



**AESD** ASSOCIATION OF  
EDUCATIONAL  
SERVICE DISTRICTS

Nine ESDs. One Network.  
Supporting Washington's Schools and Communities.

## **The Value of Washington State's Voluntary Accreditation Process**

Dr. Carolyn E. O'Keeffe  
Washington State Accreditation Coordinator and Coach  
Retired Deputy Superintendent; Northshore School District

August 21, 2023

## Table of Contents

---

<b>1. Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Introduction and Statement of Problem.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Data Review.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4. Findings.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Conclusions.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6. Appendix.....</b>	<b>9</b>

## **Abstract**

Accreditation is a voluntary process that a school undertakes to confirm it is providing a high quality and rigorous education for its students. Due to its voluntary nature, school and district administration often question the value of the accreditation process and its outcome. They wonder if there are compelling reasons for taking the time and effort to complete a process not mandated by Washington State Board of Education (SBE) or the Washington Administrative Codes (WAC). A review of various programs, colleges, universities, military academies, and informational requests received at Northwest ESD 189 was executed in an endeavor to determine the significance of accreditation to a school and its students. Findings from this study indicate that although Washington State's accreditation is a voluntary process, it emerges as a significant criterion for specific programs and memberships that high schools consider vital in their offering of high quality and rigorous programs and opportunities for their students. There are universities and outside agencies that require high schools to be accredited. Based on these findings, every high school should complete the accreditation process and maintain their accredited status to ensure that their students' futures are limitless, and their opportunities are boundless. A student's future endeavors should not be impacted by their high school's non-accredited status.

## Introduction and Statement of Problem

The State Board of Education (SBE) of Washington State has deemed that school accreditation is a voluntary process that schools may complete. The SBE acknowledges that accreditation "...is a process a school undertakes to create a valid, credible reputation among fellow institutions, students, and the public... It is intended to help schools develop their strengths, ensure governance, and provide the best educational experiences for their students." (1) Accreditation demonstrates that a school is providing students with high quality and rigorous education. A school going through the accreditation process is focused on self-improvement and has developed a focused research-based plan of action for its school improvement. An accreditation process, that is tightly aligned to the school's improvement plan (SIP) and that utilizes the cycle of inquiry-based process will support the school in its efforts to create and sustain a high quality and rigorous education for all its students. Accreditation also involves external review to validate the school's improvement plan and process.

At one point in time accreditation was required under WAC 180.56.010; however, it was repealed effective of July 1, 1968. Because accreditation has become a voluntary process, many school and district leadership question its value and whether there are compelling reasons for them to complete the accreditation process. Are there programs, colleges and universities and careers requiring high schools to be accredited? Are there requirements that brought programs to high schools of which current administration might not be aware? How valuable is accreditation to Washington state high schools and their students?

## Data Review

A review of various programs, colleges and universities, and recent requests to the Northwest Educational Service District 189's Office of Assistant Superintendent was undertaken for this study. Two specific programs that districts find valuable to offer are International Baccalaureate (IB) and College Board for AP courses (Pre AP and AP). These programs support a district's goal of providing high quality and rigorous education for its students. They are recognized nationally and internationally. Another outside entity reviewed was the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs: Private Sector Exchange. The U.S. State Department provides guidance to schools sponsoring and placing students in the K – 12 Exchange Visitor Program. A survey of colleges and universities in Washington, Oregon and California, and national military academies was undertaken as well. When reviewing all these entities, the fundamental question was whether accreditation was a requirement for any of these programs or institutions.

1. **International Baccalaureate Organization (IB):** The IB Organization has eighteen Governing Articles that schools must meet to be accepted and approved and continue as a school providing the IB program. "In reviewing the By-laws and Governing Articles" (2), there are two specific Articles referring to school accreditation:
  - a. Article 3.4 states, "A school must have the required licensure or accreditation from the local authorities and/or, if applicable, independent recognized accreditation agencies, indicating that it is licensed/accredited or otherwise

authorized to provide educational services to students of the ages served by the programme(s) for which the school is seeking to be authorized.” (2)

- b. Article 10.1: Termination of the candidacy by the IB Organization states, “The reasons for which the IB may terminate a school’s candidacy include but are not limited to the following...” 10.1 (f) speaks to accreditation: “The school no longer holds the required licensure or accreditation by the local authorities and/or, if applicable, independent recognized accreditation agencies, indicating that it is licensed/accredited to provide educational services to students of the ages served by the programme(s) for which the school is applying.” (2)
2. **College Board:** College Board is a not-for-profit organization. Members include secondary and postsecondary institutions as well as organizations and agencies serving secondary and postsecondary education. To apply and be accepted to its membership, districts and their secondary schools must meet the requirements specified under the “College Board Restated and Amended Bylaws” (3):
  - a. **III. Membership: F: to be eligible for election:** 1. “Secondary and postsecondary schools and institutions must be appropriately accredited and make regular use of one or more College Board programs and services.” (3)
  - b. **III. Membership: G:** “Membership may be terminated at any time by the Board of Trustees and shall terminate automatically if the conditions of eligibility for membership cease to exist.” (3)
3. **Designated U.S. State Department K – 12 Exchange Visitor Program:** The U.S. State Department requires that schools participating in their Exchange Visitor Program meet accreditation requirements and maintain their accreditation status while hosting exchange visitors (students and teachers). Their “Guidance Directive 2022-01 ” provides critical, detailed information for sponsors and schools hosting exchange visitors through the designated State Department’s Private Sector Exchange. This document provides the State Department’s definition of not only what an accredited institution is, but also the requirement for enrolled and participating exchange students. 22 CFR 62.2 defines accredited institutions as “any academic institution that is duly accredited by the appropriate academic accrediting authority of the U.S. jurisdiction in which such institution is located.” 22 CFR 62.25 (c)(1) states, “Secondary school exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution...” and under 22 CFR 62.5(c)(6) “... provide “evidence of current accreditation” in order to receive designation” as a U.S. Department Exchange Visitor Program.” The Directive goes onto to provide sponsors with their requirements for placing students in U.S. secondary schools. Sponsors must annually verify that their host schools continue to meet the Departments accreditation requirements. If the host school is awaiting final accreditation status, loses its accreditation status, or fails to renew its accreditation, that school is not eligible to host exchange visitors. The sponsors must provide the exchange visitor with this information and the opportunity to move to an accredited school. (4).
4. **U.S. Colleges and Universities:** How high school accreditation is viewed varied among the colleges and universities reviewed. At times the requirement for graduating from an accredited high school was clearly indicated as a criterion; other times, it was revealed in

FAQs, a video clip on admissions, speaking to an admissions representative or going to an outside linked document on admissions.

- a. **UW:** The UW does not require a high school student to graduate from an accredited high school. (5)
  - b. **CWU:** In CWU's first-year admission procedure on the CWU website, home-schooled and GED students are identified and required to provide specific admissions documentation. CWU defines a homeschool student as, "... an applicant that will complete HS coursework at home and will not receive a diploma from an accredited high school." (6) The website does not address or define a high school graduate as one who has graduated from an accredited high school.
  - c. **Gonzaga University:** Gonzaga University requires that an applicant graduate from an accredited high school with college preparatory coursework. (7)
  - d. **Whitworth College:** On the Whitworth College website, there is a video delineating the admission process to Whitworth. A specific slide states, "Students with five or more classes from an accredited high school or college (e.g., Running Start) have the option to submit test scores with their application." Whitworth is a test option college; however, an applicant needs to submit SAT or ACT test scores if they did not attend an accredited high school or had not taken at least five college courses. (8)
  - e. **Oregon Universities: University of Oregon, Oregon State University and Eastern Oregon University** all require that freshmen be graduates from a standard (private) or a regionally accredited public high school. Students from non-accredited or non-standard high schools can apply but have additional requirements that they must meet, including tests (SAT, ACT) and completion of college credits in core classes. (9 - 11)
  - f. **California State University System:** The CalState University admissions office provided the following information via email correspondence, "Although regulations do not stipulate graduation from accredited high schools, the CSU participates in the activities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and its Accrediting Commission for Schools and encourages California high schools to be accredited by the Association. Students who are homeschooled or attend non-accredited schools are expected to meet the same admission requirements as graduates of accredited high schools." They also stated, "High school accreditation is not any different for non-residents than for California residents." (12)
  - g. **Stanford University:** Email correspondence from Stanford University's Admissions office stated that there is no requirement that an applicant graduate from an accredited high school. (13)
5. **Military Academies:** Review of the websites of U.S. military academies and specific questions to the Admissions office of the Naval Academy and Senator Patty Murray's office provided the following data:
- a. There were no statements on the military academy websites requiring students to graduate from an accredited high school.
  - b. The representative in the Naval Academy's Admissions Office stated that the strength of the high school was taken into consideration – the courses the high

school offered, and that the applicant had access to take. The Academy reviewed the transcript and the whole person applying (e.g., leadership opportunities taken, extracurricular activities, challenges overcome). (14)

- c. Didra Marchand, the Veterans case worker who worked with a state panel to review student requests for Senator Murray's nomination to a military academy stated that the military did not look at a high school's accreditation status. The military looked at the applicant's transcript, GPA, leadership opportunities, extracurricular activities, and their overcoming adversities and challenges. (15)
6. **Requests for Information and Documentation of High School Accreditation:** The Northwest Educational Service District #189 (NWESD189) is the designated facilitator for the AESD Accreditation Process for Washington state. Throughout the years, the Office of the Assistant Superintendent has received inquiries and requests for verification of the accreditation status of a student's high school of record. The following are recent examples of information and verification requested:
- a. International Universities: Students and parents of students, who have graduated from a Washington state high school have requested verification that their high school is/was accredited at the time of their graduation. District administrations have also requested verification of their high school's accreditation status. Accreditation verification was required for their students applying to universities in Canada, India, and Australia. One student's visa status was dependent on their high school accreditation status. (16)
  - b. Out of State Universities: An Admission's specialist at an out of state university requested verification that the applicant's high school had been accredited. (16)
  - c. U.S. Department Exchange Visitor Program: The Operations Coordinator for Aspect Foundation requested verification of accreditation status of multiple high schools in order to place exchange students at those schools. (16)
  - d. Agencies: Agencies in various states have requested verification that the current job applicant graduated from an accredited high school. The applicants have called to verify their school's accreditation status. Examples include:
    - i. California State Patrol called to confirm that the applicant's high school was accredited as this was a requirement for the Investigation Unit of the CA State Patrol. (16)
    - ii. A student who was a candidate for New York City Fire Department's Investigation Division needed verification of school accreditation as part of the application process and requirement. (16)

## Findings

Although Washington State's accreditation is a voluntary process for schools, it emerges as a significant criterion for specific programs and memberships that high schools consider vital in their offering of high quality and rigorous programs and opportunities for their students. Current administration might not be aware that accreditation was a requirement in the application process to become an IB school and offer the IB program at their school if IB has been at that high school for many years. They also might not be aware that high school accreditation was a requirement to become a member of College Board and offer Pre AP,

Springboard and AP at that school if these programs have been a part of their high school for years. The Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs: Private Sector K – 12 Visitor Exchange Program provides a secondary school with a wealth of experience and understanding for their students regarding exchange students from other countries and cultures. Without accreditation, a secondary school would not be eligible to host exchange students. Host sponsors would not be able to place exchange students at nonaccredited secondary schools.

There are also universities to which Washington state students apply that require incoming first year students to graduate from accredited high schools. Not all colleges and universities have this requirement clearly stated in their admissions documentation. Graduating seniors may not be aware that a particular university to which they would like to attend has this requirement until they are asked to provide verification that their high school is accredited. If the high school is not accredited, the student may be ineligible to apply or may need to meet additional requirements.

There may be other agencies that require their applicants to verify their high school accreditation status besides the California State Patrol's Investigation Unit and New City Fire Department's Investigation Division. Often the request comes years after the student has graduated and well into a career path.

## **Conclusion**

The State Board of Education for Washington state considers accreditation a voluntary process and based on this status, a high school and/or district administration may determine it is an unnecessary process to undertake. This is a faulty premise and does not serve the school or its students well. Memberships to and eligibility in national and international programs could be lost, eliminating high quality, rigorous programs from a school's course offerings. This loss would impact student standing in applying for top universities and colleges. Students could be limited in the colleges and universities they wish to attend or the future careers they would like to reach. Where current and future students decide to go or do for their postsecondary study and careers is unknown. There is a vast world out there for Washington state students. Opportunities abound for them. It is crucial that schools and administrations ensure their students' futures are unlimited and not impacted by their high school's non-accredited status. Although a voluntary process, accreditation should be seen as a valuable and required process that every high school complete for the benefit of their current and future students.



## Appendix

### Bibliography

- (1) *Accreditation; FAQs*. Washington State Board of Education, [www.sbe.wa.gov/faqs/accreditation](http://www.sbe.wa.gov/faqs/accreditation). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (2) “Rules for IB Candidate Schools.” International Baccalaureate. (October 2021); International Baccalaureate Organization (UK) Ltd. Cardiff, Wales, [ibo.org](http://ibo.org). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (3) “College Board Restated and Amended Bylaws.” [www.about.collegeboard.org/governance/bylaws](http://www.about.collegeboard.org/governance/bylaws); pgs. 5 – 6 (October 2018). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (4) “Guidance Directive 2022-01.” *Exchange Visitor Program – K – 12 School Accreditation*. U.S. State Department, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Private Sector Exchange (October 2022).
- (5) *Important Freshmen Application Information*. University of Washington, [www.admit.washington.edu](http://www.admit.washington.edu). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (6) *First-Year Admission Procedures and Additional Information, Home Schooled and GED Student*. Central Washington University, [www.cwu.edu](http://www.cwu.edu). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (7) *Undergraduate Admissions, Admission Requirements*. Gonzaga University, [www.gonzaga.edu](http://www.gonzaga.edu). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (8) *First Year Application Process for Whitworth University*. Whitworth University, [www.whitworth.edu](http://www.whitworth.edu). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (9) *Admission Requirements, Undergraduate Students*. Oregon State University, [www.admissions.oregonstate.edu](http://www.admissions.oregonstate.edu). Accessed 18 August 2023
- (10) *Admissions, Freshman Requirements*. University of Oregon, [www.admissions.uoregon.edu](http://www.admissions.uoregon.edu). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (11) *Freshman Admission Requirements*. Eastern Oregon University, [www.eou.edu](http://www.eou.edu). Accessed 18 August 2023.
- (12) *Cal State Apply*, California State Universities. Personal email correspondence received 22 September 2021.
- (13) *Office of Undergraduate Admissions*. Stanford University; Personal email correspondence. Received 24 September 2021.
- (14) *Naval Representative*. Naval Academy. Personal interview. 21 September 2021.
- (15) Marshand, Didra, Veterans Case Worker, Office of Senator Patty Murray. *Nomination Request to Military Academies*. Personal interview. 21 September 2021.
- (16) Johnsen, Krista, Administrative Assistant, Office of Assistant Superintendent, Northwest ESD 189. Personal interview and documentation of inquiries. Received 21 August 2023.