



LEADING THE JOURNEY

An E-newsletter on *EXCELLENCE* in Leadership

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Principals' Handbook

<http://adventisteducation.org/principals-handbook/>

Accreditation

Leadership, [NAD Principals' Handbook](#) (excerpt)

The principal is responsible for leading and managing the accreditation process. The accreditation process is vital for holding the school accountable to accepted standards of quality and facilitating school improvement. Accreditation protocols provide the framework for a continuous process of self-evaluation, accountability, and improvement. **This must not be seen as a one-time event squeezed into a busy school calendar once every few years.** Rather, this process provides the opportunity for engaging stakeholders in self-evaluation, and identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement in the school. Students, teachers, parents, board members, and the administration should have opportunity to review data that measure school programs and work on action plans that will lead to school improvement.

All Adventist schools are accredited by the Adventist Accrediting Association, Inc. Most secondary schools are also

accredited by a regional accrediting body. Material and resources about the evaluative process are available from the NAD Office of Education website. The local conference office of education (LCOE) and the union conference office of education (UCOE) will provide direction about the accreditation process and how to prepare the necessary reports.

The principal must:

- Be familiar with the most recent visiting committee report, noting especially the major areas for improvement and the approved Action Plans.
- Prepare the annual Progress Report, which is a response to the major areas for improvement, and report on progress in completing the Action Plans.
- Organize and supervise the self-study process. (See the instructions for completing the self-study report in the [NAD Evaluative Criteria](#).)

Instead of Doing That, Do This

Doug Herrmann, Head Master, Loma Linda Academy

We all are faced with the task from time to time to develop an action plan of school improvement. I know from personal experience that it is not as easy as it may first appear. Allow me to offer suggestions that I have gathered for writing a bad action plan for your school's self-study document. For those who prefer to fail at that, I also offer some opposite ideas.

1. Work by yourself

INSTEAD...An action plan must grow out of a study that includes all stakeholders. It must be part of a school-wide assessment of the current program or profile

2. Base it on jobs that need to be done or are already scheduled

INSTEAD...Your plan must not be a list of "Must-do" items. It is not to be a list of capital items to be completed. For example, "Paint the Administration Building" is not an action plan. Rather, you are looking

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Obtaining and Maintaining

Teryl Loeffler, Secondary Associate, Pacific Union Conference

Since we believe in high standards, all Adventist schools receive accreditation from the Adventist Accrediting Association. Adventist academies also obtain a second accreditation from a public, regional accrediting agency recognized by the state and federal government. As a highly prized designation that must be earned by the school, accreditation is a type of guarantee, or stamp of approval, which says a school has met high standards as assessed by the accrediting agency.

Accreditation demonstrates to present and future clientele the institution's seriousness about its mission, student learning, and ongoing school improvement. Accreditation validates the school's hard work and progress in a variety of important areas, including: student learning, curriculum, instruction, assessment, student personal and academic growth, resource management and development. Thus, every effort should be made to promote accreditation to the parents and constituents, as it indicates the school has undergone a rigorous program of peer

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Instead of Doing That, Do This

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for areas of your program to be strengthened which will improve student learning.

3. Do not address student learning

INSTEAD...Student learning must be the focus of each of your action plans. Whatever you call them – Expected School-wide Learning Outcomes, Student Learning Objectives, or something else, these must be addressed in your plans. Each action plan will probably not address all of those outcomes. That is okay. Put another way, a visiting team should be able to see a parallel finding in the self-study that corresponds to each action plan.

4. Have lots of them

INSTEAD...Two to four is sufficient. Make sure each action plan is worthy of the school's focus and that it is achievable. The current thought is toward one overarching Action Plan with various aspects.

5. Be vague and general

INSTEAD...Be specific. Think through the steps necessary to accomplish the growth goal. Break the plan down into manageable and obtainable steps.

6. Keep them to yourself

INSTEAD...Make sure that there has been involvement of all stakeholders in the process. Be sure your visiting team doesn't have the pleasure of introducing your faculty, staff, board, or any stakeholders to the Action Plans in your document.

7. Ignore strong portions of your program

INSTEAD...It is okay to include things you are doing well and want to make sure stay strong. You do not want strong areas to become future areas of growth due to lack of attention.

8. Keep the time line short – one year maximum

INSTEAD...These should be plans that will be deep and significant enough to provide focus for several years. You should be thinking in terms of ongoing and continuous school improvement

9. “Pour them in concrete”

INSTEAD...Constantly reevaluate your plans. If circumstances change, modify them and document what you have done. You will need to discuss those changes in your next self-study document.

10. Whatever you do, forget it

INSTEAD...The biggest mistake is to never follow up on the action plan. Even if you succeed in writing a bad one, if it has steps, DO THEM! ☸

Obtaining and Maintaining

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review directed by the accrediting agency.

Approval of accreditation is not granted on receipt of the application and fee. A serious, exhaustive evaluation of a school's programs, facilities, sustainability, and plans for the future composes the approval process.

Once accreditation is obtained, it is not permanent, it must be *maintained*. A school must demonstrate, during a regular review process, that it has improved and maintained high standards. Simply maintaining the status quo is incompatible with the purposes of accreditation.

Accreditation is all about standards, high standards, uniform standards. Standards are important to parents who are investing in the future of their children. A question most parents ask, “*Is Adventist education worth the cost and time invested?*” High standards help to reassure parents that every sacrifice is indeed worth it.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges, the regional accrediting agency for California, describes the continuous process of improvement in this way:

“Accreditation is an ongoing six-year cycle of quality whereby the school demonstrates the capacity, commitment, and competence to support high-quality student learning and ongoing school improvement...Throughout the cycle, a school is expected to address the school-wide action plan and demonstrate evidence of acceptable student achievement and school improvement.”

A key component of “demonstrating evidence of acceptable student achievement and school improvement” is that of data collection. Schools must be intentional in the process of data collection. Not simply data for the purpose of having data, but data that validates the disaggregation and interpretation of student outcomes.

In addition to a specific focus on learning and ongoing school improvement, a school's accreditation has many direct benefits for students. One of the most important benefits is that teachers have professional credentials and center their teaching on student learning. In preparing for college, our courses are designed “to be academically challenging, involving substantial reading, writing, problems and laboratory work (as appropriate), and show serious attention to analytical thinking, factual content and developing students' oral and listening skills.”

Schools make the process of accreditation a year-by-year endeavor by working with all stakeholders, being painfully transparent in examining, assessing, and setting goals for student learning. Adventist schools maintain an atmosphere of continuous school improvement and high-quality student learning. Our parents, Adventist educational leaders, and accrediting agencies demand it. ☸

“Whatever you do, work at it wholeheartedly as though you were doing it for the Lord and not merely for people” Colossians 3:23, ISV.