

Communication PRinciples for Principals

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SCHOOL ACCREDITATION



IDEA

Ask your installation newspaper to publish an article about school accreditation. Offer to be interviewed, and have your message points ready and clearly state what support you need.

Accreditation – Communicating the Basics and Getting Parents Involved

The school principal is the focal point in the school accreditation process. As the school's leader, a principal has the challenging and demanding tasks associated with accreditation - ensuring their learning community meets high quality standards, implementing a continuous improvement process, and engaging in quality assurance through internal and external review.

The support and understanding of faculty and staff is critical to the accreditation process. But, equally important is parental involvement which is often elusive and difficult to obtain and sustain. The words "Get more parents involved," frequently appear in Quality Assurance Reviews (QARs). This is difficult, especially in communities where many families live off the installation and the only regular connection to the school is the school bus. For many families, visits to the installation involve errands, medical appointments, or sports and recreational activities. Coming to the installation for a Continuous School Improvement meeting might not reach the threshold that energizes a commitment. And then there's the unique demands of deployment, separation, and transition that are superimposed on every military community.

What's a principal to do? As with most calls to action, a great place to start is with communication.

Accreditation – Making it Real and Personal for Parents

Obtaining and sustaining parental involvement in the accreditation process begins with communicating an awareness and building an understanding of accreditation – the who, what, when, where, and why.

The following information is excerpted from a parent brochure published by AdvancEd and downloadable from their website:

http://www.advanc-ed.org/products_and_services/free_downloads/docs/advanced3.pdf



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What is accreditation?

Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools. Today, to demonstrate educational quality, accreditation is used by education providers of all types from traditional schools to distance learning providers to tutoring centers serving all ages of students from toddlers to adults. Accreditation engages the school community in meeting high quality standards, implementing a continuous improvement process, and engaging in quality assurance through internal and external review.

Who provides accreditation?

Through AdvancED, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) accredit Pre-K through grade 12 public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, the Department of Defense Schools, and Latin America. NCA CASI also accredits non-degree granting post-secondary schools.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI are non-governmental, nonprofit organizations founded in 1895. AdvancED is the parent organization for NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE), a research and development organization, and is dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide.

What accreditation means to parents:

A school's commitment to accreditation assures parents and the community that the school is focused on raising student achievement, providing a safe and enriching learning environment, and maintaining an efficient and effective operation. An accredited school adheres to high quality standards based on the latest research and successful professional practices.

NCA CASI/SACS CASI accreditation means that your school has opened its doors to review and support from an organization bringing 100 years of experience in improving educational quality.

What are the benefits to my children attending an accredited school?

Students who attend a school accredited by NCA CASI or SACS CASI can rest assured that the school is committed to raising student performance and held accountable for improving student learning on a continual basis.

- Ask parents to provide input to your school's vision,
- Ask parents to identify possible survey topics
- Host a principal's coffee to conduct focus groups.

TIPS



Accreditation means that students have:

- Qualified teachers who are continually working to improve their practices and teaching methods in order to increase student performance;
- Access to a rich, diverse, and sound curriculum;
- Access to a range of student activities and support services;
- Transferability of credits from school to school; and
- Greater access to federal loans, scholarships, post secondary education, and military programs that require accreditation.

The school credits that students earn at an NCA CASI/SACS CASI accredited school are recognized by schools, colleges, and universities globally. Through AdvancED's reciprocal agreements with sister accrediting organizations, students can continue their educational goals in the United States or around the world,

HOW DO SCHOOLS EARN ACCREDITATION?

To earn accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, schools must:

1. Meet the AdvancED standards.

The standards require that schools have a clear vision and purpose; have effective and responsive leadership; have a rigorous curriculum taught through sound, research-based methods; collect, report, and use performance results; provide adequate resources and support for its educational programs; value and communicate with stakeholders; and have a commitment to continuously improve. The standards are derived from educational research and best practice. They can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.advanc-ed.org>.

2. Engage in a continuous process of improvement.

Accredited schools are committed to being better today than they were yesterday. The schools identify a shared vision, maintain a school-wide profile of the current reality, establish plans and assess the implementation of interventions, and document the results of their efforts to improve student learning and school effectiveness.

3. Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.

Internal review involves the schools and their stakeholders. External review involves feedback from experienced educators outside the schools. In both cases, reviewers examine evidence to determine if schools are meeting the standards and achieving goals for improving student learning and school effectiveness.

Do parents have a role in accreditation?

Yes. Parents can assist with accreditation efforts by:

- Staying informed about your school's accreditation.
- Educating other parents about your school's accreditation.
- Reinforcing the skills your school is teaching your children.

- Becoming an active member of your school's continuous improvement team and/or internal and external review process.
- Requesting and participating in opportunities to provide feedback to your school, i.e., parent surveys, focus groups, and parent meetings.

Ways to encourage parent involvement.

Armed with the information above, how can you, as the school principal, encourage parents to participate?

1. Make it easy – go to parents instead of hoping they'll come to you.

- Ask your installation newspaper to publish an article about school accreditation. Offer to be interviewed, and have your message points ready and clearly state what support you need.
- Offer to tape a radio or television spot by coordinating with your district's or area's public affairs officer.
- Talk with commanders and ask for time to speak with units about school accreditation.
- Participate in installation community meetings or town halls.
- Use your school website to talk about accreditation.

2. Seek parent input

- Ask parents to provide input to your school's vision,
- Ask parents to identify possible survey topics
- Host a principal's coffee to conduct focus groups.
- Ask a parent from each room to be a Continuous Improvement Representative – no formal meetings needed – it can be something as simple as e-mail.
- Use the Parent Guide to the DoDEA Community Strategic Plan as your starting point. You can access the guide at: http://www.dodea.edu/pubs/docs/parentGuideCSP_2009.pdf

3. Network

- Brainstorm ideas for parent involvement with other principals nearby.
- Co-host events with other principals and their schools.
- Ask your superintendent or area director to speak with you at a town hall about accreditation.

The ideas presented above may or may not work in your community. Sometimes the best strategies involve seeking endorsement and support from your community's opinion leaders. The important thing is to make a start and make parents one of the pillars of support for accreditation.