged to do a better job tracking student performance with indicators including and beyond standardized test scores to analyze student performance and use that analysis to support learning improvement goals that are shared by all.

2.10 Implements an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel

The CISS Administrators are in the process of establishing a tool for doing formal evaluations of the teachers they supervise before the end of the school year. The Review Team encourages the Administration to continue to develop this vital piece of their job into a system that enhances the supervision and growth of their faculties and perhaps includes self evaluation and student evaluation reflections as well in the process.

STANDARD 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING

Curriculum

The curriculum is based on United States content areas and is supported by local Ministry of Education requirements which allow students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma as well as the Bachillerato Diploma from El Salvador. Continued effort should be made to further develop the school-wide curriculum to clearly balance and vertically align subject content in a scope and sequence order to provide systematic student learning growth and instructional guidelines.

Instruction

At CISS instruction is compatible with the school's mission and expectations for student learning. Although the school uses external measurements such as ITBS, SAT, PSAT and the Ministry of Education, PAES, further development of research based assessment tools should be undertaken to assure stakeholders quality educational programs for all students. The school climate supports student learning; however, attention needs to be paid to providing adequate technology and library resources. Efforts to provide programs appropriate for diverse learning styles are evident in terms of language instruction.

Recommendations for Standard 3:

3.1 Develops and implements curriculum on clearly defined expectations for student learning.

The professional staff is encouraged to undertake a school-wide curriculum review and development process that has clearly defined expectations for student learning based on recognized models like those from the McRel Learning Laboratory.

3.2 Promotes active involvement of students in the learning process, including opportunities for them to explore application of higher order thinking skills and investigate new approaches to applying their learning.

As part of the curriculum review process attention needs to be given to target specific ways for students to apply their learning.

3.4 Designs and uses instructional strategies, innovations, and activities that are research based and reflective of best practice.

More attention needs to be given to helping teachers explore alternative instructional strategies based on best practice research that involve the students more actively in their learning.

3.5 Offers a curriculum that challenges each student to excel, reflects a commitment to equity and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity

The professional staff should look for ways to differentiate instruction and provide additional opportunities such as Advanced Placement Courses to assure that each student is challenged to the highest level possible.

3.7 Provides for articulation and alignment between and among all levels of schools.

As the review cycle and process is implemented, careful attention needs to be given to assure smooth transitions between all grade levels, particularly between early childhood, elementary and secondary.

3.10 Provides comprehensive information and media services that support the curricular and instructional programs

The library collection needs to be weeded and updated.

3.11 Ensures that all students and staff members have regular and ready access to instructional technology and the comprehensive materials collection that supports the curricular and instructional program.

Instructional media including video cameras, LCD projectors, and individual classroom computers that are Internet connected need to be provided as possible.

STANDARD 4: DOCUMENTING AND USING RESULTS

The School is using four standardized tests to monitor and document performance; ITBS, PSAT, SAT and the national PAES exam. Additionally, student portfolios, progress reports and report cards are available for use in analyzing performance. Information on individual student achievement is shared with each student and the respective parents. PAES results provide some comparison and trend data with schools which are somewhat similar to CISS in El Salvador.

While the standardized test data provide some useful information, they are neither sufficiently comprehensive nor sufficiently timely in providing results for sole use in measuring progress in performance and identifying actions needed to be taken for improvement. Available test data was consulted to set the School's objective for improving math but does not necessarily support the conclusion to choose this objective. Other assessments might clarify the current situation in math performance if they could be found and utilized. There is almost no assessment data from the standardized tests that are of use for the writing objective.

It is not clearly evident that student portfolios, progress reports and report cards are being utilized in any systematic way to measure school effectiveness or is it known how helpful that data could be. Once assessments are found to support school improvement work, structures need to be put in place to assure accountability for collecting, analyzing and using data to drive improvement initiatives.

Recommendations for Standard 4:

4.2 Develops and implements comprehensive assessment system for assessing progress towards meeting the expectations for student learning, and

4.3 Uses student assessment data for making decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes

Other assessments need to be developed to provide a comprehensive system both in terms of the extent of the information obtained and for ongoing use by the classroom teacher and students to give feedback on progress and to drive instructional practice.

4.4 Conducts a systematic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness and uses the results to improve student performance

A system needs to be developed for analyzing instructional and organizational effectiveness and using results to provide improvement. Training in how to accomplish this would be very helpful.

4.6 Uses comparison and trend data of student performance from comparable schools in evaluating its effectiveness

Finding other American schools in the region with similar characteristics would provide benchmarking data for comparing academic performance.

STANDARD 5: RESOURCE AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The School is a tuition driven institution with tuition and a one-time initiation fee representing 100% of the operational income. The financial management of the school rests solely with the Owner/Director. The needs of the School are identified primarily by input and requests from the staff, students, and parents and are noted by the Director and are reflected in the annual budget developed by the Owner/Director.

There are important financial issues facing the school including:

- Given the fact that the School is privately owned, the process for approval of the annual budget could potentially lead to competing visions/goals within the School and community over the use of school resources.
- The percentage of the annual budget for salaries and benefits appears to be below peer institutions in the city and region.

- Alternate sources of financial or material resource support should be collectively identified and pursued.

Human Resources

The school hires sufficient human resources to support its vision, mission and goals. Most instructional staff members have earned Bachelors degrees. Twenty four percent of the staff have Masters Degrees. The school has a qualified counselor. The librarian is a trained teacher serving as librarian.

The administration consists of the Director and three division principals. Consideration should be given to providing financial support to the professional staff to pursue further professional growth and enrichment.

Physical Resources

The school makes effective use of the space that it has in providing a safe and healthy environment for all students and staff. Money is set aside each year for physical and material improvements to existing facilities.

Recommendations for Standard 5:

- 5.1 Recruits, employs and mentors qualified professional staff that are capable of fulfilling assigned roles and responsibilities

More careful attention needs to be paid to teaching assignments to guarantee as much as possible that qualified persons are teaching in every class.

- 5.2 Ensures that all staff participate in a continuous program of professional development

A formal professional development program needs to be put in place in line with the school's efforts toward continuous school improvement and particularly its stated goals.

- 5.5 Budgets sufficient resources to support educational programs and to implement its plan for improvement

Stakeholders need to have a clear understanding of the cost of providing a high quality, private, college preparatory, accredited program based on a US curriculum in order to help assure that sufficient resources are available to accomplish that goal. Also, a thorough examination of funding possibilities needs to be actively pursued, including tuition, initiation fees, refund approaches, corporate donations, endowment gifts and external grant programs.

STANDARD 6: STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

There is very high stakeholder involvement in the School in terms of activities. Through a well-established Parent Advisory Committee, parents work closely with each grade level to support their activities, sponsor several popular school-wide activities and meet regularly with the Administration to foster open communication. All of the parents the Review Team was privileged to meet seemed very pleased with the over-all school operations including the academic program for their children. They clearly demonstrated respect for the Administration and teachers. Some parents expressed the opinion that they realize that teachers need more resources, especially in terms of technology, to do the best job possible with their children.

Given that there generally appears to be open and well-established channels for communication with all of the stakeholders, particularly through the Parent Advisory Committee, two areas appear to need attention in meeting this Standard fully. One is in the area of improving communication with the stakeholders about the School's expectations for student learning and their goals for improvement. The other is in providing information about student performance and the School's effectiveness in the areas of improved instruction and learning. As the School continues to work on establishing and implementing its School Improvement Plan, particularly in the areas of math and writing, these can be readily addressed as assessment measures are put in place to document student performance and improvement in these areas.

Recommendations for Standard 6:

6.5 Provides information about students, their performance, and school effectiveness that is meaningful and useful to stakeholders.

Realizing the importance of this through the self-study process, it is important that the School continues to find ways to communicate with parents and students meaningful information about their performance that will lead to more individual success. One way to do this would be to improve the technology resources at the School including grading software for teachers as well as computers with Internet connectivity in every classroom so teachers could communicate more readily with parents and students as well as enhance their lessons with resources now readily available on the Internet.

STANDARD 7: COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

CISS administration and faculty express a strong desire for improvement and have established the initial elements of a continuous improvement process. Objectives have been set that are consistent with the school's vision and purpose and also match feedback received from teachers, students and parents.

The plans to achieve these objectives need much more development. Further study of the current situation will help clarify variables and barriers to success that can then suggest actions to be implemented that are likely to produce positive results. Reliance on limited

standardized test data as found in the current plans is inadequate to document the present condition or to provide indicators of progress. Assessments need to be obtained or developed that can fill these functions and be utilized by teachers to drive instruction and provide students and parents, as well as teachers, with feedback.

The need for professional development to support planned improvement is recognized but provisions for the financial resource and time to accomplish this are not in place.

Recommendations for Standard 7:

7.1 Engages in a continuous process of improvement that articulates the vision and purpose the school is pursuing (Vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school effectiveness and the school community (Profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (Plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (Results)

The school improvement plan needs further development with more in-depth study of the current condition, identification of assessment indicators that can provide feedback on progress, a structured data collection system and activities or programs to achieve the objectives.

7.4 Provides professional development for school personnel to help them implement improvement interventions to achieve improvement goals

It would be very helpful for the Administration and faculty to obtain training in how to conduct continuous improvement processes.

On-going professional development to support improvement plans have to be obtained. Accountability for identifying and obtaining this training and the resources to pay for it needs to be established.

7.5 Monitors and communicates the results of improvement efforts to stakeholders, and

7.6 Evaluates and documents the effectiveness and impact of its continuous process of improvement

Assessments that provide comprehensive and timely data for use by classroom teachers, improvement committees and stakeholders to support improvement plans need to be developed or obtained. One suggested resource is NWEA testing.

Commendations and Recommendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team provides the following commendations and recommendations in response to the school's execution of and participation in the SACS Guided Self-Study in fulfillment of the requirements for accreditation.

Commendations

The International School of San Salvador has a significant number of strengths and accomplishments which characterize the quality of the school and its capacity to support student learning. The Quality Assurance Team offers the following commendations that reflect the strengths and accomplishments of the school:

1. Creating a safe and caring school community that celebrates the diversity of its student population.
2. Developing a multicultural educational environment which reflects the acceptance, tolerance, and respect for different nationalities represented within its student body.
3. Offering ESL and SSL programs for third country national students who enroll without English and/or Spanish language skills.
4. Providing what is universally considered as the highest quality English language program available in San Salvador.
5. Creating an effective Parent Advisory Committee with representatives from each grade level that provides parental input to the School administration.
6. Having a stable and long serving leadership team.
7. Involving the entire school community in the school improvement process in preparation for the accreditation visit.
8. Maintaining a clean and well kept campus and organizing the school day to minimize interruptions and use the limited space available in the best possible way.
9. Establishing a dedicated faculty.
10. Supporting the enthusiasm and involvement of the students in school leadership, particularly by the student council members and cheerleaders.
11. Considering the limited resources, the apparent success of graduates getting accepted in universities of their choice both in the United States and El Salvador, as well as other universities around the world.

Recommendations

The capacity of any organization to improve is directly related to its ability to recognize, acknowledge, and act on its strengths and limitations. Although the International School of San Salvador is guided and characterized by several strengths and accomplishments, there are challenges facing the School that are opportunities for improvement. Therefore, the Quality Assurance Team offers the following over-all recommendations for improvement:

1. Given the fact that the curriculum is the heart of any school, it is recommended that the School continue to update its curriculum guides in all areas with attention to learning outcomes, assessments and relevant learning activities to assure quality learning for all students. There needs to be an articulated scope and sequence of delivery that helps guarantee students learning is connected, not only with what they learn at each grade level but with the greater world and the School's vision and mission as well. Using on-line resources such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, McRel Regional Educational Laboratory, the Tri-Association, 6+1 Writing Traits and administrators and websites of neighboring schools including Dr. Barry McCombs and Dr. Michael Adams at Colegio Nueva Granada in Bogotá, Colombia, particularly for math support.
2. It is clear that the staff of CISS is a dedicated and caring staff. It is highly recommend that the School pay more attention to professional development time and resources for the staff to become less isolated from their own professional communities as well as to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver the school program supporting the quality and learning excellence the stakeholders clearly expect.
3. Continue to flush out and develop the School Improvement Plan making sure it is fully grounded in relevant assessment data with an action plan that assures delivery and evaluation and the appropriate resources needed to do so.
4. Given the current concern of security world-wide and especially in El Salvador, it is recommended that the School pay particular attention to its crisis intervention plan and make sure it is well established and known to all.

Closing Summary

The Quality Assurance Review Team found the International School of San Salvador to be an effective school led by a dedicated administrative team and professional staff. It is evident that all of the major stakeholders have very positive feelings about the educational climate that has been established at CISS. In spite of its small size and lack of resources, students are receiving a quality education as evidence by the success of its graduates in gaining admission to excellent universities

The Quality Assurance Review Team certifies that the school has satisfactorily met the expectations and requirements of the SACS Guided Self-Study. Additionally, the Quality Assurance Review Team certifies that The International School of San Salvador meets all the Standards for Accreditation.

Because the primary focus of this process is on improving student performance, the Quality Assurance Review Team sincerely hopes that the recommendations presented in this report will help the school in its continuing efforts to improve the quality of the learning experience for all of its students. To establish a culture of improvement at the School, the professional staff must continuously assess, plan, implement, and monitor the School's improvement plan. The success of such an effort is largely dependent on the school's understanding and level of commitment to a process of improvement that is continuous.

The Quality Assurance Review Team recommends that the professional staff, with the support of stakeholders in the community, conscientiously continue implementing the school's improvement plan. It is through implementation that the instructional and organizational capacity of the school is strengthened and students' achievement of the desired results for learning occurs. Throughout implementation of the school improvement process, the staff should:

1. review and communicate the findings and observations contained in the report to all stakeholders;
2. consider and take action, where appropriate, on the recommendations contained in this report;
3. continue to monitor accreditation requirements for the School;
4. ensure that strategies identified in the School's improvement plan for improving student learning are executed;
5. update at least annually and communicate to stakeholders profiles of student performance;
6. document growth in student learning and improvements in instructional and organizational effectiveness; and
7. review and revise, as necessary, the School's improvement plan.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the Director General of the School, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The Team urges the professional staff to study the Team's report and to act on those recommendations they believe will improve or enhance the quality and capacity of the School to improve student learning. The team wishes the School and its students much success in pursuit of student achievement through the continuous process of school improvement.