



## The Accreditation *journey* – December 2010

### ISG Schools Recommended for Reaccreditation by the Middle States Association (MSA) of Colleges and Schools

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**Superintendent Hudson evokes the motivational phrase of “honor, value and celebrate” in regular gatherings of ISG staff and community members. There is perhaps no more appropriate place or time to share this comment than in the exciting moments following the collective sigh of relief and applause upon conclusion of oral reports from the [Middle States Association \(MSA\) of Colleges and Schools](#) to recommend re-accreditation of ISG’s five American and International division schools: Dhahran Elementary/Middle School (DEMS), Dhahran High School (DHS), ISG Dammam, ISG Jubail and Yanbu International School (YIS).**

ISG currently operates seven schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Dhahran British Grammar School (DBGS) was accredited by the [Council of International Schools \(CIS\)](#) in November 2009. Please consult the ISG Website at: [http://www.isgdh.org/downloads/CIS\\_Accreditation\\_Article.pdf](http://www.isgdh.org/downloads/CIS_Accreditation_Article.pdf) for more information regarding the CIS accreditation process. Our newest member, Sara Village School (SVS) also delivers the British National Curriculum. SVS opened in August 2010 and will develop its mission and belief statements in the coming year, paving the way for accreditation.

#### The Accreditation Process

AFG focuses on improving school curriculum to impact student learning and promote student achievement. Reviewers are quick to emphasize that AFG is a volunteer process which evolves out of a desire to provide the best education for students. Visiting MSA Validation Team members serve as constructively critical friends to help schools achieve their goals. Upon completion of their site visits during the week of December 11<sup>th</sup> oral reports were delivered to each ISG school undergoing the accreditation process. The formal accreditation report will be received in a couple of months – and its recommendations serve as a foundation for implementation planning across the ISG District.

Accreditation for Growth (AFG) committees, have been working collectively over the past two years to complete their self-study process and prepare for this key moment. Committees are comprised of ISG stakeholder representatives, including students, parents, teachers, administrators and board members. Teams from each ISG school met consistently during a 15-month process to set goals for learning and discuss the culture of our schools. A major benchmark of the AFG process was the completion in 2009 of new Mission and Belief Statements for each school. These processes were guided by the formulation of the ISG District Mission Statement, Belief Statements and Graduate Profile, upon which each ISG school based the creation of their individual statements.

In deciding upon reaccreditation MSA team members determine whether the required 12 MSA standards and AFG protocol commitments have been satisfactorily met. Key indicators, or *standards*, are divided into *foundational standards*, denoting best practices in the quality of the “education program, services and results in terms of students learning” and *operational standards* which focus on the delivery of the “education program, services and activities” for students.

Protocol issues ensure that goals are reflected in action in the classroom environment and that the curriculum aligns with the school’s mission and belief statements. The accreditation process also evaluates the culture of a school and their AFG planning process. Specifically, reviewers look for measures of accountability, the involvement of broad stakeholder groups, the level of commitment for sound improvement planning and the degree to which performance objectives are universally agreed-upon by teaching staff and school leaders. Lastly, to ensure sustainability, MSA evaluates the goals set forth for student achievement and the established systems for continued planning and improvement.

The goal of the MSA review process is to believe in a collective future and that the future will be different from the past. Most importantly, as expressed by Tara Waudby, MSA Site Leader is "... to have the audacity to believe that you can achieve your goals."

### Validation Team Visit Summary by ISG School

**ISG DAMMAM** was the first ISG American Division school to undergo the review process. MSA representatives raved about the commitment to student improvement and highlighted other strengths including the level to which diversity is embraced, the extensive offerings of extra-curricular activities, the focus on continued professional development by staff and the culture of accountability. ISG Dammam teachers are on-board and planning strategically to accomplish their shared goals of improved reading and writing skills *for learning* (as opposed to simply *learning to read and write*), to realize their mission statement and implement the school's seven year action plan. The MSA team was "impressed with ISG Dammam's commitment to continued growth," their "unique passion" in creating an environment for life-long learning and the pride held for their school and the district." In summation, Ms. Waudby indicated that "ISG Dammam has everything that a student needs to grow up."

Heading up ISG Dammam's successful bid for re-accreditation is their Professional Development Coordinator Evelyn Harrison who despite having battled and beat cancer during the process was quick to respond to her colleagues' applause "all I did is type and boss you all around." Ms. Harrison of course minimized the pivotal role played by the AFG coordinator to make this accomplishment a reality but in her traditionally humble and collegial manner reminded everyone in the room "you did this ... so don't forget it. And we are not done ... don't forget this either." The final report from the MSA review team will not be ready for the next couple of months but Ms. Harrison is right – the work has now just begun as ISG Dammam staff works towards completion of identified goals.

***The MSA Validation Team held that ISG Dammam meets all 12 standards of accreditation and recommended re-accreditation.*** To guide schools on their continued process of success, MSA representatives provided ISG Dammam with a few recommendations, including the creation of an

education process for parents to help learn about curriculum. Additional recommendations include drawing upon formal test data to drive evaluation of coursework and student performance, creating professional development opportunities to evaluate and meet the diverse needs of the students, and continued maintenance of the current campus until the time comes to move to the new ISG Dammam campus.

Geoff Morgan, MSA Site Leader for the **DHAHRAN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL (DEMS)** review process, summed up the visit of the five-member committee with the comment of one DEMS teacher to her students given the committee's presence in their classroom ... "try to ignore the strangers in the back ... they're just here to see how awesome we are."

He commended DEMS staff, suggesting that DEMS "... should be proud of the education you are offering your students." DEMS teacher Michele Cooke and Vice Principal Hal Cooke served as Co-Chairs, continuing the process begun by fellow teacher and Co-Chair Deborah Dodd.

The MSA Validation Team commended DEMS staff for their "laser focus on student learning" and spoke of how obvious and consistently staff illustrated this drive and determination and how proud staff is that they can come to work and really focus on their students. This feeling was echoed by parents who were *thrilled* with the attention their children receive. Overall, MSA representatives highlighted the tremendous climate of respect and participation and the strong collegial and collaborative relationships as being evident throughout their visit. Staff was recognized also for their use of student data to evaluate student learning and success and their cohesiveness on school objectives.

Recommendations focused on an awareness of DEMS external threats and opportunities, including continued maintenance of safety and security, campus planning and "maintaining the momentum and strong ethos for planning/commitment".

As with ISG Dammam, ***DEMS was found to meet all of the required 12 criteria set forth by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. DEMS was recommended for re-accreditation.***

MSA representatives were equally impressed by the knowledge and commitment of **DHAHRAN HIGH SCHOOL (DHS)** staff on curriculum, instruction and assessment. They commented appreciably also on the candor and high level of involvement in the accreditation process by AFG committee members. Led by Vice Principal David Butler, the work of DHS's AFG committee provided an open and inclusive process which was favorably received by parents.

DHS strategic goals focus on increased literacy for learning and writing. MSA representatives commended staff and administrators for their willingness to engage in this work and for the significant progress made. They were careful, however, to remind stakeholders that much work lies ahead to ensure that all staff are committed to this primary objective, emphasizing that for AFG to be transformational, it must be fully integrated in the school culture.

When competing for placement at the world's top universities, DHS staff want to ensure that the desired *seat "belongs to our student."* DHS students come from strong families with a background of learning. Through this initiative, and with continued work to set a timeline for implementation, establish key indicators for success, and on-going clarification of the process, stakeholders will find themselves with an ability to make a difference in student learning.

DHS staff are focused on student achievement and their shared mission statement, however, MSA representatives pointed to the opportunity for greater knowledge of the school's mission and belief statements by the larger community. Belief statements represent the moral character and personal values desired by stakeholders as well as the commitment of our educators to our students, their families and our staff.

Like its counterpart schools earlier in the week, **DHS was recommended for re-accreditation.**

The positive experience of the visiting MSA Validation Team members continued across the country in ISG's west coast school on the Red Sea. The MSA Site Chair Frank Underhill thanked **YANBU INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL (YIS)** staff for their friendly and sincere welcome and the honesty of staff about what they value and hope for the future.

MSA representatives were impressed by the high degree to which students have taken ownership in the AFG process and in the school's mission statement. YIS's mission is purposeful and focused on helping student "achieve their wildest dreams." The sense of trust and level of caring exhibited throughout the school community was highlighted in the oral report as well as the inclusive work of the AFG Coordinator and YIS Counselor, Mark Lasater.

As YIS awaits resolution on their new location, AFG representatives provided suggestions regarding on-going maintenance of school facilities and encouraged leaders to remain transparent throughout the facility change process. They highlighted the advantages of YIS's inclusion in the ISG District and encouraged creativity to provide for a balancing of administrative responsibilities and purposeful communication that is frequent, continuous and open. The MSA Validation Team also cautioned YIS staff to not lose momentum during the facility process and suggested examination of English as an Additional Language (EAL) programs.

***In closing, the MSA Validation Team confirmed that YIS had met all 12 MSA criteria and AFG protocol requirements and thereby recommended re-accreditation.***

During their visit to **ISG JUBAIL**, illustrating a common theme throughout the accreditation visits of ISG schools, MSA representatives acknowledged the high level of trust and collegiality evident among ISG Jubail staff and the sense that the students, parents and staff comprise "one big family." Community members understand the "value of paying it forward." MSA representatives commended the administration, which clearly "hears and responds to its community," for their openness. ISG Jubail's accreditation process was guided under the leadership of Vice Principal and AFG Chair Dan Mock.

The work of the technology committee, the use of the Moodle virtual school platform and the strength of the elementary science department were signaled out for added excellence. ISG Jubail's commitment to parents with the formulation of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and the outstanding climate/school culture created through the PTA planning process, were also highlighted.

Suggestions were offered to evaluate the balance of core course work and electives, increase the use of student assessment data and continue collaboration to enhance student learning, with special attention devoted to the strengthening of application activities for primary students to balance with the school's secondary school curriculum.

ISG Jubail offers the International Primary Curriculum before grade seven. MSA Validation Team members identified a few concerns, including the need to address the disparity between the school's mission statement and the delivery of the IPC elementary curriculum and improvements to health and safety. ISG Jubail was also encouraged to articulate an effective collaboration processes for vertical and horizontal alignment of their curriculum in which objectives are clearly identified and conditions set for success. ***With these contributions, the MSA Validation Team recommended ISG Jubail for re-accreditation.***

### Looking Forward

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, the representatives of the visiting MSA Validation Teams completed their review of the five ISG schools scheduled for re-accreditation. Their visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a tremendous success. Professional reviewers acknowledged the excellence of ISG schools, the continuous focus on learning and professional development, and the inclusive and collaborative culture experienced across the District. The team's recommendations will be acted on by the Middle States Association through a series of rigorous reviews with final determination regarding accreditation in May 2011.

In his concluding remarks, AFG Chair Bernie Mitchell, reminded everyone that *excellence can be attained if you ....care more than others think is wise, risk more than others think is safe, dream more than others think is practical, and expect more than others think is possible. (Author anonymous)*

ISG educators illustrate their commitment to excellence on a daily basis. The Accreditation for Growth process and MSA site visits remind us *to value* the commitment and collegial environment in each of our schools, the enthusiastic leadership of our AFG Coordinators, the passion of contributing parents, teachers and students as AFG committee

members, and the work of our administrators in supporting the continued success of our schools.

Superintendent Hudson reminds us also of the importance *to honor* the process we have undergone; what we have achieved and where the continued cycle of growth and improvement will lead us.

Although our work is only beginning; as ISG community members continue with implementation of their AFG objectives, it is critical to take time to recognize this fine accomplishment and *to celebrate* the unanimous recommendation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools to re-accredit the five ISG schools under review.

Congratulations to our ISG schools and AFG Committees for their tremendous accomplishment.