10 Questions About WASC

By Peter Kimball, TAS WASC Coordinator

TAS has just completed a self-study as part of the WASC accreditation process. To help understand the process, the following are some common questions that members of the TAS community may have.

Q: What does WASC stand for?

A: WASC stands for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, a world-renowned accreditation association that oversees the academic programs of over 4500 pre-K-12 schools, two year community/junior colleges, and four year universities in California, Hawaii, the American Pacific islands, and in East Asia.

Q: Why is WASC accreditation necessary and beneficial for TAS?

A: Accreditation is vital to the assurance of a quality educational program and reflects the ongoing efforts at TAS and other schools to provide a high quality education that meets the needs of the students it serves. When a student attends an accredited school like TAS, other schools that the student may attend have confidence that the educational program that TAS offers is trustworthy and highly effective. This facilitates the transfer of student transcripts from TAS to other pre-K-12 schools and is vital to the college acceptance process.

Q: How long is a WASC accreditation term?

A: A normal WASC accreditation term is six years. However, if the WASC visiting committee identifies any problems, serious issues or concerns with a school’s educational program, resources or school climate, they can may only offer limited accreditation terms of one or two years with follow up visits. In extreme cases, accreditation can be denied. Every school that is accredited by WASC has a three year mid-term visit during the six year cycle to insure that the improvement plan is being implemented effectively.

Q: What is the WASC Self-Study?

A: A school seeking accreditation from WASC conducts a formal Self-Study process during its fifth year in the six-year accreditation cycle. TAS has completed the Self-Study by gathering and analyzing evidence from all stakeholders in the school community regarding the current state of the school’s educational program and operations. This process closely ties to the strategic planning process already in place at TAS.

Q: Wait a minute – how am *I* providing input for the current WASC Self-Study process?

A: Many of the procedures already in place at TAS provide data for the WASC Self-Study process. Examples include the parent perception surveys that are completed with reregistration, feedback on the use of facilities, the Faculty Advisory Council survey, student feedback and input regarding school programs, standardized test scores, and School Board meeting minutes to name a few. While you may not be directly involved in providing information for the Self-Study, you will have undoubtedly contributed in many ways to the process simply by your regular involvement and communication with the school.

Q: But is there a formal structure to the Self-Study process?

A: Indeed there is! There are four Focus Groups, each assigned with gathering and analyzing data about the organization of student learning, curriculum instruction and assessment, support for student personal and academic growth and school culture and environment. Each of these groups requests information from various Home Groups, which consist of the teams already in place in the school organizational structure, such as the Grade 2 Teaching Team or Upper School English Department. Support staff, parents and school board members are also included in these groups.

Q: Does the WASC Self-Study include the good, the bad and the ugly of TAS?

A: The WASC Self-Study intends to be an honest reflection of how we believe our school is currently doing. This includes what we are doing well, what we feel we need to improve, and a clearly articulated plan that describes how we intend to reach our strategic goals. TAS is committed to completing a thorough and objective self-study that accurately assesses the strengths and weaknesses of our educational program.

Q: When is the WASC accreditation team scheduled to visit TAS, and who is on this team?

A: The eight-member WASC accreditation team will visit TAS in April of 2018. The Co-Chairs are Dr. Harlan Lyso, former head of Seoul Foreign School for over 20 years and a superintendent of the year award winner, and Ms. Debbie Reed, retired superintendent of the Polytechnic School in California. The other committee members will consist of other professional educators who have experience with the WASC accreditation process and come from a variety of U.S. and international schools.

Q: How can we trust a group of people who are not familiar with TAS to provide reliable input about our educational program?

A: All visiting committee members will receive our updated school profile with detailed information regarding all aspects of the educational program at TAS. The current profile is available for viewing on the TAS website in the WASC information link. The Self-Study report will also be sent to all visiting committee members well in advance of their visit so they will have time to read it carefully and familiarize themselves with how we think we are doing as a school. The goal of the visiting committee is to validate our Self-Study process and findings and to help identify anything that we might have missed.

Q: If I have any questions about WASC, accreditation, or the Self-Study process, whom should I ask?

A: The WASC link on the TAS homepage is the best place to go for the most recent information related to the WASC accreditation process at TAS. Simply log in as you normally do to access the TAS home page. The Self-Study is published here as well. This report was completed in December, 2017. The WASC website is www.acswasc.org. For questions regarding specific TAS accreditation issues, please contact Dr. Catriona Moran, Deputy Head of School at moranc@tas.tw or Peter Kimball, WASC Coordinator at kimballp@tas.tw.