

Section 1: Self-Study Procedures – Overview of District Preparation and Organization to Conduct the Self-Study

The West Feliciana Parish School System possesses a strong commitment to continuous improvement as evidenced by a long, continuous association with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The only high school in the district, West Feliciana High School, was first accredited by SACS in 1930; over 75 years ago. West Feliciana Middle School, which opened during the 1999-2000 school year, was initially granted accreditation as a “spawned” school. The middle school staff immediately formed a Self-Study Committee and hosted an accreditation review team visit during the 2002-03 school year. The three elementary schools in the district, while not directly involved in previous SACS accreditations, have been involved, however, in various continuous improvement efforts. Bains Lower Elementary, for example, was the first Louisiana school to receive accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

The district has also made strong gains in student achievement during the past fifteen years. State and national assessment results, school report cards, the district report card, and other indicators continue to demonstrate the

district's commitment to increasing student achievement and to providing a quality education for all students. The West Feliciana Parish School System continues to rank among the top school districts in the state, and Superintendent Lloyd Lindsey, Jr. is among the longest tenured superintendents in Louisiana.

Because the district has only five schools and approximately 2500 students, it seemed to the district's leadership that district-wide accreditation by SACS/CASI was the next logical step for the district in its quest for continuous improvement. Near the beginning of the 2004-05 school year, representatives from the district attended a workshop on district accreditation in Baton Rouge. Those individuals shared the information learned with other leaders within the district, including the superintendent, supervisors, and principals during a bi-monthly staff meeting. It was decided by the district leadership to invite Dianne Garbo and Patsy Jenkins from the SACS/CASI state office to give a presentation to supervisors and principals at a staff meeting on May 10, 2005. After hearing the presentation, there was consensus among the staff that the school system should move forward and seek district accreditation through SACS/CASI. The Supervisor of Secondary Education, Mike Clark, assumed the role as the district

coordinator for this effort because of his experience in the Self-Study Process, and having served on a number of visiting teams over the years.

As Robert Burns wrote, “the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray.” In August and September, 2005, Louisiana and West Feliciana Parish were, to put it mildly, greatly impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The plans for district accreditation were put “on hold” and were not resurrected until the spring of 2006.

A SACS/CASI District Leadership Team comprised of central office supervisors, principals, assistant principals, and teachers was organized in the spring of 2006. Dr. Patsy Jenkins, State Specialist for SACS, presented a workshop to this group on April 27, 2006. The West Feliciana Parish School Board, during its regularly scheduled meeting on May 23, 2006, approved the superintendent’s recommendation that the school system pursue district-wide accreditation. Upon receiving a Letter of Intent from the superintendent, Dr. Mark Elgart approved the district’s request for a QAR Team visit January 27-30, 2008.

The Leadership Team met again on June 19, 2006 to review the standards and to look at ways of enlarging the circle of stakeholders involved in the process. Six supervisors and the middle school assistant principal were assigned to chair the seven committees related to the SACS/CASI standards. Committees were also established for the Vision and Purpose, the District Profile, the District Action Plan, and Documenting and Using Results. School personnel, including teachers and other staff were assigned to each committee. Chairs were responsible for including additional stakeholders such as parents and community leaders. In addition, a SACS/CASI Steering Committee was appointed to work under the direction of SACS/CASI District Accreditation Coordinator, Mike Clark, in planning, documenting, and implementing the Guided Self-Study process.

West Feliciana Middle School Assistant Principal, Beverly Grant, was appointed as chair of the Steering Committee. Jovanka McCray, also an assistant principal at the middle school and Bridget Plauche, chair of the Profile Committee and assistant principal at West Feliciana High School, were appointed co-chairs. Other members of the steering committee included Tunica Elementary principal, Shannon Hall; Bains Lower Elementary librarian, Linda Holmes, who also chaired the Vision and

Purpose Committee; Bains Elementary teacher, Marjorie Dubea; West Feliciana High School assistant principal, Carolyn Lee; and Assistant Superintendent of Federal Programs, Jesse Perkins, who chaired the District Improvement Plan (Action Plan) Committee.

Throughout the 2006-07 school year, the various committees began meeting to examine the standards and to look at strengths and challenges of the district. Each school, especially the elementary schools, began to examine their improvement efforts using the SACS/CASI standards as a rubric.

NSSE surveys were conducted with parents, teachers, students, administrators, support personnel, and community leaders. The electronic format was decided upon by the steering committee. This proved to be a much more formidable task than anticipated, especially obtaining results from parents and community members. Eventually, over 1800 surveys were tallied and the results used to formulate the district's goals, objectives, and action steps. Because the surveys were not completed until the spring of 2007, the initial deadlines set by the steering committee had to be adjusted.

The narratives addressing the seven standards and the work of the committee on Vision and Purpose were submitted by the chairs to the

steering committee for review in May, 2007. One very interesting aspect of the development of the Vision, Mission, and Beliefs statements was the involvement of the district's students. Much of the wording for this component was contributed by the students, with the assistance of community members. A new district motto, **Dedicated to Excellence, Anchored in Success, Connected to the World**, was written after much discussion and debate. The District Action Plan and the District Profile were submitted at the end of June, 2007. The steering committee met on July 26, 2007 to begin the process of reviewing, editing, and formatting all of the information submitted by the various committees. This work continued through the fall of 2007.

Assistant Superintendent, Jesse Perkins, chaired the committee responsible for developing the Action Plan. This committee, comprised of administrators, teachers, and several parents, was charged with reviewing all data, including assessment results and the NSSE surveys, developing district-wide goals and objectives, and formulating an Action Plan for implementation. The three goals identified were: (1) To increase student achievement in the core subject areas; (2) To provide Professional Development to increase student achievement and enhance interpersonal

relationships; and (3) To improve district operational functions and educational services to facilitate student achievement. Objectives, expected outcomes, and activities were developed for each goal. Because the 3 R's Model (Relationships, Rigor, Relevance) is such an important component of teaching and learning in the district, the committee believed that it was important to imbed it appropriately into the Action Plan.

As part of the monitoring process, District Monitoring Teams (DMT's) were organized by the central office during the fall of 2006. These teams, chaired by central office supervisors, were devised with a two-fold purpose: (1) monitor each school's implementation of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, and (2) monitor the schools' adherence to the SACS/CASI standards.

Five teams, one for each of the district's schools, were organized at the district level and included central office administrators, school-based administrators, and National Board Certified teachers. The DMT's first visit took place in April-May, 2007, followed by a second visit in October-November, 2007. At the conclusion of the day-long visit, the school's principal was provided an Exit Report by the DMT chair.

Throughout this process, the steering committee and the SACS/CASI Leadership Team have worked diligently to ensure that the district's stakeholders were involved and informed about the district accreditation process. On the first Staff Development Day for school personnel in August, 2006 and again in August, 2007, parents and community leaders who had served on the various committees and the community at-large (including several elected officials) were invited to attend a SACS/CASI District Accreditation meeting in the auditorium. Memos updating the progress of the steering committee's work were also mailed to each stakeholder who had served on a committee. In addition, focus groups were conducted at each school during the DMT visit this fall.

The West Feliciana Parish School Board will receive a report from the steering committee at its regularly scheduled meeting on December 18, 2007. Members of the Steering Committee will address the faculty and staff at each of the district's schools on January 9, 2008, an early dismissal staff development day. Involved stakeholders and other community members will be invited to a public review of the district accreditation process on January 15, 2008.

The organization of the Guided Self-Study and the development of the District Improvement Plan has been a district-wide effort. The SACS/CASI District Steering Committee has been responsible for reviewing, editing, and revising all written documents, as well as keeping all stakeholders informed. The school-based administrators and teachers, central office administrators, and support workers, have all worked diligently to ensure that the West Feliciana Parish School System provides a quality education for all children. Each of these groups, along with the parents, students, and community leaders has embraced the continuous improvements efforts of the school system. The district is looking forward to the QAR Team visit on January 27, 2008.