



# THE GOLD STANDARD

Volume One,  
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A Newsletter of the Middle States Association  
Commission on Secondary Schools

## Introducing...*The Gold Standard*

I hope you enjoy the first issue of the Commission on Secondary Schools' newsletter, **The Gold Standard**.

Because communication is at the heart of our work, we are reintroducing what we hope will be a bi-annual update about the work of the Commission for members of the Middle States Association.

In each issue we'll share accreditation news about member schools and help you better understand the inner workings of Middle States, the accreditation process and the added value of membership.

This newsletter is also designed to encourage your feedback on our services and policies and to increase the involvement of our member schools as workshop participants, team chairs and team member volunteers. As you'll read this month many of our members have found CSS participation of great value not only in improving their district's performance but also by bolstering their personal professional development.

We hope **The Gold Standard** will encourage you to remain active and involved in Middle States and provide you with insights into the many benefits of membership. Please let us know what you think of our newsletter and suggest features for future issues by contacting me at [hcram@css-msa.org](mailto:hcram@css-msa.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hank Cram".

Hank Cram, Ed.D.  
*President /Executive Director  
Middle States Association  
Commission on Secondary Schools*



## MSA Validation Team Chairs – Responsibility, Rewards & a Career Boost

As a member of the “first wave of schools” to attain Middle States accreditation over 35 years ago, Abington High School in Abington, PA has a storied relationship with the association and an unwavering commitment to accreditation. The entire school community sees great value in accreditation, most recently through the Accreditation for Growth (AFG) protocol.

Abington administrators and staff tap into their experience with MSA in their volunteer service as Validation Team chairs and members. Through their visits they provide tangible, constructive feedback to their colleagues in other schools. In fact, according to Assistant Superintendent Leigh Altadonna, Ed.D. the school provides more chairs of Validation Teams than any other Middle States affiliated school.

### An “Intense” 3½ Days

Serving as a Validation Team chair or member of a team is not for the faint of heart. The Abington team chairs emphasized that the 3½ day visits are very “intense.” To be successful the team must be in sync with each other and with the school.

A great deal of preparation is also required, beginning with Middle States' selection of team

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## MSA Validation Teams

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members who are chosen based on their respective and varied areas of expertise.

“Team chairs survey each team member to identify their individual strengths and weaknesses,” said Abington Assistant Principal and AFG Team Chair Louis Martin.

During their relatively short visit the MSA team takes a comprehensive look at the school ranging from facilities to administration and leadership to course programming and guidance services and even school safety.

“It can be difficult sometimes,” said Mr. Martin. “The team needs to remember that we are going there to assess what a school says it wants to do, ask how they’re going to accomplish what they say they are going to do and determine if they have the resources to accomplish their goals. You have to leave some of your personal opinions and values in your briefcase... you can’t compare what they want to do with what you’re doing in your school.”

### Best Foot Forward

The MSA Validation Team chair visits a school six weeks

### Teams Integral to MSA

Mr. McCuen emphasized that one of the criteria an accreditation team checks during a visit is to be sure that the overall plan of a district or school system lines up with the AFG school plan. Middle States recently changed the AFG plan from five years to seven years to better align with most districts’ strategic plans.

“It’s a collegial growth process. I think that’s what I like most about it,” said Mr. McKuen. “As Dr. Burt stated, you’re validating a program put in place to help achieve goals. The school community knows that, and they look at it more in terms of ‘What can you do to help us be a better school?’”

Validation Team members emphasize that every Middle States accredited school is united in trying to make schools better. In today’s demanding and sometimes confusing educational environments, schools struggle to balance the classroom needs of students while meeting the requirements of assessment from statewide standardized tests to Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) through No Child Left Behind.

“AFG was a little ahead of the curve in terms of planning and assessment,” said Dr. Altadonna. “Now state after state is requiring schools to submit plans and Middle States’ protocols can help educators plan and achieve goals.”

### An Authentic Process

Dr. Altadonna and the entire Abington team concur that Middle States Accreditation is “a very authentic process.”

“It’s really an attempt to do a substantive and full planning job,” said Dr. Altadonna. “It’s not just window dressing. I’ve never encountered a high school or a district yet where it has not been a serious attempt to do an authentic job for validation.” ★

“Serving as a Team Chair gives one the opportunity to go into a completely different environment, study the culture of a school and the leadership models that are in place, and take a look at how the curriculum is being wrapped around the cultural aspects of the school. It’s fascinating to look at the measured progress of a Middle States accredited school over the years.”

Robert M. Burt, Ed.D.  
Principal, Abington High School  
MSA-CSS Validation Team Chair

Robert M. Burt, Ed.D. principal of the high school, added, “The last day is usually the best day, because you get to come home with a sense that you have accomplished something really quite important.”

### The Fine Line Between Assessment and Judgment

One of the biggest challenges facing a team chair is to make sure that his or her team is very clear about the difference between assessment and judgment.

Validation Teams assess a school or district based on a plan developed in accordance with a Middle States protocol prior to the visit. Dr. Altadonna characterized it as “Middle States completes a technical review and the teams complete a qualitative review.”

prior to the team visit to preview the site and obtain all necessary documentation in preparation for the validation visit.

According to Rod McKuen, assistant principal, the previsit gives the school a sense of what the visit will look like. “They know what to expect and we expect them to be prepared.”

MSA Accreditation is a prestigious honor for a school or district, so schools tend to put their best foot forward, sprucing up their facilities and alerting staff, students, even the community about the Accreditation visit. Dr. Burt, characterized it as “red carpet” treatment. “They’re welcoming their professional colleagues and most know that we are not there to judge, but to interact.”

# Welcome to Newly-Accredited Schools

## CSS – SCHOOLS

### Seven Year Accreditation

*Accreditation for Growth/  
Validating the Vision*

Academy of Notre Dame De Namur, PA  
Academy of the Holy Cross, MD  
Barringer High School, NJ  
Benedictine Academy, NJ  
The Berkeley Institute, Bermuda  
Calvert High School, MD  
Cape Henlopen High School, DE\*  
Carrick High School, PA  
Central High School, PA  
Dallas Senior High School, PA  
Delaware Military Academy, DE  
Governor Livingston High School, NJ  
Hatboro – Horsham Senior High School, PA  
Hoboken High School, NJ  
Indiana Area Senior High School, PA  
Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School, PA\*  
Loch Raven High School, MD\*  
Lower Dauphin High School, PA  
Mahwah High School, NJ  
Malcolm X. Shabazz High School, NJ\*  
Martin Luther King High School, PA\*  
Matawan Regional High School, NJ  
Milford Mill Academy, MD\*  
Morristown High School, NJ  
Newburgh Free Academy, NY  
Niagara Catholic High School, NY\*  
North County High School, MD  
Northside Urban Pathways Public Charter School, PA\*  
Northwestern Lehigh High School, PA  
Notre Dame High School, PA  
Paramus High School, NJ  
Penn Wood High School, PA\*  
Pequannock Township High School, NJ  
Phase 4 Learning Center, PA  
Polytech High School, DE  
Port Chester High School, NY  
The Purnell School, NJ\*  
Ramapo Ridge Middle School, NJ  
Roxborough High School, PA  
Saint Peter's Boys High School, NY\*  
Scranton High School, PA  
Severna Park Senior High School, MD\*  
South Carroll High School, MD  
West Allegheny Senior High School, PA  
West Genesee High School, NY  
West Side High School, NJ  
ASCI-ASP  
Chapelgate Christian Academy, MD

### Five Year Accreditation

*Reflections on Standards of Quality*

Blue Mountain High School, PA\*  
Cardinal Hayes High School, NY  
Coatesville Area Senior High School, PA  
Devon Preparatory School, PA  
George School, PA  
Hasbrouck Heights High School, NJ  
The Hudson School, NJ

Indian River High School, DE  
John Dickinson High School, DE\*  
North Allegheny Senior High School, PA  
Roselle Catholic High School, NJ  
Woodrow Wilson High School, DC\*  
*Pathways to School Improvement*  
The Ferris School for Boys, DE

### Ten Year Accreditation

*Reflections on Standards of Quality – C/T*  
Washington Online Learning Institute, NY\*

Western Area Career and Technology Center, PA\*

\*with stipulations

## CIWA SCHOOLS – (PreK-12)

### One-Year Probationary Accreditation

*Accreditation for Growth*

Quality Schools International  
Almaty International School, Kazakhstan\*

*Council on International Schools*  
International School of Moshi, Tanzania\*

### Two-Year Accreditation

*Seventh-Day Adventist*  
Spencerville Adventist Academy, MD

### Five-Year Accreditation

*International Credential*

American Overseas School of Rome, Italy  
*Reflections on Standards of Quality*  
American Overseas School of Rome, Italy  
Anglican International School, Israel\*  
Karachi American School, Pakistan  
Monmouth Academy, NJ\*

### Seven-Year Accreditation

*Accreditation for Growth*

American Community School, Jordan  
Dr. Gertrude A. Barber National Institute, PA  
Lancaster Mennonite School, PA  
Northampton Area School District, PA  
George Wolf Elementary School  
Lehigh Elementary School  
Moore Elementary School  
Northampton Borough Elementary School  
Northampton Area Middle School  
Northampton Area High School  
Ogdensburg City School District, NY  
Grant C. Madill Elementary School  
John F. Kennedy Elementary School  
Lincoln School  
Sherman School  
Ogdensburg Free Academy  
Quality Schools International  
Ashgabat International School, Turkmenistan  
Baku International School, Azerbaijan\*  
Bishkek International School, Kyrgyzstan

Kyiv International School, Ukraine  
QSI International School of Bratislava, Slovakia  
QSI International School of Kosice, Slovakia  
QSI International School of Ljubljana, Slovenia  
QSI International School of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina  
QSI International School of Shekou, China  
QSI International School of Skopje, Macedonia  
QSI International School of Tbilisi, Georgia  
Sanaa International School, Yemen  
Tirana International School, Albania  
Springfield School District, PA  
Harvey C. Sabold Elementary School  
Scenic Hills Elementary School  
E.T. Richardson Middle School  
Springfield High School  
Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, MD\*  
Wall Township School District, NJ  
Allenwood Elementary School  
Central Elementary School  
Old Mill Elementary School  
West Belmar Elementary School  
Wall Intermediate School  
Wall High School  
Wilmington Christian School, DE  
*Assembly Guide for Special Education*  
Clearview School, NJ  
*Association of Christian Schools International*  
Conestoga Christian School, PA  
Dayspring Christian Academy, PA  
Grace Academy, MD\*  
Grace Brethren Christian School, MD\*  
*Association of Waldorf Schools of North America*  
Washington Waldorf School, MD  
*Project Evaluation*  
Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ  
**Ten-Year Accreditation**  
*Association of Independent Maryland Schools*  
Bullis School, MD  
*Council on International Schools*  
American School in London, UK  
*Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools*  
Germantown Academy, PA  
*School Alliance for Continuous Improvement*  
Marlboro Central School District, NY  
Marlboro Elementary School  
Middle Hope Elementary School  
Milton Elementary School  
Marlboro Intermediate School  
Marlboro Middle school\*  
Marlboro High School\*  
\*with stipulations

## Pennington First Recipient Of Nicklas Volunteer Award

**D**r. Susan K. Nicklas, Executive Director of the Middle States Commission on Secondary Schools from 2002 to 2005, set the standard for excellence in service to the Middle States Association throughout her more than 12 years as a member of the Association's staff. Through her hard work, courage, creativity, and dedication, she increased the value and stature of the Commission throughout the world of education.

At the Commission's April 2006 meeting, Chair Debbie Rutherford announced that the Executive Committee had selected **Jennie Pennington** as the first recipient of the Nicklas Award. Pennington, who retired as principal of Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake H.S. in Burnt Hills, NY, received the honor in recognition of her long volunteer service to the Commission, which includes chairing 17 visiting teams. She also served as a member of the AFG Advisory



**Jennie Pennington (left), was the 2006 recipient of the Nicklas Award. Pictured with Pennington are MSA-CSS Commissioners Hillel Levinson and Allison Kokkorus.**

Dr. Nicklas held both the educators and other individuals who volunteered their services to the CSS in the highest esteem, often referring to them as, "the heart of our organization."

Upon her retirement in 2005, the CSS honored Dr. Nicklas for her many contributions to the organization by establishing an annual award in her name. This award is presented to Middle States volunteers who, by providing long and valued service to the member institutions of the Middle States Commission on Secondary Schools, have advanced our mission.

Committee and as a member of the Commission for six years. Pennington currently represents the Commission on the Middle States Association Board of Trustees and is a Past Chair of the Board.

According to Rutherford, Pennington stands among the most dedicated educators who have tirelessly given of themselves to further the mission and work of the Commission. Her efforts, like those of all Middle States volunteers, are greatly appreciated and a vital part of its success. ★

## Commit to Be the Best in 2007!

**E**ducation is a dynamic process for an institution, its staff and students. Middle States Accreditation adds value and helps a school manage the process of change and improvement through regular assessment, planning, implementation and reassessment. It is truly The International Gold Standard of Accreditation for public, private, parochial, charter and distance learning schools.

Call today to jump start Middle States Accreditation in 2007.

**215-662-5603**

## Our Mission

To ensure that all students in its region receive the highest quality of education and achieve at levels expected by society and, through its accreditation and school improvement services, to recognize excellence in educational quality, planning, and growth in student performance in addition to providing the means to meet rigorous standards of educational quality.

