

The Self-Study for High Schools in Transition – WASC and SLCs

Introduction

The decision convert a large, comprehensive school into a community of SLCs is a significant development that has a major, immediate impact on the daily lives of all stakeholders. This conversion will also affect the school wide efforts to implement prior action plans and the ability of the complex to coordinate improvement efforts in the future. The District policy to create wall-to-wall SLCs is based upon research which indicates a number of positive student outcomes including: higher achievement, lower dropout rates, higher completion rates, lower rates of violence and vandalism, more positive feelings about self and school, more participation in school activities, increased completion rates of college level courses and the closing of the achievement gap. Teacher response parallels these positive impacts by displaying more positive satisfactions and enhanced morale (Raywid, 1996; Cotton, 2001; Darling-Hammond, Aness, and Ort, 2002; National Education Association, 2006).

The Bulletin 1600 conversion guide along with District SLC attribute rubrics are designed to mirror the WASC process. Both require collaboration, development of a vision, data analysis, goal setting, gap analysis and action planning. A successful conversion of the large school complex will definitely indicate that the school is ready and capable of performing a successful self-study using the Focus On Learning: Joint WASC/CDE Process Guide. Note: The Visiting Committee may want to read the SLC proposals and meet separately with selective SLC stakeholders. Everyone should be familiar with the proposal, history, organization, and progress of his/her SLC.

PART I. Setting the Stage

- 1) Cooperate with the Visiting Committee Chairperson. Develop a mutually acceptable plan of action. Set a positive tone for the self-study.
- 2) Align the Vision Statement for each SLC with the overall Schoolwide Vision. An SLC Vision, for example, incorporate key phrases and concepts found in the school wide vision while reflecting the unique focus of the SLC. Note: If the Schoolwide Vision is revised, include mention of SLCs and “personalization” within the text.
- 3) Align the expected local outcomes for SLC students with the Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLRs). There are three viable alternatives:
 - (a) Develop a written statement of Expected Communitywide Learning Results (ECLRs) in order to ensure complete alignment. Arrange these interdisciplinary, SLC specific outcomes under the broad categories of the established Schoolwide ESLRs (i.e. collaborative workers, complex thinkers, effective communicators). SLC local outcomes must be reflected along with state standards in the site plan for creating a new standards-based educational system (CDE Aiming High, Chapters 4 and 5).
 - b) Organize lists, as above, of traditional learning objectives for all SLC students including: description of specific cognitive, affective, or behavioral outcomes, tasks and conditions of learning, methods of

assessment, and criteria for acceptable performance. Stress higher order processing using Bloom's taxonomy.

c) Organize thematic or integrated curriculum units around the ESLRs which are consistent with the SLC's unique academic focus. These units will stress such desired results as essential understandings, key concepts, selective competencies, or habits of mind. Delineate the sequence of learning experiences, performances, instructional strategies, essential questions, and multiple assessments which have been developed through backward planning. The SLC must be in agreement as to the implementation of these units. Save your exemplars for show-and-tell.

- 4) Include SLC Lead Teachers on the school's Leadership Team.
- 5) Include representatives of all SLCs on the key Focus Groups according to their strengths and interests.
- 6) Include every SLC, meeting as a Committee of the Whole, within the cycle of Home Group meetings (i.e. departments, support staff, students and parents) in order to perform a thorough analysis of the SLC programs and outcomes. Meeting as a Committee of the Whole will allow the SLC staff to review evidence, learn from each other, and reach consensus in providing input to Focus Groups and the Leadership Team.
- 7) Disaggregate significant student data according to the SLCs and record the analysis of that data by the SLCs. Performance/assessment data should generally be shared among SLCs, and between SLCs and core departments for the benefit of all students. SLCs are not only consumers, but are collectors, organizers, and presenters of data. Members of these organizational structures are mutually accountable for student progress and may offer each other additional perspectives for understanding student learning results. Through meaningful collaboration, these shared perspectives will certainly supplement, and may complement the school wide efforts to analyze relevant data and take coordinated action.
- 8) Include members from each SLC on committees and school wide teams whose task is to analyze student outcome data. Establish a training-of-trainers model for the benefit of all SLCs; SLCs must be capable of performing critical data analysis and establishing a system of continuous improvement in order to work effectively as an autonomous educational unit. Personalization structures and strategies which result in deep teacher-student relationships should facilitate the individualized analysis of assessment data, student-centered interpretations, modification of the teaching/learning process, and the establishment of a focused professional development program in each SLC. Note: WASC encourages innovations which are supported by research. SLCs provide an opportunity to conduct a variety of innovations with the results shared throughout the school.
- 9) Revisit the School Impact Report regarding the practical effects upon SLC programs and practices which are the result of school wide policies, procedures, activities, and the decisions of key personnel (i.e. elected school wide deans and SLC intervention plans; Saturday school and SLC tutoring). Coordinate all policies and procedures, and develop communication systems in order to ensure consistent, coherent support for student learning. SLCs generally do not stand alone and are intricately intertwined with mandated school wide/District programs. Students benefit when these programs are well coordinated.

- 10) Make sure that all stakeholders can recount the role that they played, or are playing, in the collaborative and cooperative process of school wide conversion into SLCs. If challenges were encountered, be candid in describing how the school worked together to reach consensus and take collective action.
- 11) Establish a school wide decision making body which includes SLC leaders and has the authority to resolve conflicts arising between SLCs in a fair and equitable manner. Keep minutes of all discussions and decisions regarding SLCs.
- 12) Revisit the issue of “equity” among all SLCs. The Visiting Committee may be sensitive to “have, and have-not” SLCs, issues of unfair competition and pupil sorting, as well as other types of preferential treatment. Each SLC must be provided a fair and authentic opportunity to offer rich, well supported, high-level instructional programs which are designed to promote equitable outcomes for all students.
- 13) Collect samples of SLC projects and other evidence of student work to show the Visiting Committee. Retain accompanying rubrics, scoring guides, project descriptions, teacher evaluations with comments, etc. Be prepared to relate this evidence to the ESLRs and SLC Learning Results.

PART II. Talking the Talk

- 14) Remember the “Crazy Eights”: Collaborate, Communicate, Cooperate, Coordinate, Consolidate (strengthen through structures, systems and culture), Create (adopt/adapt research-based best practices); Cultivate (nurture/improve) and Celebrate learning.
- 15) In recounting the progress made on the school wide action plan and responding to the critical areas of follow-up, note the following: the proposed and expected outcomes of the SLC reform; the role of SLCs in supplementing District programs; the progress made by individual SLCs in contributing to the comprehensive, school wide effort by implementing their proposals or relevant attribute action plans. Some SLCs will be further along the implementation continuum than others. Verify the effectiveness of these reform efforts by analyzing the interaction of multiple kinds of data (FOL: Using Data). This progress section provides an opportunity to take inventory of all school improvement activities, check for consistent objectives, uncover competing or conflicting practices, measure positive impacts, and ensure that school wide coherence has been established. Note: A key question to be addressed, How has the school integrated all initiatives into one “umbrella” school wide action plan?
- 16) Carefully compare the SLC’s written proposal/plans with the WASC criteria in order to build a common frame of reference for the self-study. The components of the District’s SLC attributes readily integrate with WASC rubric guides.

(Item analysis to follow)