

WASC Overview Q & A January , 2006

What is WASC?

WASC is the acronym for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. It is the accrediting organization for the western states including California. WASC reviews schools to determine whether or not a school is doing an adequate job of educating ALL of its students and whether students are mastering a particular body of knowledge. Further, WASC has the additional mission of ensuring that schools “clearly demonstrate that they are about the critical business of continual self-improvement”. That is; does a school continually re-evaluate itself to determine whether it is providing the highest quality learning experiences for all students?

Why is FAME seeking accreditation?

FAME is seeking accreditation because we want to offer the highest quality program to our students. Achieving accreditation assures our students, parents, and community at large that we have gone through a rigorous evaluation of our program and that we have a clear vision of desired outcomes and how we will attain them. Further, many colleges and universities will not accept students from non-accredited schools. We want FAME to be recognized as a vital contributor of well-prepared students to the higher education system. Therefore, we are seeking accreditation for our high school programs. Other reasons Accreditation is important:

- 1) It allows us to maintain an approved course list with the University of California and California State University. These are courses which we have developed for our students to ensure they meet the UC a-g course sequence requirements for admission to college.
- 2) It insures that our transcripts are accepted by universities, technical schools, financial aid institutions, etc.
- 3) It enables us to develop partnerships with community members that will provide additional resources for our students.
- 4) It enables us to apply for grants and other funding that will allow us to provide additional services for our students.
- 5) It insures that we maintain a continuous process of self-evaluation with the goal of providing a top quality program for our students.

What is the accreditation process?

After the initial application period, which we have completed, the next step in the WASC process is a year-long intensive study of our school. At the administrative level we have already started implementing the required review. The next step is to conduct a “self-study”. The self-study involves the efforts of all “stakeholders” in FAME. This includes parents, students, teachers, office staff, administrative staff, and our community instructors (vendors). The purpose of the self-study is to clarify our purpose, clearly state our academic goals and identify our best practices for meeting our purpose and goals. It

also involves pinpointing areas where we need to make improvements and developing an action plan for doing so.

We need all of you in order to make the self-study meaningful and productive. We will be asking for volunteers to participate in groups. We will request information via surveys and website polls. And, we will solicit your opinion regarding whether you, as a stakeholder, agree with our findings. This is your school and the WASC process provides an opportunity for everyone to be involved and provide input into what processes make our school successful.

What are the steps involved in a self-study?

The self-study process requires that we do the following things:

Clarify our mission and purpose

Prepare a profile of our school community

Clearly state our expected school wide learning results (ESLRs)

Outline how we measure our expected outcomes

Analyze the following areas:

Category A: Organization for Student Learning

1. School Purpose
2. Governance
3. School Leadership
4. Staff
5. School Environment
6. Report of Student Progress
7. School Improvement Process

Category B: Curriculum and Instruction

1. What Students Learn
2. How Students Learn
3. How Assessment is Used

Category C: Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth

1. Student Connectedness
2. Community/Parent Involvement

Category D: Resource Management and Development

1. Management and Budget
2. Resource Planning and Fiscal Health
3. Operational Standards and Procedures

What are our Mission, Philosophy and Goals?

Mission and Vision

The mission of FAME is to enable our diverse population of students to become independent thinkers, life-long learners, and responsible, contributing members of society.

FAME recognizes the cultural diversity and individuality our student population. FAME strives to create an education community where students from all social, academic and economic backgrounds can learn to their highest potential. Using the state standards to guide our educational program: teachers and parents work together to assure the achievement and progress of each student, building the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for them to be self-motivated, competent, lifelong learners.

Philosophy

FAME believes that, “Educators must invite students to experience the world’s richness, empower them to ask their own questions and seek their own answers, and challenge them to understand the world’s complexities (Brooks and Brooks, pp. 5, 1999). Specifically, we have determined that learning best occurs in an environment that:

- is accepting of varied methods of demonstrating knowledge
- promotes physical and emotional health and well being and supports questions, experimentation, self-expression, creativity and appropriate risk taking
- is relevant and authentic
- is developmentally supportive
- is democratic and student centered
- models and requires high-level thinking skills
- incorporates language learning and multi-cultural education
- celebrates and brings relevance to cultural and individual diversity
- models self reflection and self assessment
- is rich and demanding and promotes depth of learning
- is psychologically safe
- provides a variety of ways for students to engage in coursework and in the community

Goals

- All students will demonstrate grade-level proficiency in reading and writing.
- All students will demonstrate master of designated outcome goals in the areas of English Literature, History, Math, Science, Art, and /or a Foreign Language.
- All Students will demonstrate mastery of skills related to college preparation and success in continued education and/or career objectives or other post high school plans.
- All students will demonstrate the development of a social conscience.

(Please see our ESLRs for more information).

Other Questions?

If you have other questions about the WASC process or how you may participate, email Leslie Nilson at leslien@basischarter.org.

We’ll be using the WASC section of our website to keep you updated on our progress. We look forward to hearing from you!