

**REPORT OF THE MID-TERM ON-SITE REVIEW TEAM  
FOR LOWELL HIGH SCHOOL**

**TO:** The Accrediting Commission for Schools  
**FROM:** Marilyn Cook, Chairperson of Review Team  
Maureen Van Tuyl, Committee Member  
**RE:** Lowell High School - Mid-term On-site Review, May 8, 2003

**I. Introduction**

Founded in 1856, Lowell is a four-year public college-preparatory school with selective and competitive admissions criteria. It serves 2,576 students within the boundaries of the San Francisco Unified School District. The enrollment at Lowell constitutes a socially, ethnically, and culturally diverse population. The ethnic composition is 55 Chinese, 17.4 Other Whites, and 11.9 Other Non-Whites. Several different racial/ethnic groups together make up the remaining 5. Lowell High School is well-known nationally for the quality of its programs and the exceptional performance of its students over the years. It is blessed with very strong parent support which is evident in donations of hours, expertise, and finances. The On-Site Review Team found the Progress Report prepared by the school to be an accurate reflection of the current status of the WASC Action Plans.

Some extremely significant changes have occurred in the governance structure at Lowell in the past three years. In 2000-2001, the new superintendent of San Francisco Unified School District proposed new ideas, such as the Weighted Student Formula (WSF)

"to help promote school reform and accountability.... The purpose of the WSF was to give school sites flexibility in providing resources to match individual student needs and increase equity in per-student funding among schools. The success of the WSF was predicated upon the close collaboration of the site administration and the School Site Council (SSC)/ Site Advisory Council (SAC) in designing and implementing an academic achievement plan and a corresponding budget crafted to address the needs of the school's student population and unique site priorities. In March 2001, Superintendent Ackerman announced that fall implementation of the WSF for the schools would not take place in the upcoming 2001-2002 academic year. Instead, schools were invited to apply for participation in a pilot initiative that trains school personnel in the "Site-Based Budgeting" process. The selected schools would be given an Unrestricted General Fund budget denominated in dollars in lieu of FTE staff positions and would determine what staff and non-staff items to buy with those dollars. A schedule of districtwide average salaries for certificated and classified staff would be utilized in the budgeting process. As an incentive for schools to apply to be in the pilot, an additional \$100 per student would be granted to the 20-25 chosen schools. In early April 2001, the Lowell administration and the Site Advisory Council voted overwhelmingly to respond in the affirmative to the Superintendent's invitation. In mid-April Lowell was notified of its selection as one of the 22 pilot schools and received approximately \$250,000 over and above the site allocation for the 2001-2002 school year."

(Lowell High School Third Year WASC Progress Report, May 2003, pp. 3-4)

In order to be eligible for "Site-Based Budgeting" and WSF dollars, schools in SFUSD adopt an expanded role for the traditional School Site Council; and they develop an Academic Plan for the school according to a format provided by the District which specifies school and district priorities and determines budget allocations.

As stated in the Progress Report, "The School Site Council, particularly under the Weighted Student Formula, makes a significant contribution to the direction of the school."

"The District has revised the former Site Plan (now called the Academic Plan) so it can better reflect goals and objectives of the school and how these goals and objectives can be met. The Academic Plan is developed only after public comment and must be revised annually. According to the District, the Academic Plan meets all State and Federal requirements. ... In order to support the District's emphasis on the Academic Plan, to better coordinate planning and budgeting, and in order to provide a planning document that has the broad base of input, the SSC voted to use the Academic Plan as our sole strategic planning document."

(Lowell High School Third Year WASC Progress Report, May 2003, page 8)

The impact of the new district budget allocation system and the decision-making process used by the SSC as they develop both the Academic Plan for the school and determine how the budget is to be allocated has been far-reaching and profound. Three of the critical areas for follow-up after the WASC Visit three years ago—clarification of decision-making processes of the school, increased communication among staff, and the improvement of building maintenance and cleanliness—have been addressed through the new site-based budgeting system.

Questions regarding the allocation of resources, which programs will have priority, how to gain access to the decision-makers, who will make the decisions and according to what criteria, have all been answered to a very great extent. All constituents have input into the Academic Plan and may present their ideas for funding to the SSC. Through the SSC, decision-making is visible to the public.

By the spring of 2003, the new system for budgeting, planning, and decision-making had been smoothed out and staff seem confident that the new system is working to meet the needs of students and staff at Lowell. They acknowledge that the attention and energy that has gone into meeting the requirements of the new system have momentarily reduced their ability to focus on all of the WASC Action Plans. On the other hand, there is significant overlap between the District-required Academic Plan and the WASC Action Plans. Consequently, significant progress has been made in some areas.

## II. Follow-up Process

Because of this change in the governance structure and decision-making processes of the school, there has been some confusion over how progress on the WASC Action Plans should be monitored. This description is detailed on page 7 of the Progress Report as follows:

"Lowell has a multifaceted procedure for implementing its Action Plan. The principal is the primary person responsible for ensuring that the process for implementation of the Action Plan is carried out. The WASC Coordinator serves as an informal advisor to the decision-making bodies and key individuals within the school who are charged with the responsibility for carrying out the various steps within the Action Plan. The WASC Coordinator consults with the WASC Leadership Committee that consists of the coordinator, three administrators, three teachers, one department chair, and one paraprofessional, on an "as needed" basis. Initially, the implementation of the WSC led to some confusion between the SSC and the WASC Leadership Committee regarding the responsibility for oversight of the Action Plan. There was some discussion that the Leadership Committee should be replaced by the SSC. Over time it became clear that while the Lowell Academic Plan and the WASC Action Plan share many of the same objectives, the Action Plan incorporates the broader concerns of the site community. At the present time, the SSC is charged with carrying out the WASC Action Steps which coincide with the

Superintendent's goals, and the WASC Leadership Committee is responsible for oversight of all other steps in the WASC Action Plan. In March 2003, the SSC adopted the Eleven Areas for Critical Follow-up from the WASC Visiting Committee Report as areas for targeted improvement for the next school year. The new role of the SSC, the lack of common planning time, and the sabbatical of the WASC Coordinator, are factors that have negatively impacted the progress of the WASC process. Next year the .2 FTE normally allocated for a WASC coordinator will be eliminated due to budget cutbacks; therefore, all school leaders will need to put forth an extra effort to accelerate the WASC process beyond its present stage."

(Lowell High School Third Year WASC Progress Report, May 2003, page 7)

In discussions held on May 8 among the Review Team, the principal, the WASC coordinator, and the SSC President, the representatives of the school all agreed that the SSC had now stabilized sufficiently in its new role that they could incorporate the WASC Action Plans in the decision-making and resource allocation processes. The SSC, therefore, would begin to monitor the progress of the school in those areas defined by the WASC Action Plans which are not covered in the required format of the Academic Plan. The school remains committed to complete the Action Plans designed in their WASC self-study.

Comment on each schoolwide action plan section:

The eleven critical areas for follow-up are embedded in the Action Plans as detailed specifically in the school's mid-term report. Significant progress has been made in the following eight areas:

- Goal A-1 - Develop a Strategic Plan (The school has decided that the WASC Action Plans along with the Academic Plan are sufficient for their planning needs. This goal is no longer needed. The Visiting Team concurs.)
- Goal A-2 - Integrate SDC students into the Lowell Community - Significant progress has been made.
- Goal A-3 - Cleaning and maintaining the physical plant - Significant progress has been made.
- Goal Communication-1 - Clarify the decision-making process throughout the school - Significant progress has been made.
- Goal Technology-1 - Develop Digital High School application utilizing community resources - Significant progress has been made - Application was completed and approved.
- Goal Technology-2 - Identify DHS coordinator responsible for implementation of the plan - Significant progress has been made - An assistant principal serves as DHS coordinator.
- Goal Technology-3 - Implement DHS goals, objectives, benchmarks, and evaluation - Significant progress has been made.
- Goal Technology-4 - Implement evaluation defined in the DHS Plan - Significant progress has been made.

Progress has also been made to varying extents in the other areas:

- Goal Curriculum-1 - Identify assignments that allow students to attain the ESLRs - In progress
- Goal C-2 - Department-wide rubrics and schoolwide standards - In progress
- Goal C-3 - Coordinate curricula for sequenced courses - In progress
- Goal C-4 - Upgrade library facility - In progress
- Goal PD-1 - Create ESLR-based Professional Development program - In progress
- Goal PD-2 - Utilize embedded common time for planning and professional development - In progress
- Goal PD-3 - Orientation and support system for new faculty and staff - In progress

- Goal PD-4 - Write a professional development program to implement the WASC action plans - Needed
- Goal SS-1 - Evaluate systems for identifying and supporting students not achieving their potential - In progress
- Goal SS-2 - Assess the curricular paths of selected sub-groups - In progress
- Goal SS-3 - Enhance tutoring services - In progress
- Goal SS-4 - Revitalize the student mentoring program - In progress
- Goal Assessment-1 - Evaluate the status of development of ESLR assessment - Needed
- Goal Assessment-2 - Synthesize and align ESLR assessment across departments - In progress
- Goal Assessment-3 - Devise and refine assessment tools to measure student achievement of each ESLR in all departments - In progress
- Goal Assessment-4 - Align standards across departments as applicable - Needed
- Goal Communication-2 - Plan to improve student awareness of academic opportunities and recognition of student achievements - In progress
- Goal Communication-3 - Plan to improve student awareness of extracurricular opportunities, recognition of nonacademic student achievements and contributions to the community - In progress
- Goal Communication-4 - Strategy for improving schoolwide communication - In progress

### III. Recommendations for Additional Attention or Identified New Concerns

The staff, students, and community have completed much valuable work in the past three years in order to ensure that the school is continually moving toward its goals and continually monitoring its own improvement efforts. Because of the major change in the governance structure of Lowell due to their participation in the San Francisco Unified School District's WSF budgeting and decision-making system, great effort and achievement have occurred in some of the WASC critical areas for follow-up. On the other hand, some areas have yet to be addressed. The leadership groups of the school are aware of this situation and have already made the decision to address these areas by bringing the WASC Action Plans under the responsibility of the School Site Council. It should be noted that the Lowell School Site Council has a membership of 28 - 14 school employees and 14 parents and students—and that a teacher is the president. The SSC at Lowell has a sophisticated operation and is responsible for the development and monitoring of the school's Academic Plan and for the allocation of resources to meet the goals of the plan. It is the judgment of the Visiting Team that having the WASC Action Plans under the umbrella of the SSC will ensure that the plans are appropriately monitored.

  
 Marilyn Cook, Visiting Team Chair

May 8, 2003