



VISITING TEAM REPORT

Heritage Preparatory School

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A History of SAIS Accreditation

SAIS member schools are part of a remarkable history of quality assurance in education.

SAIS began its organizational life in 1903 as the "Mid-South Association of Independent Schools," providing training for teachers in private schools and some early public schools in the southeastern states. In 1953, another organization began as the Southern Association of Independent Schools, providing a forum for independent school administrators to work with public schools through SACS and to contribute to the larger interest in accreditation in the southeast. MAIS and SAIS merged in 1986 to form the present SAIS, with an emphasis on accreditations through SACS for independent schools and professional development for administrators, trustees, and teachers. Today, SAIS works to help both established and emerging schools approach these issues with creativity and innovation. Working at the state, regional, and national levels, SAIS serves and strengthens member schools through the promotion of the highest quality educational standards and ethical conduct.

The mission of SAIS is to provide leadership, accreditation services, and professional development resources that will strengthen member schools as they fulfill their missions. The focus of SAIS's interest when it began in 1953 was to develop and maintain relationships with the expanding organization of SACS in order to ensure significant input from independent schools into the exploding world of public school accreditation. The post-WWII years of baby booming, facility planning, teacher training, and legislative entitlement funding eclipsed the scope and role of private education in America close to the current level of service. Part of this history of negotiating standards in a predominantly public-school oriented world of education caused SAIS to embark on its own method of accreditation in the late '90s. The efforts resulted in the SAIS method of accreditation available to member schools.

SAIS has designed and implemented a significant program of accreditation to assist member schools as they develop and promote high quality education in this region. This method is based on a school's stated mission and its own unique approach to thorough and vigorous self-examination.

In today's world of accountability in schooling, accreditation serves as a critical component of a school's demonstrated effectiveness and ability to provide successful schooling for children. A school that is able to achieve accreditation demonstrates a commitment to a process that requires the school to meet a set of rigorous standards; to engage in a program of continuous school improvement; and to demonstrate quality assurance to its stakeholders through self-evaluation and peer-review. SAIS accreditation provides schools access to an integrated network of services and technical assistance that supports every school's ability to identify and meet its goals for improving student performance and the teaching and learning process.

SAIS accredited member schools are part of an international network of accredited schools that have demonstrated success in educating children. As such, SAIS accreditation is recognized throughout the world as a symbol of quality in education for students and teachers. To earn accreditation, schools must meet quality standards, be evaluated by an outside group of peer professionals, and implement a school plan focused on strategic improvement and student performance. Accreditation is voluntary and must be renewed each year.

The Review

A team representing SAIS conducted an on-site visit to review this school's self-study and standards compliance. The team was comprised of team members whose diverse independent school backgrounds provided an array of expertise. The visiting team sought the answers to these four critical questions within the framework of the school's self-study. The following pages contain the findings.

In conducting the on-site reviews, the visiting team was responsible for:

1. Assessing the adequacy of the self-study process;
2. Identifying strengths of the school deserving commendation;
3. Developing recommendations that may help to strengthen the programs of the school;
4. Assessing compliance with the standards of SAIS;
5. Developing a written report of the findings.

To fulfill the team's responsibilities, team members:

1. Reviewed documentation provided by the school;
2. Conducted interviews with board members, parents, school personnel, students, and community members;
3. Applied the standards for accreditation;
4. Developed a draft of commendations and recommendations;
5. Contributed to the content and focus of the written report;
6. Provided input as to the determination of accreditation.

The primary focus of the self-study process is to demonstrate the capacity of a school to meet the requirements for accreditation. A typical self-study consists of:

1. Analysis and response to accreditation standards;
2. Identification and demonstration of a continuous process of improvement;
3. Implementation of methods that provide for quality assurance.

The study addresses four critical questions relative to each of the school's stated goals for improvement and mission fulfillment:

- **PROFILE:** Where is the school today? The PROFILE should include clear, comprehensive information reflecting current student performance data, stakeholder perspectives, community characteristics, and analysis of strengths and limitations in the areas of student learning and school performance.
- **VISION:** Where does the school want to go? The VISION is a clear, compelling purpose communicated through the school's vision and mission statements, beliefs, and core values.
- **PLAN:** What is the plan to get there? The PLAN should be based on an analysis of pertinent data, research of the best practices, and alignment with generally-accepted expectations for student learning at schools with similar missions.
- **RESULTS:** How will the school know when it has accomplished its plan? The RESULTS are documented evidence demonstrating successful implementation of strategies that resulted in accomplishment of the school's mission and student achievement gains related to the school's mission.

SAIS Accreditation Policies

- **Accreditation Committee**
The SAIS Board of Trustees has established the SAIS Accreditation Committee to oversee the accreditation services offered by SAIS. The Accreditation Committee establishes and maintains review boards whose members review and act upon visiting team recommendations. The Board of Trustees reviews and officially approves the schools recommended for accreditation by the Accreditation Committee.
- **Accreditation Appeal Process**
If the visiting team recommendation to offer accreditation or re-accreditation is rejected, specific reasons will be given and the school may be given a timeframe and assistance to address deficiencies. The decision of a review board may be appealed in writing by the head of school, referencing specific area(s) in which the school was found deficient. A subsequent review board will review the original findings and the appeal materials. If the decision is upheld by the subsequent review board, the decision may be appealed in writing by the head of school to the SAIS Board of Trustees. The school's accreditation status will remain unchanged during an appeals process. The judgment of the SAIS Board of Trustees is final.
- **Interim Report Requirements**
Accredited schools must submit a two-year interim report to SAIS after the team visit. This report ensures continued compliance with standards/indicators and documents efforts made in addressing the visiting team's recommendations and the school's self-study goals.
- **Member in good standing:** Schools must remain a member in good standing, with all annual membership dues paid in full and abiding by policies and procedures.
- **Notification of substantive change / head of school change:** Accredited schools must notify SAIS in a timely manner of a substantive change using the form at www.sais.org/change. Changes may include: head of school change, other leadership changes, adding or contracting grade levels, merger, name change, mission change, major construction, crisis situation, litigation, school closure, other changes. In the event of a substantive change, SAIS may request additional information or conduct a visit to the school.
- **Terms of accreditation and re-accreditation:** Terms of accreditation are generally for five years commencing on July 1 and concluding on June 30. Schools must host a visiting team prior to the expiration of their term of accreditation and during the same semester of their previous accreditation if a re-accreditation visit and within three years of becoming a candidate for accreditation if an initial accreditation. Any variance to an accreditation timeline must be approved by SAIS. A new self-study is required for each five-year period reflecting evidence of continuous improvement.
- **Non-compliance:** Stakeholders may file a non-compliance complaint against a school. Upon receipt and verification of a non-compliance report, the school will be given an opportunity to respond to the inquiry. The inquiry, response, and any subsequent written correspondence on the matter may be made available to the accreditation visiting team chair on the next accreditation visit. However, an immediate investigative visit to the school may be undertaken if the response by the school is unsatisfactory or an accumulation of complaints indicates that a school's response is inconsistent with a preponderance of evidence. As is frequently the case, if a school's practices are bordering on non-compliance, a discussion that is triggered by a non-compliance complaint is often a catalyst to remedy such practices. In the event that a school is not compliant, a series of actions will be undertaken with the school such as but not limited to: a request to remedy the non-compliance issue, placing the school on warned status or probation, and an ultimate action of dropping accreditation.

Roster of Team Members

Chair(s)

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School Snapshot

Mission

Purpose

To provide an academically rigorous educational experience designed to help students know, love and practice that which is true, good and excellent and to prepare them to live purposefully and intelligently in the service of God and man

Vision

To be a school known for graduates who positively shape culture through their faith and intellect.

Mission

Think with excellence, believe with confidence, live with character.

Motto

Esse quam videri -“To be rather than to seem”

Distinctives

Christ-centered, Covenant Community, Classical

The school's purpose, vision, mission, motto and distinctives are all intentionally used to shape the culture and all decision making at the school. They are referenced in our materials and often quoted at school meetings and events. The board of trustees regularly reviews the purpose and works to ensure that the school remains true to its directives.

Brief History

Heritage Preparatory School was founded in 1998 with 15 students by a small group of like-minded families in the educational space of Westminster Presbyterian Church on Sheridan Road in Atlanta. In 2003, the school moved to the current location on the campus of Morningside Baptist Church. A fifty year lease was signed in 2008 securing the school's position as a Classical Christian school in midtown Atlanta.

Middle school was added in 2005, with the first class of three graduating in 2008. Heritage graduates have matriculated into Atlanta's finest schools including Lovett, Marist, Pace Academy, St. Pius, Wesleyan, Westminster, Woodward and many public high schools as well. Heritage alumni have received accolades in their high schools for academics, extracurricular activities, sports and service opportunities. We now have graduates in colleges and working in various careers all over the world.

The school received its first accreditation from SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) in 2008. In 2014 the school received dual accreditation from SAIS (Southern Association of Independent Schools) and SACS.

Extracurricular activities were first introduced in 2007 with a chess club, followed by the addition of a drama club. Today the school has a robust clubs program for students in all levels of the school.

In 2010, the school launched the middle school athletic program that included boys' and girls' cross-country, girls' volleyball, boys' basketball and girls' soccer. In 2013, Heritage joined the Metro Atlanta Athletic Conference.

In 2017 the school launched the middle school House Program which allows middle schools students opportunities to work together within the school as well as service projects in the community.

Heritage currently has 148 students from 88 families enrolled in Enrichment (4 year pre-school) through class 8. Class sizes range from a maximum of 12 students in the lower school to 15 in the middle school. We have 34 faculty and staff members.

In 2017, after extensive research and stakeholder feedback, Heritage decided to start a high school in the 2021-2022 school year. We are working diligently towards fulfilling that goal.

Leadership

Heritage is governed by a board of trustees responsible for upholding the school's mission. As stated in the bylaws, the board is independent, self-governing, and self-perpetuating. The board of trustees exists solely to ensure that the school's mission remains intact, clear, and communicated throughout multiple constituencies, that the mission is being professionally executed with positive results, and that talent and financial resources are in place to ensure the immediate and future health of the school.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the board has the ultimate fiduciary responsibility for all that is Heritage. Pragmatically, the board is organized around functional expertise.

Heritage Prep has a president that is responsible for development, admissions, financial and operations departments. The president is employed by the board of trustees and reports to them.

We also have a headmaster who is responsible for all of the educational aspects of the school including teacher hiring and development, curriculum development, and ensuring that our educational model is fulfilling our mission.

Self Study

In 2015 we began a re-branding process with an outside firm. This process included meetings with stakeholder group representatives to determine our distinctives and to assess our mission effectiveness. Once this process was complete, we rolled out the results to our faculty/staff and parents in small group settings so that we could compile and assess the feedback. One of the outcomes of this process was our decision to begin a high school in the 2021-2022 school year.

In 2018 we conducted a value narratives survey and found that Heritage is aligned with the expectations of importance and performance in most areas. Our net promoter values were 90% for parents and 68% for faculty and staff.

Improvement

The strategic priorities for Heritage Preparatory School are:

1. Spiritual Authenticity
2. Academic Excellence
3. Programmatic Excellence
4. Institutional Excellence

The details around these priorities are articulated in the School Report for Growth.

Introduction

Introduction and Overview of the Visit

The SAIS visiting team was warmly received by the Heritage Prep community. All constituent groups were open and excited to contribute to the conversation around the future of the school, providing the team insight into the culture of Heritage Prep. All documentation was available to the team in the accreditation portal or upon request. The team met with members of the board of the school for dinner and representative groups of parents, students, and teachers. Key administrators answered questions about the school's growth plan and specifically the four strategic goals identified for school improvement. The visiting team also visited classrooms and observed teachers and students involved in their day-to-day activities.

Our conversations and observations affirmed for us what we perceived to be an incredibly positive and supportive school community. Each group independently spoke to the mission manifested through a Christian spirituality that permeated all aspects of the student experience. All were deeply committed to the classical model of education as the avenue through which this Christian worldview was delivered. All stakeholders felt the size of the school - specifically the grade level sections - provided for deep and meaningful relationships between the students and the teachers, which meant that students could be pushed from a loving place to reach challenging academic heights.

The board and school leadership are to be commended for the work they have done in setting a vision for Heritage Prep. Conversations with the board members revealed a healthy approach to governance and an appropriate relationship with the president. The board's work in stabilizing the senior leadership of the school nearly five years ago and then that leadership's work generally, has laid the foundation for what this team experienced throughout our visit - a school community excited about the forward momentum of the school and firing on all cylinders.

All stakeholders were aware of and generally excited about the prospect of a high school coming online by 2021, although some stakeholder groups were more informed around the details of that plan than others. We sensed - and school leadership was well aware of - the need to maintain momentum around the upcoming high school. As you might expect, there was some anxiety around the details of what that high school will actually look and feel like and a desire, especially from the faculty, to have an opportunity to offer insights into the planning process. As identified in the growth plan, one improvement theme we heard during our visit related to developing a more robust athletics program.

Area 1

Title

Spiritual Authenticity

Description

Heritage seeks to maintain a thoroughly Christian educational experience. The presence of this goal is to prevent the institutional drift that can occur when focus is applied to areas of the school that are higher profile and easier to assess, i.e. academic rigor. The board and leadership of Heritage recognize the temptation to widen the admissions standards to create growth, but doing so would fundamentally change the culture of the school. As such, the school wants to maintain its commitment to their core values. This goal is not necessarily to take the school somewhere new but rather to maintain and enhance their present culture and identity.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for the following:

- Developing and sustaining a positive school climate;
- Faculty clearly and consistently modeling the mission of the school;
- Committing to weekly devotion programming that includes families, students, and faculty and staff.

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider the following:

- Developing a formal spiritual action plan that naturally evolves from middle school to high school.

Area 2

Title

Academic Excellence

Description

Heritage seeks to continue to provide a rigorous classical and Christian educational experience that will demonstrate continued growth in their standardized test data in conjunction with instilling a Biblical worldview lens for the students' spiritual growth. It will be essential that ongoing plans for training and mentoring new faculty are maintained as the school continues to grow in enrollment and faculty positions.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for the following:

- Developing a consistent understanding of the benefits of a classical education across stakeholder groups;
- Dedicating significant time and energy to hiring, training, and supporting teachers in the classical Christian approach, thereby developing a culture of professional growth;
- Adopting a curriculum mapping software in order to embed a reflective practice for the constant evolution and development of curriculum at the school;
- Adopting technology standards and committing the resources necessary to meet them;
- Training teachers to analyze ERB CTP4 results in order to benefit student learning and curriculum implementation.

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider:

- Developing a communication plan for how middle school students will encounter the real world with a Christian worldview and what that will look like as they matriculate to high school;
- Adopting a philosophy on technology integration as part of the broader high school development plans.

Area 3

Title

Programmatic Excellence

Description

Heritage will develop an athletics strategic plan that will provide a framework for improving their current program and building into a high school athletics program. Heritage will develop an after-school club philosophy to help guide the offerings made for each quarter and help manage expectations of parents. Heritage will continually update and revise the high school timeline to reflect current status and any new developments.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for the following:

- Focusing on the after school clubs that has further enhanced the sense of community between and amongst students and faculty;
- Identifying, recruiting, and retaining a faculty and administration that are enthusiastic about wearing multiple hats.

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends the school consider the following:

- Developing a vision for athletics at Heritage Prep that includes near, intermediate and long-term goals for the program;
- Developing a vision for fine arts that includes near, intermediate and long-term goals for the program.

Area 4

Title

Institutional Excellence

Description

Heritage seeks to build on the momentum created over the last three years to position itself for a successful high school launch. By establishing a high school, the school will be able to stabilize middle school enrollment, create excitement for new families seeking a K-12 school, and finally be able to take advantage of completing the Trivium by offering rhetoric.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for the following:

- Thoughtful and intentional planning by the board and the school's leadership around the addition of a high school;
- The board's adoption of the president/principal model which has led to stable and successful school leadership;
- Developing a comprehensive model of succession planning across all facets of school leadership.

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider the following:

- Developing a facility action plan that recognizes the 2021 deadline for facilities that can house a high school;
- Developing and communicating to the faculty a plan for engagement around the reality of the high school vision;
- Developing an internal marketing and communication plan geared to the trailblazer students and families around the benefits of staying through high school;
- Developing an admissions strategy that considers the addition of a high school;
- Developing an alumni engagement communication strategy to further the institutional excellence goal of adding a high school;
- Creating a market analysis model that identifies demographic realities and anticipates market shifts in order to inform programming that supports enrollment goals.

Additional Commendations and Recommendations

Additional Commendations

The team commends the school for the following:

- Clearly defining and communicating a vision for who Heritage Prep is and what they are not.

Additional Recommendations

The team recommends the school consider the following:

- Consider developing an Enrichment 1 to class 12 diversity and inclusivity plan as ideas for adding a high school move forward.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

Summary

The visiting team left Heritage Prep feeling that we had worked with a small school that was clear in its mission and identity, committed to the classical pedagogical model through a Christian worldview, and excited about the future of the school as the institution celebrates only its twentieth year. Preparing to add a high school in less than three years is no easy feat, and programmatic and facility plans were revving up during our time at Heritage Prep. It is clear to all that a high school will change the dynamic of the culture of the school. Matt Skinner, President, and Beth McCauley, Headmaster, are both veterans of Christian, K-12 schools and as such this duo is more than prepared to lead this strategic initiative. The visiting team appreciated that in addition to the high school goal, the school remained committed to its academic program, which was incredibly strong as our group saw during our classroom visits.

It is an exciting time to be a part of the Heritage Prep family. As the high school program and facilities outlook become clearer, the school seems poised to take advantage of their two-sided value-add in the market: their unique mission-niche and phenomenal location inside the perimeter. A detailed and regular market analysis process that helps to identify mission ready families will be critical as the school looks to enroll around one hundred more students over the next five years. Understanding what barriers to enrollment exists for those families, and how the school might be able to balance these needs with a mission that remains consistent but a program that could evolve to meet the needs of those families.

Conclusion

Finally, the visiting team would like to thank Irene Simoneaux, SAIS accreditation coordinator for Heritage Prep, for the incredible amount of work she put into this process on our behalf. From the previsit to our time on campus in February, 2019, she was amazing. Thanks also goes out to the board of Heritage Prep and senior leadership, as well as all of the faculty, parents, and students who took time out of their day to meet with the team. Heritage Prep is a strong school with an exciting future. We thank them for allowing us the opportunity to work with them through the accreditation process.

Standards Compliance

The school is in compliance with all standards of the SAIS accreditation process as verified by documentation, observations, and interviews.

Self-Study Quality

The self-study conducted by the school meets the standard of quality and thoroughness required by the SAIS accreditation process and answers the four critical questions as outlined in the Guidebook.

Recommendation

The school is unanimously recommended for accreditation.