

Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools

Synopsis of Report of 2011

Christian Brothers Academy

During the 2010-11 school year, Christian Brothers Academy (CBA) undertook the Accreditation for Growth (AFG) process to become re-accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (MSAS). The AFG process relies in part on an intensive self-evaluation component that involved the time and efforts of a Planning Team comprising faculty, administration, student, and Board of Trustees representatives. The Planning Team's efforts resulted in a *Plan for Growth and Improvement* that establishes the following as objectives for CBA for the next seven years:

- » To demonstrate our Lasallian core principles through increased participation in voluntary religious activities, participation in positive peer programs, and increased school and community service.

- » To promote our quality education through increased ability of the students to communicate by writing effectively.

CBA's faculty, administration, and staff are working collaboratively on Action Plans to implement the Plan's objectives and measure the school's progress towards achieving them (see the Appendix that follows this Synopsis).

In November 2010, a Visiting Team comprised of professional educators appointed by the Middle States Association visited CBA for a period of three days in order to assess the results of the self-evaluation and the effectiveness of CBA's total school operation. The purpose of the Team's on-site visit was threefold: First, the Team was to determine whether CBA continues to meet the MSAS's *12 Standards for Accreditation*; second, the Team was to determine if CBA meets the requirements for a planning ethic and planning processes of the AFG protocol; and third, the Team reviewed the content of the Plan for Growth and Improvement in student performance developed by CBA's Planning Team to determine the validity and clarity of the Plan, together with the level of commitment to implementing the Plan and achieving its objectives expressed by the school's community of stakeholders.

During the course of their three days at CBA, Visiting Team members met with CBA's stakeholders-- representatives of CBA's administration, staff, faculty, students, parents and guardians, and trustees. The Team observed classes and reviewed an extensive array of materials pertaining to CBA's history, daily administration, academics, athletics, and extracurricular activities. After this review and visit, the Visiting Team assessed CBA's practices and policies according to the *12 Standards*. This assessment accompanied a recommendation by the Team of full certification for CBA.

In spring 2011, the Team sent its full report and comments to CBA. The Team's full Report can be viewed on CBA's website (see the *Overview* section of the *Home* tab on the main webpage); a synopsis of the Visiting Team's observations and recommendations is set forth below.

I. The Context of the School:

Observations: The Visiting Team recognized the rich history and traditions of CBA, as well as the school's ability to weather economic downturns fairly well. Visiting Team members acknowledged CBA's long tradition of excellence as well as the excellence of its financial planning and management.

Recommendations: To enhance CBA's tradition of excellence, the Visiting Team recommended that CBA explore partnerships with local colleges so that students may obtain credits. In the Team's view, this would increase the attractiveness of attending CBA. The Team also recommended that, in lieu of building its own performance space, CBA explore forging relationships with professional performance venues in Syracuse.

II. The Period of Appraisal:

Observations: The Visiting Team found that CBA took the Period of Appraisal very seriously, as evidenced by its selection of an Internal Coordinator and the requirement that faculty and staff be actively involved in the AFG process. Surveys sent to stakeholders were given serious consideration and acted on. Changes were made to the structure of the Middle States process to enable continuity.

Recommendation: The Visiting Team recommended that a member of each Action Plan team be responsible for reporting to the Planning Team.

III. The Planning Process:

Observations: The Visiting Team felt that the school's current Planning Team comprises a good representation of CBA's stakeholders; has a clear sense of purpose; and possesses the energy and understanding necessary for real involvement. There is awareness of a need for continuity and involvement. The Visiting Team noted that the current Internal Coordinator competently and objectively fulfills the role and mandate, but suggested that a plan for succession should be developed. The Team also noted respect and professionalism among CBA's administrative personnel and their clear understanding of their duties. Additionally, the Team commended the Board of Trustees for its devotion to CBA. The Visiting Team commented particularly on CBA's concern with and attention to communication issues. It was noted that a vigorous effort has been made to improve communications, with success.

Recommendation: The Team recommended that the Planning Team include a wider range of stakeholders, such as student delegates from underclasses, and that it have fewer administrative personnel involved.

The Visiting Team's assessment was that, overall, CBA MEETS the AFG Protocol requirements.

IV. Plan For Growth and Improvement:

Observations: In determining whether CBA has adequate "building blocks" for meeting and maintaining accreditation, the Visiting Team found that:

- ▶ All stakeholder communities know, understand, and support CBA's stated Mission and do their best to achieve it.

- ▶ The stakeholders are invested in CBA's beliefs and core values.
- ▶ The school's *Profile of Graduates* "...expresses clearly the outcomes of CBA's Mission and Beliefs put into practice...."
- ▶ The "Mission, Beliefs and *Profile of Graduates* are an integral part of the conscious and subconscious of the community...."

Recommendation: The Visiting Team recommended that CBA continue training all of its stakeholders in the Lasallian principles.

V. Performance Objectives and Action Plans:

The Performance Objectives and Visiting Team recommendations for those Objectives are noted in their entirety in the Appendix to this Synopsis.

VI. The Middle States Standards:

The Visiting Team found that CBA MEETS the requirements of each of the 12 MSSA Standards:

Standard 1: Philosophy and Mission:

Observation: The Visiting Team noted that CBA's Mission drives the school and its life. All stakeholders are aware of and support this long-standing Mission, with it focus on the development of students "of good character who place a premium on education and on treating each other with respect."

Recommendations: The Visiting Team had no recommendations with respect to this Standard.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership:

Observations: The Visiting Team noted that the parameters of governance are clear and that the Board of Trustees operates within those parameters, maintaining a clear commitment to the institution. Both the Board of Trustees and school leadership enjoy high regard from stakeholders. Maintaining the vision of the Christian Brothers is paramount in future planning.

Recommendations: The Visiting Team recommended that CBA's Strategic Plan more clearly articulate long-term goals and objectives in the areas of financial aid, tuition levels, and faculty compensation. The Visiting Team also recommended that investigation of the feasibility of building an auditorium or other performance space be part of the Strategic Plan.

Standard 3: Improvement Planning:

Observations: The Visiting Team noted that the Planning Team, Board of Trustees, and school administration are committed to financial planning; maintaining facilities and programs; and marketing and enrollment through strategies that reflect organization, vision, and insight.

Recommendations: The Visiting Team had no recommendations with respect to this Standard.

Standard 4: Finances:

Observations: The Visiting Team noted that the protocols for finances were professional and organized. The school's Director of Finance, trustees, and the principal combine for an expertise in finance, vision, and Lasallian tradition. Emphasis is placed on affordable tuition, and finances are stable and well-monitored.

Recommendation: The Visiting Team recommended that a written plan of succession for members of the Board of Trustees' Finance Committee be developed.

Standard 5: Facilities:

Observations: The Visiting Team noted that the school's facilities are safe, clean, and well-maintained. Highlights of the campus include the chapel, the art and music wing, library, two gyms, and ample classroom spaces. Equipment seems to be well-maintained, and materials are available within the reality of the budget. The school building is warm and welcoming, with little clutter in the hallways. School administration and the Board of Trustees are aware of needs for improvement. The Team also noted the success of the recent *To Be the Best* capital campaign, monies from which have enabled CBA to refurbish athletic fields and the stadium and to enhance technology in the classrooms. The Team noted that there is an awareness of the eventual need for improvements to the tennis courts and baseball field and the school building's windows, boilers, and roof.

Recommendation: The Visiting Team recommended that CBA explore the feasibility of building an auditorium or other performance space at the school.

Standard 6: School Climate:

Observations: The Visiting Team emphasized that the climate of CBA is that of a "family community" in which trust, caring, and a love of CBA are evident. Continuation of the Lasallian tradition is emphasized. Parents and guardians report that the school principal and faculty are caring and qualified. The Visiting Team also emphasized that the characteristic of "family" used to describe CBA is a recurring one among all stakeholders.

Recommendation: The Team recommended that a public governance flow chart should be developed to assure that stakeholders clearly understand roles and protocols.

Standard 7: Health and Safety:

Observations: The Visiting Team found that CBA maintains a safe and healthy environment for teaching and learning. Students feel safe at CBA and "...there is a wonderful family feel to the school." CBA is in full compliance with safety standards, incorporating them through a thorough *Student Handbook*; employment of a full-time school nurse; collection of attendance; use of a hall pass system; secured entrances to the school building; and practiced procedures for emergencies. The school has adequate facilities for storage.

Recommendations: The Visiting Team recommended that someone other than the school nurse should be the attendance officer, and that additional storage areas should be designated or built.

Standard 8: Educational Program:

Observations: The Visiting Team observed that the phrase “academic excellence” describes the goal of all CBA stakeholders. To this end, the Planning Team’s second Objective focuses on writing improvement across the curriculum. According to the Team, students and their parents or guardians noted CBA’s reputation as having a strong academic environment aimed at preparing students for the rigor of post-secondary education. The Team noted the desire of faculty and administrators to expand the curriculum. The Team also found that the curriculum is easily accessible and that the rigor of academic programs is evident from both the qualifications of teachers and the preparedness of students for college.

Recommendation: The Visiting Team recommended an expansion of the school’s fine arts electives, citing the potential of a strong fine arts program to attract and retain students.

Standard 9: Assessment & Evidence of Student Learning:

Observations: The Visiting Team found that CBA uses a variety of assessment tools to evaluate and place students, including an entrance exam and administration of nationally-recognized tests, including EXPLORE, PLAN, the PSAT, and the ACT. The Visiting Team noted that CBA offers Advanced Placement courses in a variety of subjects and that it requires students to take New York State Board of Regents Examinations.

Recommendation: The Visiting Team recommended that CBA continue to focus on the academic success of all students, and that it pay particular attention to the success of the increasing number of students with learning disabilities who enroll at the school.

Standard 10: Student Services:

Observations: The Visiting Team recognized again the “strong culture of affirmation and esteem” at CBA, promoted by both the Guidance Department and Campus Ministry. Through Guidance, care and support is given to the students, placing their needs first. Programs exist to address academic and non-academic success of students, and the Guidance Department office is clearly a welcoming center of activity. The Visiting Team also remarked on the outstanding number of CBA graduating students who attend college. Students have access to college information, and the Team noted as a valuable tool the use of the Naviance© system. Overall, the Visiting Team observed that there is a common feeling among students and families that school faculty, administrators, and staff are approachable, available, and helpful.

The Team noted that Campus Ministry, through its programs, supports the Mission of CBA and the Lasallian traditions so prevalent at the school.

Additional Visiting Team observations about services included the availability of accommodations for students with learning disabilities and the efficient operation of the school nurse’s office, where it is evident “that the health and well-being of every student at CBA is paramount.” Noted as well was the transportation policy, communicated widely to students and their families; the adequacy of the school cafeteria; and the school’s full- service library, with a librarian who is “an excellent resource to students

and teachers alike....” Finally, the Visiting Team commented on the policies and practices of the Admissions Department.

Recommendations: The Visiting Team noted a few recommendations, including expansion of the Junior/Senior High retreat program to include all students who wish to attend along as well as expansion of the program to the Kairos four-day retreat model. Also, the Visiting Team recommended that the task of signing-in students should be assigned to the Main Office rather than to the Nurse’s Office to afford the school nurse more time to attend to the varied obligations of that office.

Standard 11: Student Life and Student Activities:

Observations: The Visiting Team noted a very strong atmosphere of understanding and respect at CBA, which is furthered by the wide variety and number of student activities offered. These activities allow all students to be able to celebrate their unique gifts, and so are strongly supported by the school’s administration, faculty, staff, and coaches. Students are supportive of the activities and are aware that if they are interested in an activity not offered, they may be able to initiate that activity. The Visiting Team was most impressed with the dedication and commitment of the Athletic Director and coaches in promoting the school’s values.

Recommendations: The Visiting Team had no recommendations with respect to this Standard.

Standard 12: Information Resources and Technology:

Observations: The Visiting Team found that the Library and Technology Department provides a thorough learning environment for students. It noted the access to technology available, computer labs, and the resources acquired by the library through the BOCES interlibrary loan program. The Visiting Team also noted the classroom technology available, including BrightLink® and SMART Board® projectors.

Recommendation: The Visiting Team recommended that the school explore the possibility of creating additional spaces for class and small group work in the library.

Appendix: Student Performance Objectives

Student Performance Objectives form the centerpiece of the *Plan for Growth and Improvement*. They express in measurable terms the key end results that CBA seeks to realize from its Mission, as expressed in its Profile of Graduates; they are limited in number so that CBA can focus on the most critical aspects of student performance without diverting its energies in too many directions.

As discussed in the Synopsis, the Planning Team has identified **two Objectives** as the highest priorities for growth and improvement if CBA is to move closer to achieving its Mission. **These Objectives, their measurement metrics, and the Visiting Team's responses and recommendations regarding them, are as follows:**

Objective 1: By 2017, CBA students will demonstrate increased comprehension of the Lasallian core principles of *responding to the needs of those who suffer from poverty and injustice* and *valuing the living presence of God in our world* through increased participation in voluntary religious activities, school and community service, and availability for and participation in positive peer programs.

Measurement Metrics:

- »The percentage of CBA students participating in voluntary religious activities will increase by 3% or more per year over the baseline percentage established in the 2009-10 academic year.
- »The percentage of CBA students in grades 9-11 performing at least 10 hours of community or school service during the academic year will attain and be maintained at 65%.
- »The percentage of CBA students in grades 10-12 participating in positive peer mentoring and tutoring activities will increase by 3% or more per year from the baseline percentages established in the 2009-10 academic year of 2.5% (peer mentoring) and 5.5% (peer tutoring).

Visiting Team's Response and Recommendations:

This Objective is seen as the clearest means of increasing both the students' comprehension of Lasallian Core Principles and their participation in religious and peer activities and services. **There is a high level of understanding of this Objective, and full support for it among the school's community of stakeholders.**

The Team recommends increasing school-sponsored opportunities for service for high school underclassmen, **and expanding** the Kairos Retreat for juniors and seniors from the current abbreviated term to the full four-day experience.

Objective 2: By 2017, CBA students will have an increased comprehension of the Lasallian core principle of *promoting a quality education through the ability to communicate by writing effectively.*

Measurement Metrics:

- »The mean PSAT, ACT, and SAT writing scores of CBA students will increase by 3% over the baseline scores established in the 2009-10 academic year.
- »CBA students will maintain a 3-year average percentage of 84% at the mastery level (score of 85 or above) on the New York State Regents Examination in English.

Visiting Team's Response and Recommendations:

Faculty, students, and other CBA stakeholders appear to be generally knowledgeable of the school's expectations of standard writing requirements across the curriculum. There is acceptance of the Modern Language Association (MLA) writing protocol, tailored to meet appropriate needs of specific classes.

The Visiting Team encourages CBA to:

- »Implement ongoing professional development in writing skills for all teachers.
- »Moderate the amount of work placed on members of the English Department in supporting their colleagues from other Departments in this area.
- »Continue recognizing the School Librarian for her expertise and her support of teachers in research and writing.
- »Consider creating rubrics to address the application of MLA styles in each core subject.
- »Consider adding a staff assistant to support the Reading Specialist.

The Visiting Team did not list any requirements for the Objectives and Action Plans that require monitoring; therefore, there are no stipulations attached to CBA's accreditation.