



The following is part of a letter I received from Rabbi Nochem Kaplan.

Thoughts on Accreditation:

- ❖ American accreditation is a uniquely American process. Whereas many countries supervise schools directly, schools and colleges in the United States provide quality assurance through self study and peer review. This means that a school examines all its functions and its activities against nationally recognized standards and through the use of carefully crafted assessment instruments and records all its findings. The American model is now being copied by many in Europe, the Middle East China and Africa. It is seen as the best way to guarantee quality education in a modern world.
- ❖ For more than a century, the accreditation process was successful because schools which undertook an accreditation protocol seriously undertook an introspective process. They sought to better understand who they were, what the source of their strengths and successes was and where they needed to improve. The self study process gave form to introspection and yielded honest results.
- ❖ As part of the self study process, a school demonstrates how it meets all national standards in areas as diverse as the soundness of its financial administration and its future to careful examination of its professional personnel and academic offerings. It is able to chart the success of its programs in light of its own mission and educational vision as opposed to an arbitrary governmentally generated mission. It will also learn where improvement is needed.
- ❖ The peer review process is meant to assure that a self study is all that it is meant be, thorough, honest, and meticulously undertaken. It has been the assurance of the "quality Assurance" represented by accreditation. A peer review team enters the school through a well done accreditation document. It tells a visitor everything about the school from the school's perspective and against a background of national standards. The school thus bares all and hides nothing.
- ❖ It is the self study which has helped schools meet their highest expectations and greatest aspirations. It challenged them to look for better processes and to reach for higher standards. It made them take an honest look in mirror and examine themselves, warts and all. It helped them resolve to improve and showed them the way how.
- ❖ It is the thorough peer review which has assured the veracity of the self study. No substitute statistical study, or review of test scores and other such data generated facts will produce the success of time tested accreditation.
- ❖ Together, self study and peer review set the stage for strategic planning which assured positive outcomes to well laid plans. Any process which circumvents these dual foundations of accreditation cannot honestly call itself by that name.
- ❖ It has been said that accreditation is a dynamic process but the elements of self study and peer review, which have served the country so well, remain constant. How the accreditation process is applied to changing times and different needs of systems is what is dynamic and evolving. It is because the basic elements of the process are constant and demand veracity, that it is such an effective tool to promote substantive change and continuous improvement.
- ❖ Additionally, accreditation has never been a one-size-fits-all process. Much as the American people and culture is a diverse mosaic of differences and contrasts, so too are its schools. Public and private schools are at once similar and unique. All American schools are dedicated to fostering the democratic process and excellence in education. The content and processes schools employ in arriving at those goals is as diverse as the American people. This is why private education exists; its mission is to promote a unique identity within the American mosaic.
- ❖ Recently, there have been some who have submitted a new form of accreditation which has not only diluted the process it has emasculated it. It no longer resembles the thoroughly dynamic process described and it needs to be exposed for what it is: A statistics gathering process set against a background of diluted and nebulous standards which promote mediocrity.

I wish you all Happy Holidays and a Prosperous New Year, 2011.

Dr. Don D. Petry
Executive Director
NCPSEA, National Council for Private School Accreditation



For more information about NCPSEA please, contact us or visit our website.

Our mailing address is:

NCPSEA
P.O. Box 13686
Seattle, WA 98198-1010 USA

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