

Chancellor Academy

Validation Team Visit

Oral Report

Written and Presented by

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

We are pleased to see all of you here this afternoon to hear the preliminary observations and thoughts of the Middle States Validation Team.

I must say we leave Chancellor Academy at the end of this oral report, feeling that we have had a very rich and deeply rewarding experience of your school.

It is tradition that the oral report is presented without opportunity for questions. Also, please forgive us if we immediately leave after the oral report. This oral report is just a snapshot or glimpse of what the formal and considerably longer written report will say about the school's planning process, the content of the plan, and how well Chancellor Academy meets the Commission on Secondary Schools standards for accreditation.

We would like to provide you with a very brief summary of the major points we will likely make in the written report that will follow in a few weeks.

The school will receive a copy of the written report for proofing and accuracy of facts. Then the report will be forwarded to the Middle States Accreditation for Growth Advisory Committee for review and recommendation. The school will have a formal opportunity to respond to the written report prior to submission to the Commission. Finally, the Advisory Committee will submit the report with recommendation to The Commission on Secondary Schools for vote on accreditation.

Before I begin, I need to recognize my colleagues on the team for their incredible effort and hard work during these very full and intense days. We came together as total strangers and leave as friends. Your validation team came together just for your school and your school alone. Sadly, we will probably never work together as a validation team again. I have served on and chaired many visitation and validation teams and there has never been a team more dedicated, more concerned, and more giving. I must say many teams begin with a confused struggle on how to

approach the report much less the validation process. This team did not hesitate or stumble, instead they hit the ground running knowing the right questions to ask, how to analyze the data, and how to produce a polished and comprehensive report of their findings.

Despite the long hours in analysis, discussion, and writing, they made this monumental task not only possible, but actually fun. They may not see themselves as I do, but it is a pleasure working with real pros. I wish to express my deepest appreciation to and profound awe for Mary Dart, Tim Klavon, and Jason Milliren. Their objective professionalism, attention to detail, and good humor made my work easier and your validation report meaningful.

Also, I must express, on the behalf of the team and myself, our sincere gratitude to all of you who have welcomed us and made our visit to Chancellor Academy a pleasure. We felt we were members of your school community even before we set foot on your campus. Like the book, you opened up your school to us. We applaud your candor and honesty in your accreditation papers and your interviews. While the new format of the AFG Protocol self study document did not adequately capture the richness of the school, it was obvious from our visit that Chancellor Academy is so much more. You have an amazing story that is not being fully told in the self study.

I would like to recognize the extraordinary work of Lisa McConagly and John Syvertsen in preparing for our visit. As much as I would like to individually thank everyone else for your very gracious hospitality and your contribution to the success of our visit, I fear I will miss someone who rightfully deserves public recognition for a job well done. Regardless, you should know it is recognized and appreciated.

We commend you for choosing the "Accreditation for Growth" process for the second time and continuing the strategic planning protocol for student outcome improvement. This was a courageous step. In doing so, you have made several commitments in continuing the protocol.

After completing the initial AFG set of objectives, you have revisited your mission that was woven through a universally shared list of beliefs that have not changed over time, although the

characteristics of your students have, and developed a concise statement with emphasis on team based therapeutic and academic service to each individual student.

You have committed to achieving improved student performance within that stated mission.

You have committed to including a broad-based representation and participation of your community stakeholders in achieving these goals and furthering your mission.

You have committed to developing a process of ongoing daily evaluation on all levels of your performance and progress.

You have committed to participating again in this peer review and validation process by opening up your dreams, visions, plans, and process to outside scrutiny.

The Chancellor Academy is rich in educational significance providing a unique therapeutic and academic experience for young people who have not been successful in the traditional public school setting.

The Chancellor Academy is more than a school or a therapeutic center; it is a culture where every student feels respected, valued, and supported.

As one student stated, "we are like a family." Another student stated, "the teachers know what you can do and what you cannot do, and meet you where you are." A third student said, "You can actually trust the teachers."

Recognizing the unique talents and difficulties of each individual student, the school appropriately equips and challenges the psyche and intellect of its students. The Chancellor Academy displays a special atmosphere of warmth and gentleness supporting an explicit expectation for personal responsibility in social interaction and learning. The school has created and maintained an extensive array of activities that bring and nurture the student in the family fold. With the intent to provide each student with accountability, self-understanding and

self-determination the members of the faculty and staff strive to instill each student with the social, and behavioral tools as well as appropriate academic instruction to return to, and succeed in, the traditional school environment or graduate from The Chancellor Academy as responsible, value centered adults.

Students know that they are not only safe and supported, but also liked. At Chancellor Academy, students have found a place where they can trust the adults, and success, once an impossible fantasy, is not only a possibility, it is an expectation.

Allow me to read to you a sample of the comments made by the students during our interviews:

“Chancellor is like an extended family.”

“The teachers care.”

“If you have something going on, the teachers will stop whatever they are doing and focus on helping you get through it.”

“We are very proud of the career opportunities and Odyssey of the Mind.”

“The teachers support you.”

“Teachers take their time and are very tolerant.”

“We have a farm that makes us unique. Other schools don’t have animals you can care for and learn about.”

“You feel like home.”

“Not like any other school, they are here to help you.”

“They do an awesome job.”

“Their communications are better than my church.”

“They like to interact with our parents.”

“Everybody’s family.”

“Teachers take the time to get to know you.”

“Lots of trips, I never went anywhere before.”

During our very positive conversations, the students did mention a few things they would like to see, although they would not change anything in the program as it is now, some would like a greater academic challenge or more rigor in the classroom, more access to computers, a performing arts program like drama and more homogeneous groupings in courses.

Finally, (this one puts a lump in my throat) when I asked the students what would they like me to tell the school, they all agreed when one student said, "Tell them we love them."

Now, let's look at the actions The Chancellor Academy has taken in the continuance of its dreams and service to young people coming from up to fifty public schools in New Jersey.

We start with the planning process.

Lewis Carroll tells us why self-study and planning are essential. I quote:

“The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for sometime in silence: at last the Caterpillar addressed her.”“Who are you?” said the Caterpillar. After a long pregnant silence, Alice thought, "This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation."

Of course, the caterpillar keeps asking Alice, "who are you?" and she continues to avoid the question.

We asked Chancellor Academy, "Who are you?" Chancellor Academy through reviewing its mission statement, beliefs statement, and philosophy, also asked, "Who are we?" After extensive discussion, you reaffirmed your mission; you know who you are and what you want to do for young people.

Permit me to continue with Lewis Carroll and Alice lost in Wonderland.

Later in her search for a way out, Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in the tree.

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" she asks. "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." said the cat. "I don't much care where or know," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat.

Like for Alice, the lesson is clear. If you don't know who you are and where you want to go, it doesn't matter because any road will take you there. And if you don't know where you are going, and don't have a map, goal or plan, how do you know when you get there?

As guided by the Accreditation for Growth self study, you asked yourself, "Who are we and where do we want to get to."

The validation team believes Chancellor Academy has shown it has an excellent sense where it is, where it wants to go and has the plan and commitment to get there, for its young people.

As the time arrived for the school to re-apply for re-accreditation in the summer of 2009, Chancellor Academy as a for profit corporation with its governing body, leadership, and administration being one and the same, collectively decided to pursue MSA accreditation through the Accreditation for Growth protocol for the second time.

The internal coordinators attended two Middle States orientation programs on the AFG protocol. Over the winter, the planning team, that included the school leadership, actively participating and groups met weekly to discuss and write the self study with anticipation of the validation team visit in the spring of 2010. Using your all inclusive planning committee, your self-study planning was carefully done through information sharing, work sessions, surveys, evaluations, and document feedback. Considering the difficulties in involving parents and other constituencies of the school community due to confidentiality and a hectic busy world, the planning process included broad based stakeholder awareness if not involvement, and clear intention. The parents are passionately supportive of the faculty in anything the school does to improve their children's performance and sense of self. The directors and the internal coordinators led the process as vision setters, facilitators and coordinators. They worked to insure all voices were heard, and that the mission, and direction was universally shared.

All of you in this room worked so hard and have a part of this study. Both coordinators were fantastic.

As a side note, the lead internal coordinator has the rare ability to know the school from the inside out, being directly involved in the academic and all of the supportive elements of the school, while being capable of remaining objective and committed to the completion of all accreditation and strategic plan related activities. As she was the internal coordinator for the previous AFG process, as well as this one, the school should consider continuing this role after accreditation to insure the continuance of the process. This position would be instrumental in guiding the school in the refinement of the improvement plans as well as the implementation of an annual review process.

As the process continues with new faculty, staff, parents and students joining the community, it is important that communication and awareness activities keep all stakeholders informed and involved. Also, it will be very, very important that the school develop plans for the celebration and marketing, especially to school districts with possibly changing leadership or placement officers, of the school's unique features and benefits for kids. The creation and development of a comprehensive contingency strategic financial plan in these interesting financial times will be

critical to the future prosperity of the school.

The school community seems to have embraced the Accreditation for Growth process. For the future, the validation team senses that during the implementation and review processes, new items will surface for consideration, and the components of your improvement objectives, especially, will undergo a series of refinements in their development. Be ready and modify your plan accordingly as it benefits your students.

Overall, you can be proud of a process well done.

Objectives:

Proceeding to your objectives. You selected two goals, goals and objectives being the same entities. The objectives are clearly defined and endorsed by all stakeholders. You seem to have reliable methods, evaluation instruments, and long term plan of action and review. The objectives reflect the school's commitment to improving the educational program for its students. Your objectives address the increasing need for language, literacy improvement and the learning of technology program skills that have become basic everyday functions in one's professional and personal life today.

Chancellor Academy seems to have all the necessary pieces in place for the successful completion of your objectives.

The accreditation criteria for AFG objectives have been met.

Standards:

Now, let's proceed to the Commission on Secondary Schools' Standards for Accreditation. In the midst of uncertain times for school districts due to budgetary retrenchment and the pressure to keep special needs students in the traditional setting, Chancellor Academy has been able to maintain a viable level of enrollment. In fact, the school is thriving.

Also, contrary to contemporary institutions, the type of students currently referred to Chancellor Academy display less severe behavior issues and higher academic ability than those earlier clients of the school.

Accordingly, the school will need to raise the "academic bar," while exploring ways to provide remedial and compensatory strategies in reading to facilitate a student's ability to be successful in challenging subjects while dramatically improving one's reading from phonemic awareness to grade level fluency and comprehension.

The Chancellor Academy has examined and codified its mission, philosophy and beliefs from their universally held tenants helping adolescents with a history of academic, emotional and social issues.

The school's unique social therapeutic model, that is not the pathologically oriented medical model, permeates every aspect of the school's program, from group sessions to frequent situational interventions.

The school's philosophy and belief statements reflect the vision and values of the school.

The mission statement and belief statements are clear, concise, well defined and are obvious in the daily operations of the school.

The validation team found that the school is led by a very capable and compassionate leadership team, who holds the vision for the school's future.

Of course, again, at Chancellor Academy, leadership, governance, and ownership are one and the same.

The school's leadership should develop contingency plans for the possible dramatic change in enrollment, the possible loss of the school's current leased premises, and the need for additional facilities.

The validation team recommends that the school leadership explore the implementation of marketing, education, and cultivation programs for prospective client public schools and districts.

As teachers are the foundation of the school, the validation team recognizes their flexibility, creativity, and exceptional commitment to the needs of each individual student's growth and development.

The faculty of the Chancellor Academy works well as a team and with its daily meetings and interactions are on "top of it" every moment.

The school deserves Kudos for having an exceptional group of adults to teach, guide, and encourage your very special student body.

It is amazing that such a wide array of personalities get along so well, and it is because of you.

You teach the student rather than the subject to the student.

You are the student's stability.

When the student comes up to you, you make sure you are there.

The students know they can talk with the teachers and that you can be trusted.

You are always "on" for the kids.

You "hook" them.

You are their Thanksgiving dinner.

Because of the entire staff of Chancellor Academy, two students agreed that, I quote; "You have never been to school until you've been to Chancellor Academy. You've never been home, unless you've been to Chancellor Academy."

The validation team recognizes the high morale of the highly qualified teachers and staff.

Accordingly, the validation team suggests, in support of Chancellor's adults, that the school

review items such as professional development, special faculty stress reduction programs and breaks, and any factors that would enable the school to continue to attract and retain the best teachers in the future.

Also, the team suggests the school codify a plan of succession for the leadership positions in the administration of the school.

The educational program is clearly consistent with The Chancellor Academy mission statement and beliefs.

The Team commends the school for creating and maintaining a culture of learning, caring and support.

The students notice and they try to live up to the expectations of this unique culture.

The grouping of students by similar development rather than grade level is innovative and very effective in addressing the needs of its students. Continued refinement, especially as the school receives more academically motivated and able students, in grouping will further improve student achievement. You have recognized the need to raise the level of academic instruction and expectation. The validation team suggests the school explore implementing programs and assistance similar to the Wilson Reading Program, Kurzeil 3000, and Linda Mood Bell reading and math programs for remediation and compensatory practices.

Using very effective programs developed by the school itself, the members of the school community seems to be continually self-examining and exploring new ideas and programs to improve service to Chancellor Academy's young people.

Kudos for your family building activities.

Addressing other aspects of the standards in a shotgun fashion, I will make a few to the point statements:

- In addition to your extensive planning, Chancellor Academy has kept up with its previous objectives.
- Leadership should consider developing and sharing a strategic, long range plan as well as provide retreats to separate the staff from day to day activity to reflect and plan.
- Documentation and codification of meetings and progress in school improvement planning is very important.
- The business office is commended for its prudent management and maintaining a strong stable financial position.
- Explore ways to secure the weight training area, and secure the side doors of the school.
- Consider, after the start of the school day, making the side door by the office as the visitor entrance with camera and controlled lock.
- The school climate is collegial, caring, organized, and accepting.
- Ensure that safety goggles, and maximum safety practices are employed in the wood shop. Place safety notices in the room.
- Install uniform permanent emergency exit signs, easy to see in a smoke filled area.
- Consider a performing arts program as a valuable addition that would serve your population well.
- Consider developing your own battery of tests, similar to standardized tests that would measure progress made by each individual student with a baseline set by the abilities of the student as one enters Chancellor Academy.

- Kudos, on your point system and reward trips.
- Continue to look into electronic books to assist in your reading program.
- The school's information resources and technology adequately support the total educational program and encourage students and staff to broaden and extend their learning.
- Find a place to keep your server in a secure climate controlled place with access limited to appropriate people.
- The well organized dynamic counseling services are a driving force for the school's unique approach. Consider creating a suite of private counseling rooms to facilitate confidential sharing of information. The validation team recommends giving each counselor a computer (preferably a laptop for mobility) to facilitate the timely exchange of important student information with district and outside agencies or professionals.
- Focused on the social needs of the students, student services are simply exceptional and organized in accord with the school's mission, philosophy, and beliefs.
- You deserve compliments for your modeling what you want your students to model.
- Although students call their teachers by their first names, it is done with the highest respect and, in fact, brings the students closer to their mentors.
- There is the old saying: "Students don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."
- They know you care a lot. You respect and treat them as human beings. You make these kids feel normal and at Chancellor they are normal.

- From a space perspective, you have a near full school. You have arranged for expansion in enrollment or program offerings with the new annex.
- The school's facilities are maintained and kept clean in an exemplary manner.
- The team was impressed by the work done in all subject areas.

Again, the commitment and dedication of the faculty is recognized. The relationships between staff and students demonstrate respect, fairness, and understanding. The halls seem like the channels of a beehive with everyone scurrying about knowing and doing an exact job for the moment. You are an ideal model for situational leadership and problem solving. You juggle many balls in the air, at the same time, and you don't seem to drop any.

Hopefully, this Accreditation for Growth process will be another turning point for the school in serving the needs of your kids and improve student progress.

The Chancellor Academy satisfies the accreditation criteria for all twelve standards.

By the way, before I conclude, good luck tonight at the NJPAC. We'll be looking for it on YouTube.

Therefore, the Chancellor Academy Validation Team will recommend accreditation to the Commission for Secondary Schools.

We have been privileged to witness the excitement of The Chancellor Academy community. You may take great well-deserved pride in having a program that really "works" for those who have floundered in the traditional academic environment. I wonder what genius or creative spirits are inside these walls that will unfold as you open your clients to self determination and dreams. Because of you, I wonder how these so-called "failures" will weave their own special fabric toward personal success. What will be their story?

What will be their gift to us and the world?

Most importantly, you are returning to these young people the human right that has been robbed from them. You are giving back to them the right to hope.

You do what you say you do.

Good things are happening for the young people of Chancellor Academy.

We hope and trust this service will continue for a long time into the future.

You are guiding them toward understanding themselves and becoming responsible, value-centered, self-determined adults.

You are committed to making your objectives into realities - all for your students, who come first.

So, on behalf of your kids, and as one of the kids said, "Thank you for all you do."

You not only teach them, you accept these special young people just as they are and you open their dreams.

As another student directed, "Keep doing what you're doing."

Also, thank you for allowing Mary, Tim, Jason and I be witnesses and part (albeit brief) of your special place.

Because of you, Chancellor Academy is an amazing place for special young people.

Thank you and God speed.

Leslie (Les) H. McLean, Ed.D.