



## GIVING YOURSELF AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-REFLECTION THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

A Message from MSA-CESS President Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., C.P.A.

The holidays and the start of a new year naturally offer valuable opportunities for self-reflection. However, we don't always have to wait until the calendar changes to look within, adjust our priorities if necessary and set new goals.

Just as the accreditation process relies on schools to do the challenging work of setting goals and developing plans for the future, we are doing the same here at MSA-CESS. Guided by our strategic plan, we have spent the past several months reflecting on where our organization has been, where we hope to go and how we're going to get there.

We have examined our capacity as a staff, and made several additions and changes to ensure we are well positioned to continue to provide our members with the high-quality services they expect and deserve from Middle States.

We have also renewed our commitment to strengthening and building upon the partnerships we have forged over the years, including with other regional and co-operating accrediting agencies, which we think of as our "critical friends."

I am happy to report that MSA-CESS was granted renewed recognition as an institutional and programmatic accrediting agency by the U.S. Department of Education. The decision was based in part on the recommendation of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI).

Personally, I have had the pleasure of visiting several Middle States accredited schools and candidates throughout the world and witnessing firsthand how they are making a difference in the lives of students each and every day.

While visiting Kuumba Preparatory School of the Arts in Washington, D.C., I met teachers who attended Kuumba as children, became educators as adults, and now pay it forward as teachers at the school.

Central High School, a public school in Philadelphia, Pa. was reaccredited using the Sustaining Excellence (SE) Protocol. At their recent colloquium, the school community demonstrated how their STEM curriculum is incorporated into everything their students do, even physical education. Central is testament that the SE Protocol is a powerful tool for using strategic planning and action research as vehicles for growth and improvement.

Last month, I toured schools in Puerto Rico that are not only surviving after being devastated by Hurricane Maria two years ago, but are thriving. I've also had the pleasure of meeting with leaders from several Diocesan schools and Career and Technical schools and getting to know teachers and administrators from the Mediterranean Association of International Schools at their annual conference.

In every instance, I've been excited to see the tremendous work that is happening to provide all students with a quality education and continuously grow and improve.

As 2019 comes to a close, I wish you the very best as you reflect back on the year and look ahead to your goals for the future. Have a safe and joyous holiday season, and a Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Marie McCauley Ed.D. CPA".

Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., C.P.A.

### Also In This Issue:

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• Outstanding Volunteers Honored For Their Work

## SIX SCHOOLS AWARDED PRESTIGIOUS PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION

The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools voted at its biannual meeting this fall to recognize six schools for their Programs of Distinction. They are:

- Advantage Career Institute, Eatontown, N.J., Program of Distinction in Counseling and Support Services for Post-Secondary Career & Technical Schools
- Fox Chapel Area High School, Fox Chapel, Pa., Programs of Distinction in Music, School Counseling and Visual Arts.
- Mount Lebanon High School, Pittsburgh, Pa., Program of Distinction in School Counseling
- Saint Joan of Arc, Hershey, Pa., Program of Distinction in STEM
- Trinity Hall, Tinton Falls, N.J., Program of Distinction in STEM
- Ursuline Academy, Wilmington, Del., Program of Distinction in Global Literacies

The Middle States Programs of Distinction initiative provides external validation of an accredited school's accomplishments in specific areas of expertise and enables schools to take accreditation to the next level.

MSA accredited schools are eligible to apply for Program of Distinction recognition for outstanding programs in Global Literacies, World Languages, Visual Arts, Music, Early Childhood Education, Service Learning, School Counseling, Counseling and Support Services for Post-Secondary Career & Technical Schools and STEM.

Learn more, [here](#).

## MORE THAN 180 SCHOOLS EARN ACCREDITATION, REACCREDITATION

The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools voted at its biannual meeting this fall to accredit or reaccredit 183 schools and school systems in 25 states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and 27 other countries.

Among the schools that earned accreditation or reaccreditation are more than 30 Catholic schools, several charter and vocational schools, 12 public schools and Huntington Learning Centers in 11 states.

A full list of schools and school systems that earned accreditation or reaccreditation is available [here](#).

### HAVE YOU REGISTERED FOR AN UPCOMING WORKSHOP?

MSA-CESS offers all workshops free of charge to members, and we have a series of workshops to meet your needs at every stage of the 7-year accreditation cycle. [Sign up today!](#)



Counseling and Support Services, Advantage Career Institute, Eatontown, N.J.



Music Program, Fox Chapel Area High School, Fox Chapel, Pa.



STEM Program, Trinity Hall, Tinton Falls, N.J.



Global Literacies Program, Ursuline Academy, Wilmington, Del.

# SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD: ACADEMY FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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### About the Sustaining Excellence Protocol

Under the Middle States Sustaining Excellence protocol, rather than complete a traditional self-study for reaccreditation, leading schools have the option to focus their time, energy and resources on developing, implementing and sharing an action research project for achieving their goals. A key component of the protocol is the requirement for schools to hold a colloquium to share their research results with the broader education community with the goal of improving education on a wider scale.

### Notes from the Field



The Academy for Information Technology (AIT) is a small, four-year career academy based in Scotch Plains, N.J., that fosters critical thinking skills in its culturally diverse student population. By stressing intellectual curiosity, hard work, ethical behavior and technological expertise with business integration, the school community guides its students to achieve their greatest potential. The AIT graduate is prepared academically, technologically and interpersonally for the challenges of the future.

AIT earned reaccreditation through Middle States in 2016 under the Sustaining Excellence protocol with the goal of using action research as a framework to develop career readiness skills in students in all grades. The school posed seven research questions:

1. What more can be done to prepare our students for careers in business and in information technology?
2. How can we increase the frequency and efficacy of networking events?
3. How can we expand the role of school counselors in student career exploration?
4. How can we increase the frequency and efficacy of structured learning experience?
5. As a faculty, how can we better integrate business and information technology skills and concepts across the curriculum?
6. Because business and information technology requires a lifetime commitment to learning, how can we better prepare students to conduct independent, academic research?
7. How can we expand our relationships with local universities to ensure our students excel at the university level and have the potential to earn college credit?



In setting out to answer the questions, AIT engaged the entire school community, including faculty, administration, members of the AIT advisory board, parents, students, and outside business leaders. As a group, they researched and identified specific areas of focus and adopted an initiative called “Great Schools INSPIRE.”

Working with its stakeholders and guided by action research, AIT implemented a variety of successful plans and programs. Among the highlights:

- Career events including Statistics Career Day, Novo Nordisk Career Day, Novo Nordisk Field Trip, Bell Labs Guest Teacher, 12 Days of Code, Cyber Security Month, HACKUC III
- Pre- and post-surveys for interns
- Adoption of the Career Interest Profiler
- Development of a student career interest survey

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## SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH NOTES FROM THE FIELD: ACADEMY FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (CONTINUED)

(continued from page 3)

- Development and incorporation of a presentation rubric throughout the curriculum and across disciplines
- Adoption of an e-portfolio requirement for all students beginning freshman year
- Acceptance into the Waksman Student Scholars Program, which provides opportunities for high school students and their teachers to conduct an authentic research project in molecular biology and bioinformatics and publish their findings.
- Adoption of AP Capstone program
- Development of a research rubric to evaluate student research

By developing and implementing a multi-tiered approach to continuous school improvement, based on action research, AIT is building on its success to further prepare its students for a viable future.

### MSA AROUND THE GLOBE



Middle States President Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., toured schools throughout Puerto Rico last month, including the Saint Francis School in Carolina, Puerto Rico and American Military Academy in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico.



Middle States volunteers traveled to Costa Rica where they visited schools to share ideas, teach and learn from local educators. Our team was fortunate to be able to spend time at Country Day School (pictured) and Costa Rica International Academy.



Last month, Middle States leaders traveled to Cape Town, South Africa for the Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA) 2019 Conference: "Learning from the Past, Shaping the Future." Congratulations to AISA on 50 years of supporting international school education in Africa!



In October, we attended the NESAC Council of Overseas Schools Fall Leadership Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, where we worked with our accredited international schools with long-term planning and goal setting.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS!

We are happy to announce the recipients of this year's Susan K. Nicklas and F. Laird Evans Outstanding Volunteer Awards.

**Nancy Burke, Ed.D.**, a longtime educator and the former principal of Trinity High School in Camp Hill, Pa., is a recipient of this year's **F. Laird Evans Outstanding Volunteer Award**.



From Left to Right: MSA President Lisa Marie McCauley, Nancy Burke and MSA Commissioner Clay Petry

"Nancy's professional experience and leadership style have made her an asset to Middle States and to our member schools," said Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., president of the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools. "Middle States volunteers share a passion for improving education and making a difference for schools and students throughout the world, and Nancy is proof of that."

Burke, who served as Trinity High School's principal until her retirement in 2009, has led teams of educators on visits to schools around the world, including Catholic, Islamic and charter schools and a school for the deaf.

In addition to serving as principal, Burke has held adjunct faculty positions at Harrisburg Area Community College in Harrisburg, Pa., and at Pennsylvania State University's Harrisburg campus. Burke earned her undergraduate degree in biology and a doctorate in educational leadership from Immaculata University, Immaculata, Pa. She also holds a master of science degree in biology from Shippensburg University in Shippensburg, Pa.

*F. Laird Evans is the former president of the Middle States Commission on Elementary Schools and an ardent supporter of school accreditation.*

**Michael L. Smith, M.Ed.**, Director of the American School of Valencia, in Valencia, Spain, is the recipient of this year's **Susan K. Nicklas Outstanding Volunteer Award**.



From Left to right: MSA President Lisa Marie McCauley, Michael Smith and MSA Commissioner Michael Kuchar

"Michael is a dedicated volunteer with Middle States, and we are grateful that he has been so willing to lend his time and expertise," said Lisa Marie McCauley, Ed.D., President of the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools. "Michael recognizes how powerful it is for schools to work with their peers in education to share tips and tools for success, supporting each other throughout the accreditation process and beyond."

Smith has led teams of educators on visits to schools in countries such as Kuwait, China, Spain, Moldova, Malta, Luxembourg and Germany. He is also a member of Middle States' International Schools Advisory Committee, where he volunteers time twice annually to review and provide feedback on Middle States accreditation reports.

Prior to becoming Director of the American School in Valencia in 2013, Smith was Head of School for ES International School in Barcelona, Spain and Naples, Fla. Smith earned his bachelor's degree in history from West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va., and his master's degree in international education from Endicott College, based in Beverly, Mass.

*Susan K. Nicklas served as the executive director of the Middle States Commission on Secondary Schools from 2002 to 2005 and spent nine years on staff prior to becoming director.*

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS  
FROM MIDDLE  
STATES!**

Stay up to date on happenings at Middle States and member schools around the world when you like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#)!



**Middle States Association Commissions  
on Elementary and Secondary Schools**

3624 Market Street, 2 West  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680

267.284.5000  
610.617.1106  
info@msa-cess.org  
www.msa-cess.org

