

**Report of the Visiting Committee  
Accrediting Commission for Schools  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

**Focus On Learning  
CASTLEMONT HIGH SCHOOL  
8601 MacArthur Blvd.  
Oakland, California 94605**

**May 7 – 9, 2000**

**Visiting Committee Members**  
Jacqueline P. Wyse, Chairperson  
Dr. Francisca A. Miranda  
Mr. Richard J. Morosi  
Dr. Harold L. Bush

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WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES (WASC)  
COMMITTEE  
May 7 to May 9, 2000**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### ***General comments about the school and its setting***

Castlemont High School is one of six comprehensive high schools in Oakland Unified School district, serving students in grades 9-12, with an enrollment of approximately 1800. Castlemont is a culturally diverse school with 62% of the population as African American, 28% Hispanic, 10% Asian and Pacific Islander and less than 1% White. Although African American students have been the majority, the Hispanic and Asian populations have shown a steady increase from 1996-97 until the present. Economic and social disadvantages affect all cultural groups at Castlemont, with 80% of the student's families qualified as low income and 46% on free and reduced lunch program.

Castlemont also has a large number of English Language Learners (532) with seven major languages represented including Spanish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Tongan and Mien. The percentage of ELL's is approximately 27 to 30% of the total population with the numbers increasing steadily since 1996-97. Data regarding the redesignation rate for English Language Learners indicates that there is definitely a need for more coordination between the district and the school in this area. Few students categorized as ELL by the district have score above the 30th percentile in reading, writing and mathematics in order to be reclassified as a fluent English proficient student. In some cases, adult translators or bilingual associates are available to assist teachers. Also, there is an effort being made to send home communication to parents in more than one language.

Castlemont also has two categories of special education students including RSP and SDC, with special education students making up 8.2% of the total school population. Data indicates that the number of special education students has grown since the last WASC review however, it also shows that these students are increasingly redesignated as regular education students as they proceed through school.

In terms of the physical structure of the plant, the campus' three main buildings were closed for five years during seismic retrofitting and renovations. Most portables were removed in June 1999, and this is the first school year in many years that classes have been held in the main building. This has greatly increased the overall safety and began enhancing school pride, beautification and an improved learning environment. For safety purposes, a wrought iron fence has also been installed around most of the campus and the football field. Castlemont recognizes the positive ramification of a safe and secure campus and has devoted one of its action plans to the physical improvement of the school campus.

The school community is pressing for improved custodial services, increased hiring of safety personnel and on-site vendors for expanded food services. Plans are underway for the completion of a new swimming pool that will serve the school and surrounding community. The school community is also working to improve the school climate.

Racial problems have occurred on campus between two ethnic groups and campus safety and security continue to be a high priority.

Parents and community members seem to agree that although some progress has been made in this area, much more still needs to be accomplished in order to ensure that Castlemont is a safe, peaceful place for all students to learn.

Some of the biggest challenges that parents see currently facing Castlemont are: the need for more parent involvement, the need to improve communication between staff and students, additional support for ELL students and more of an on-going effort to promote the good programs which the school has to offer. They also recognize that student achievement needs to be improved and that there is a need to adapt to the changing demographics in order to make Castlemont feel "like home" to all students. Most parents feel comfortable and welcome at the site and in discussing issues, but there appears to be an obvious rift between some of the bilingual parents and others who are in key leadership positions.

***B I. Significant changes or developments since the last full visit***

One significant change since the last visit is that Castlemont High School presently has a new Principal and three out of four Assistant Principals are new. The composition of the administrative team is more reflective of the demographic composition of the student body. Another significant change is that the District has hired and placed 32 new teachers at Castlemont.

Another major change is that the organizational structure of the entire school has been changed to reflect an academy model. The school is composed of eight academies and a 9<sup>th</sup> grade house or castle. This school to career program creates small schools within a school. Students chose an academy, which designates career paths and assists students in determining post secondary education goals or training needed to establish career choices. The academies are intended to assist in driving student achievement through promoting career choices, post secondary linkages, student interventions, counseling and guidance, awards and incentive programs. Each academy has two academy directors and a counselor. Teachers were able to select an academy on the basis of their experience, interest, and the master schedule. Each of the academy directors is a part of the leadership team. The academy structure appears to be the focal point of their academic program and the main vehicle with which to attain their ESLR's and action plans.

Castlemont's API scores are very low, drop out rates are high, especially at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level and attendance definitely needs to be improved. The "Focus on Learning" process has helped the staff to recognize these challenges and to begin the process of examining the data and to plan interventions to help students experience greater success. The concern is however, that the last visit was three years ago, and there has been little if any measurable growth in student academic performance during this time.

Data shows that in 1999 only 53% of the population tested in the Stanford Achievement Test with an API statewide rank of 1 on a scale of 1 to 10. Of particular concern is that 93% of the ninth grade students performed below the 50<sup>th</sup> % in reading achievement. This student outcome data needs to be disaggregated and analyzed by major characteristics of the student population. It is unclear how certain data elements in the school profile were utilized, such as 72% daily attendance rate, 11% drop out rate, and the 23% suspension rate. Although 80% of the students' families are considered low income, only 46% of the students are participating in the free and reduced lunch program.

Data also indicates that the percentage of students enrolled in A-F courses has dropped or declined in every subject except Intermediate Algebra, which has increased only slightly. The data reflects that the students tend not to enroll in courses that require advanced math skills. This data also needs to be disaggregated and further analyzed by gender and ethnicity. The staff acknowledges that work needs to be done in this area to recruit more students for these courses, especially males, and that enrichment needs to be provided to improve student performance and strengthen the math program.

Data in this area reflect that the 18% of total graduates completed A-F requirements in 1997 and 30% in 1998, which while an increase, is still extremely low.

Parent concerns from meetings revealed that the areas of greatest need are safety and security on campus, student discipline, the need to improve parent involvement, poor food services, truancy, on-campus absences, cultural differences, lack of a campus healthcare professional, family counseling and violence support, improved access to the library and the redesignation of more ELL students. Several community meetings have been held to address these concerns and brainstorm potential solutions. It is not clear what percent of the parents were involved in these meetings. A PTSA is in place and is open to all interested parents.

It is apparent that there is a great deal of support for the school from the business partnerships, which are an inherent part of the academy structure. There also is a great deal of support from the Castlemont alumni group. In addition, the school submitted an application for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center to provide students with basic skills, cultural opportunities, medical and dental services, and parent education and empowerment.

The student survey only consisted of a random selection of 97 students, which was done on a trial basis to begin the process of assessment involving student input and evaluation of teaching practices. Although this small sample indicates that students are also concerned about safety and health issues, as well as the need to broaden access to the library, neither parents nor students articulated student academic achievement as a top priority.

The school's leadership is composed of administrators, counselors, academy directors, focus group facilitators, and department chairs. The faculty meets via retreats and other meetings to address school issues, but the decision making structure is not clear in terms of how students, parents and community members play a role or have a regular voice in the decision making process. The decision-making process needs to be defined more thoroughly relative to the roles of administrators, department heads and the leadership team.

Castlemont has action plans in place to address several school issues. Originally due to the transition and turnover of a new administrative team, and the challenges of moving back into the buildings after the completion of the retrofitting, the Principal requested that the WASC process be delayed a year and instead, the school chose the option of the applying for a limited term of accreditation, which could give a maximum of three years. Although a full self-study was not required with this new process, the school opted to write a complete self-study nevertheless.

## **II. FOLLOW-UP PROCESS**

*Comment upon the school's process for follow-up, including the capacity of the school to monitor implementation and accomplishment of the areas for improvement as recommended by the previous visiting committee.*

Evidence indicates that follow-up by the staff on recommendations of the previous visiting committee was minimal at best, until this school year. The change in leadership as well as lack of time for teachers to engage in this process, all were cited by the new administration as critical impediments to this process. This year the leadership team met at a retreat, as well as on buy-back days to take a close look at the recommendations from the last WASC visit and a close re-examination of the vision for the school and the ESLR's. Most stakeholder groups were represented during the last process, although, the administration agreed that perhaps better student representation and input could have been helpful.

The school has completed a full self-study using the Focus-On-Learning Criteria. This process included a re-writing of the schools' ESLR's and the development of new Schoolwide Action Plans. These action plans have been established according to the following schedule:

### ***Spring-Winter 1999***

1. Schoolwide planning in support of the vision statement.

### ***1999-2000***

1. School retrofitting
2. School Attendance
3. Safety strategies and safe environment

**2000-2001**

1. Additional school retrofitting
2. Expanding technology instruction

**2001-2002**

1. Additional school retrofitting

**2002-2003**

1. Feeder school articulation and reduction of 9<sup>th</sup> grade drop out rate.
2. Improved lesson plans that integrate standards with ESLR's.
3. Improvement of student technology skills.
4. Assessment strategies that measure student growth in ESLR's.
5. Staff Development related to ESLR's and Action Plans.
6. Academic growth through participation in academies.
7. Support for safety strategies from district and site administrators.

The proposed monitoring and follow-up process for Castlemont High School will be the major responsibility for the leadership team and focus groups. The team will establish benchmarks for action items in the action plans and assist in developing multiple assessment measures to identify the levels of student achievement.

Staff development buy back days will be set aside to analyze data about the school. Time will also continue to be provided on Wednesdays and Thursdays for this process. An administrator appointed by the principal will also facilitate the progress of the schools action plan. However, the schools' success in the accomplishment of these action plans depend on the extent to which specific personnel are designated for monitoring and assessing these action plans; as well as the schools' ability to use and analyze data relating to the improvement of student achievement.

The Academic Improvement Grant has been awarded to Castlemont to raise student achievement and to get students ready to succeed in college.

**III. SCHOOL'S PROGRESS ON CRITICAL AREAS FOR FOLLOW-UP**

***A. For each of the schoolwide critical areas for follow-up, provide a succinct Summary of the school's progress since the full visit and any observable Impact on student learning.***

The previous visiting committee listed nine school-wide critical areas for follow-up. These areas have been addressed with varying degrees of success:

***CRITICAL AREA I***

One of the major critical areas which needed to be addressed since the last self-study three years ago was the issue of completing the retrofitting and renovation of the school, in order to provide students with an environment that is conducive for learning. Although most of the renovation has been completed and the students and staff have



been moved back into the main buildings, there still is a need for marked improvement, relative to the graffiti, there is still a need for repair and maintenance tasks to be completed by the District in an ongoing basis. District support and funding are definitely necessary to ensure that major projects are completed according to the timeline and action plans proposed by the site. Improved food service remains an issue, as does hiring and retention of cafeteria employees working as a team.

## **CRITICAL AREA 2**

The second critical area which was recommended for follow-up by the last visiting committee was that all stakeholders develop student performance assessment strategies that measure the effects of the school's programs and services on the accomplishment of the ESLR's in authentic, valid and reliable ways. These should incorporate clearly articulated benchmarks for student performance in order to provide staff with needed information about student progress over the course of each student's high school career. There does not seem to be any evidence supported in the self-study that indicates that the ESLR's are connected to a regular formal assessment procedure that focuses on systemic improvement in student performance objectives. More data needs to be analyzed consistently and disaggregated according to grade, gender and ethnicity, in order to improve curriculum and student achievement. It seems that some assessment tools such as standardized tests, grades, drop out rates, etc. are only used selectively and on an individual basis rather than on a consistent basis by all of the teachers. Although individual teachers have incorporated a variety of assessment instruments to measure student performance the school has no formalized assessment process other than SAT 9 scores. Although the school growth target is to increase student academic, social and emotional growth by 20%, staff is unclear about what baseline data is to be used in the calculation, who is responsible for monitoring the growth, and how this growth is to be reported.

As was stated by the previous visiting committee, there still needs to be more evidence that curriculum is changed or revised on a regular basis to incorporate the results of assessment. What has changed is that the curriculum is now structured based on the academy in which a student is enrolled. The academy action plans have devised some assessment instruments to measure student performance such as student portfolios, learning projects, presentations, rubrics, and peer evaluation. Some changes have been made in instruction, which have caused some improvement in students' attendance and performance in the classroom, testing, and class participation.

Although there is more collaboration concerning traditional assessments, staff recognizes the need to develop rubrics and uniform grading within the departments. Especially apparent is the need for the staff to develop strategies to help the growing ELL student population experience success in order to be re-designated as fluent English proficient students.

The ESLR's and action plans state that the staff has established a growth target of 20% increase in students' academic, social and emotional growth, as measured by a decrease in absenteeism and suspensions. It would also seem however, that a

measure of a student's increase in academic growth certainly would be improved test scores, a drop in the number of D's and Fail's and a higher graduation rate.

### **CRITICAL AREA 3**

The third critical area was that all stakeholders actively participate in the development, structure, implementation and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the schoolwide action plan. This process involves prioritizing the growth areas, designating areas of responsibility, developing clear timelines and assessment which is well delineated and aligned with the ESLR's.

The action plans mentioned in the previous self-study are apparently moot. The current self-study makes no reference to them, faculty is unfamiliar with them, and the staff developed a new set of action plans.

Communication seems to have improved since the last visit with a more common understanding of the school objectives by all stakeholders. All stakeholders met and discussed new action plans at a school-wide retreat, which was held last spring and this past fall.

The structure provided by the "Focus on Learning" process has helped the school to focus on the critical areas. Teachers, staff, business partners and alumni seem to be the strongest stakeholder voices, however, the student involvement in this process is still not very strong.

The school has set the following priorities for this school year: facility, attendance and safety. Action steps, timelines, and the relationship to ESLR's and WASC criteria are clearly delineated in each action plan.

Priority items for the 2000-01 school year are in the areas of facility and technology. The district has to move with all deliberate speed to ensure that the growth targets are met.

The 2001-02 priority items are also in the areas of facility and technology. Ongoing critical areas of follow-up are addressed in action plans ranging from 1999-2002, including a plan to reduce the 9<sup>th</sup> grade drop out rate by 20%; the development of project-based lesson plans to be produced by all teachers; expansion of the use of technology within the curriculum; increasing the students' academic growth by 20%; increase staff development by 25%; and improving safety on campus.

### **CRITICAL AREA 4**

This critical area states that the staff, students and parents continue to develop a comprehensive plan to improve student attendance. Although the current report describes the importance of student attendance and methods to promote increased attendance, such as tardy sweeps, additional security officers, and a district-funded family, community outreach officer are in place currently; no data exists to indicate the extent to which these methods have been effective. The teachers, staff, district and

administration realize that attendance is tied to academic performance, and continued efforts must be focused in this area. Student attendance averages 72% daily.

**CRITICAL AREA 5**

Little evidence exists that the school does aggressive articulation with feeder schools that has resulted in improved academic achievement of students in its ninth grade in all departments; however, a limited number of departments such as Math, ELL and Instrumental Music meet on a regular basis. There is not, however, a formalized school-wide process to discuss curriculum and instructional strategies. The school has developed an action plan to reduce their 9<sup>th</sup> grade dropout rate by 20%, a goal established by the district. Efforts obviously still must be continued in this area.

**CRITICAL AREA 6**

Critical area six is that the leadership, and teachers utilize the present Castlemont integrated teaching team models to expand to school-wide teaching teams. Although the academies have been created the school has no evidence that all students have experienced academic growth by participating in these academies or the ninth grade castle. The focus groups created by "Focus on Learning" are serving as a vehicle for the staff to meet in school-wide teaching teams and the Principal has committed to having these focus groups continue in this capacity.

**CRITICAL AREA 7**

The critical area states that recently instituted safety strategies should receive continued support from the district and site administration. In an attempt to enforce school safety continual patrols are done by the site management team, site police officer, teachers, paid parent patrols and staff to ensure the safety of all students. Surveillance cameras have also been effective especially in identifying outside potential troublemakers. The wrought iron fence needs to be completed in a couple of more small areas, but is generally working to help staff members secure the campus. The administration and staff are focusing on the area of safety on continual basis.

**CRITICAL AREA 8**

The critical area recommends that the school move from a technology vision statement to a coordinated action plan, including intensive staff development and procurement of state-of-the-art equipment. The school now has seven 30-station computer labs and a 15 station Library computer center. Each teacher has been provided with an Internet ready computer for his or her classroom. Staff development took place for teachers to learn how to enhance their lessons. There is also an on-going process to train teachers in lesson planning and use of technology in the classroom in order to enhance student achievement. The staff has developed an action plan to address the area of technology and there is evidence that progress has been made in this area. The school also is in the process of writing the Digital Grant, which will give additional funding to secure more equipment, software, and will fund staff development.

**CRITICAL AREA 9**

Staff development should be site driven based on ESLR's and action plans.

The school has developed a new Action Plan that targets staff development as being driven by Castlemont's identified ESLR's. Each academy has written an action plan and these are woven or integrated into the school-wide action plans for what the staff wants to accomplish during the next few years. Staff development obviously needs to focus on teaching reading, literacy, and math skills across the curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

During the visitation, the visiting committee noted that although preliminary steps have been taken to address all of these critical areas; continued focus, strong leadership, and continual monitoring are needed to ensure that these areas will all be fully addressed within the timeline established by the current visiting committee.

### ***III B. Identify and note any areas that need to be given priority for the School's ongoing improvement.***

#### ***Priority Areas for On-going Follow up***

1. The school administration and Leadership Team need to better understand the relationship between the self-study process including the five expected outcomes as defined in the "Focus on Learning" Process Guide, 2000 edition and school-wide initiatives such as safety programs, academies, attendance, assessment, and student achievement.
2. The school administration needs to establish a process to ensure that all students, parents, and community have an ongoing and regular voice in the decision-making process.
3. The school administration needs to improve communication with all parents and community, to ensure that diverse voices are heard and considered.
4. The district, school administration, and leadership team need to begin immediately to analyze and interpret data, to assess student achievement, establish benchmarks for student performance, and when appropriate, modify curriculum and instructional practices. There is a need for the district to assist the school with this process.
5. The school needs to align its curriculum with the board-approved standards.
6. The district, school administration, and leadership team needs to begin a process to institutionalize articulation with the feeder schools in order to reduce the dropout rate, especially at the ninth grade level.

7. The school administration, leadership team and department chairs need to develop in writing a decision-making matrix, which includes clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
8. The school administration, leadership team and department chairs need to develop a plan that will ensure that staff development funds are expended for identified needs in accordance with the school-wide Action Plans.
9. The school administration, leadership team, and department chairs need to establish, develop and implement a plan with defined roles assigned to specific personnel, to monitor and follow-up the Action Plans.
10. The school administration, staff, students, and parents need to clearly define a site comprehensive plan to improve student attendance, tardiness, and improve student academic achievement, including improved test scores, a reduction in the number of D's and Fail's, and improve the number of students completing A-F requirements.

### ***III C. Report on the school's success in carrying out its action plan***

The action plans described in the previous self-study have been replaced by a new set of action plans. Due to the change in administration and the addition of 32 new teachers on the staff, most of the documentation for the WASC process, which occurred prior to this school year, was misplaced.

Each academy has now developed its own set of action plans and these have been incorporated in the Schoolwide action plans contained in the current self-study document. Critical areas of follow-up as indicated by the school are: to reduce the 9<sup>th</sup> grade drop out rate, to improve teacher effectiveness in preparing lesson plans and designing academic lessons that comply with district and state standards, emphasize ESLR's and improve the overall quality of instruction; and lastly, to continue to work to improve the infusion of technology into instruction.

The school's success in the accomplishment of these action plans depends on the extent to which the principal names specific personnel designated for monitoring and assessing these action plans; as well as the school's ability to use and analyze data relative to the improvement of student achievement.

### ***IV. Commendations Related to Progress***

Significant progress made in responding to critical areas for follow-up.

1. Castlemont High School has established community partnerships to enhance their Academy Programs.

2. Since the last WASC visitation, there have been improvements to the physical plant, which have addressed campus security and beautification.
3. Castlemont High School has established computer labs to integrate technology with their curriculum.
4. Castlemont High School has addressed the school's security as evidenced by the hiring of the additional security guards and by providing 80 hours of professional development for them.
5. Castlemont High School has promoted on-going collaboration with community groups and other funding sources to improve student learning.
6. The commitment and dedication of some certificated and classified staff members, despite many obstacles and challenges, to provide a quality learning environment.