

## *Focus on Learning*

### *VC Chair Hints*

#### *Before the Visit: Working with the School*

- I start a journal for each school visited, making notes of all pre-visit telephone conversations & visits. Save all e-mail – both sent and received.
- Ask the school to send you (1) their current action plan, (2) the VC report from the last full visit, and (3) VC reports from any/all interim visits. If (by chance) the school can't locate these, you can obtain copies from WASC-North. You might begin to ask for any reports they made to their constituency on progress on the action plan.
- Ask school to add you to their mailing list for family newsletters, school newspapers, & other mailings. For a small town, the principal subscribed to the local weekly newspaper for me. These are very helpful in getting a feel for the culture of the school. Web sites play this same sort of role – school and district.
- Remind school to include student handbook/registration guide with the self-study mailing. If faculty handbook is small, include also. Members will return if requested.
- Make at least one visit & do pre-reading! It helps you better understand successes and difficulties the school has had in preparing the self-study & prevents major gaps/gaffs for VC members. WASC will cover a second visit if you or the school feels it's important. You can head-off much confusion/misunderstanding.
- I try to stay in touch with the principal/self-study coordinator every 3-4 weeks, once we've made initial contact. Make that initial contact as early as possible. Send them some information about yourself (personal & professional). Note, while much of my before-the-visit work is with the self-study coordinator, I always copy the principal on all e-mails to close the loop. Find out what's right for the school you're visiting.
- Ask principal about any undercurrents/issues so that you can alert committee. This can include anything from the recent death of a staff member to the resignation of a superintendent to staff changes to labor negotiations to the passed/failed bond measure. Keep checking, something may have happened Saturday night before your Sunday meeting.
- Develop your own housekeeping list for the school. Identify VC needs, process decisions, paperwork responsibilities, technology requirements. Having it in writing will lessen tension at the school & help ensure that stuff is in place for the visit. Review it early with the self-study coordinator; check progress.
- Check on the availability of e-mail for VC members either at the school or hotel. Folks like to stay in touch.
- Make sure everyone will have a key to the workroom & bathroom if keys are required. You do not want to be potty manager.
- Work closely with the principal/self-study coordinator and the district business office to understand their requirements for reimbursement given the new rules. Will everyone need original receipts? Is there a per diem limit? Will the hotel be prepaid? What about purchase orders at three local restaurants for dinners? Forms? Timing? Lisa Blaylock, WASC business manager, can likely help with other suggestions/solutions. Her direct number is 650-548-4376.
- Get the schedule for the visit established early. Work within the school's schedule. Focus Groups should meet after school to avoid stress and costs with multiple substitutes, and the VC needs to see the school in action before tackling the focus areas. A slightly shortened day Wednesday will put folks out on the road home a little earlier. See if this can happen.

### *Before the Visit: Working with the Visiting Committee*

- Assign three-four (depending on committee size) to each focus area, with two as main learners/writers. These two people are responsible for both conducting any/all meetings in this area as well as completing the writing on their section of Chapter 4. However, they have assigned help from the others. In addition, they should pre-write on the complete report! It's only that the most detailed, complete work is in their assigned areas.
- Note on your request to members for their writing preference, you're also asking about their expertise in school-related areas. While there are generally no home group meetings, one or more could be scheduled based on need – either the committee's or the school's. In addition, the VC needs to know who the “go to” person is on the team when there are questions about a particular area.
- Try to pair assignments in ways that will match experienced & new VC members. Mix up folks on assignments; you just don't know how things will jell on the committee.
- Gather professional information on the team: Who's the science expert? Who can help the team understand small learning communities? Reassure members that there are no department reports nor meetings (generally).
- It's OK to request particular characteristics for team members. You may need a Spanish speaker or someone familiar with a particular program. I've wound up with a very uneven mix of male-female on a team & asked that WASC staff work on the balance. The WASC staff is extraordinarily helpful!
- Remember the stages of group development: form, storm, norm, perform. Groups include you & the school leaders, the VC, the VC & school.
- Contact the committee members often. An initial letter soliciting input then one making assignments may be enough in writing. More important that you call each one – welcome as well as encouraging their early writing & meeting the submission deadline. Keep calling if you don't get materials. Often e-mail alone is insufficient. Remember the personal touch.
- If for some reason you're unable to contact a VC member, let WASC know (South call Temecula Office; North, Burlingame). They may be able to give you additional contact information OR replace the team member. They can only do the latter if there's time!
- Make sure e-mail addresses are known by all VC members. Tell them that where several are writing on the same topic, they might want to share their early drafts then combine & collapse the writing themselves prior to sending ONE (not two or three) to you.
- Share John Sugiyama's techniques for reading/prewriting with VC members if this was not included in their training.
- Advise women to take two pairs of shoes to school. Changing mid-day improves our outlook. The place to secure personal belongings may not be large. Smaller purses/totes may be in order.
- Remind VC members to bring casual/comfy clothes for evenings.
- Make sure VC members have phone numbers for hotel & school before Sunday. There are emergencies & some may need directions.
- Have school make map & write out directions from hotel to school & back.
- Check out the school (and district's or organization's) web site. Check in with [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us) & [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov) for data.
- Check out dietary needs. Vegetarians? Lactose intolerant? Let the school know so that some accommodations can be made, if necessary.
- E-mail helps you accommodate a variety of file formats in prewriting. Although I have found Google Drive to be life changing as a chair. You can see who's working how well and who's not. My only caution is that I've have new and experienced VC members think the indicator was “what the school wrote.” Then said, “it sounded so good, I just left it and didn't write any more.” Next time, I'll use ONLY the evaluative prompts.

- Have VC members do their preliminary writing in straight paragraphs. If they do much fancy formatting, you'll just need to adjust it to fit your style. Send them the Word® file sent to you. Remember, you are not obligated (nor is the school) to use a tabled format.
- Preliminary writing comes in a variety of styles. Of course, complete, coherent sentences are helpful, but bullets can capture key ideas. Questions are critical. I like to have writing separate from questions. It's easier in the long-run to eliminate the questions from the final draft. Encourage writing that acknowledges the good work of the school. Make sure all preliminary writing for school has been edited to remove the "too bold" statements & those comments/questions that smack of compliance. With more than one person writing in each area there will be redundancies. Eliminate these as you have time. (See later notes in Technology section.)
- Expect that at least one member of your team will change before the visit. You might warn the school. They should have at least one extra copy of the self-study to send out to the new committee member. It's most often impossible to get the leaving member to send their copy to the new member! Often, the member cannot be replaced. You'll go one short, sharing the load. You might have a back-up person in mind; check with WASC before confirming any committee additions.

### *Before the Visit: Your Preparation*

- Prepare packet for VC Chair evaluations along with an envelope stamped & addressed to WASC. Give the material to one committee member on Wednesday. Their responsibility on Wednesday is to collect & mail these confidential reports.
- Get things like the cover pages for the VC reports done before you go. If you can get a copy of the school's mascot or logo, add it to the page & print in color. Make the school proud of this work!
- Take along your own stash of favorite office supplies. There are just some tools I can't work without. Take some for your hotel room as well. The school should provide some basic supplies in your workroom as well.
- Take some note paper with you for thank-you notes that can be left at the school on Wednesday afternoon for distribution (principal, clerical, self-study coordinator).
- I do the pre-write for Chapters 1, 2, 3, & 5, not assigning myself a major role in Chapter 4. With information from the school, you can get pretty far with Chapters 1-3 before the visit. Then, I must make sure these chapters are augmented and edited by other VC members. (Do ask for their early input – particularly concerns in these chapters!) If you have experienced members, you might want to assign a back-up writer (with you) for these chapters.
- Try taking the key areas for follow-up from the criteria and putting them in a table, such as

Critical Learner Needs	Criteria	Criteria	Criteria	Criteria <small>(4 for private schools; 5 for CA public)</small>	Action Plan
	1.	1.	1.	1.	
	2.	2.	2.	2.	
		3.	3.	3.	
		4.	4.		
			5.		

This ought to show a clear path to the action plan, reinforcing the critical learner needs and providing a number of possible new action steps. (The school's preliminary action plan should NOT be the same as the current year's plan!) I do this and share it with both the VC and the school on Sunday as a conversation starter.

- Take support materials with you. I like to have the FOL manual & a small grammar rules book (which I never use but it's there just in case someone wants to have a comma or capitalization discussion). I also take copies of other support materials to help with writer's block (for example: rubric for the California Distinguished School, the rubrics for the criteria/standards from WASC and other accrediting associations).

- Take an alarm clock. You may not know how to set the one in the hotel room. Have a back-up wake-up call. Check with VC members. Do they need special help in the morning? Student members are prone to oversleep.
- Check out where the closest copy shop is. You may need their services. Hours?
- Check the weather before you go. Stick in a sweater or jacket. Will you need an umbrella?
- If it suits you, think about wearing clothing in the school's colors on Wednesday. Take clothing you're comfortable in & will withstand the rigors of the day.
- If you have a student member, call & talk with one of the parents to assure them of the child's safety & the value of their role. If there's a financial problem & the student will have difficulty paying for the hotel room, if that's required. Either you or WASC (check with Lisa) can figure out a solution. You need to ask the financial question; students are reluctant to let you know of their difficulty.

### *During the Visit: General*

- Get the cell phone numbers/school phone extensions for the principal (and the administrative assistant), one assistant principal (and the administrative assistant), and the self-study coordinator. An alternative is to ask to borrow one of the school's walkie talkies for you to carry with you. You just never know when you'll need to make quick contact.
- Have a back-up plan for getting to the school in case a VC member is late in the morning. If people aren't in the lobby by the agreed to time, we'll leave & you can follow. Or, have some VC members go ahead to the school, leaving one to round up the laggard(s).
- I don't charge alcoholic beverages to the school. VC members who wish to drink pay for these separately.
- Sunday: Arrive early & get yourself set up. The hotel can generally arrange to have one room ready early. Think about having the Sunday VC meeting at the school. Even if you work at the hotel, remember to leave time for clothes changes and driving to arrive at the school in plenty of time for the Sunday meetings.
- Have snacks available at night. Think high protein/energy. Salty snacks (pretzels; nuts; cheese & crackers) are good late afternoon/evening.
- Consider working at the school on Sunday even if you first meet at the hotel. It's too easy to get involved in the work & not make the meeting at the school on time.
- Remind VC members to calculate mileage & to include mileage home as well as driving that they did to & from school & dinner. Complete forms for school/district reimbursement and ensure they get to the proper person at the school/district.
- Post butcher paper in your hotel room: Strengths, Growth Areas, Need to Know or Questions, Don't Forget, "Our Experts" (VC members' areas of expertise just in case there are questions),
- I tape copy of schedule & list of VC members (with hotel room numbers added) to mirror in bathroom as my regular morning and evening reminder.
- Review tomorrow's schedule each evening. Which meetings? Who's where? Who's in charge? Are you ready? What support do you need?
- Find your editor early.
- If you have poor writers, hope they are good observers & information gatherers. Pair them with the good writers, even if you need to adjust assignments. Often the good writers will finish early & be available to help out.
- Pair an experienced committee member with a new one. Ask them to be "special buddy." You can't do all the coaching!
- Watch for team tension. Deal with it early. Don't be afraid to ask to have a committee member replaced OR, if necessary, send him/her home. If you're going to send them home during the visit, check in with WASC FIRST!
- When in doubt, call WASC. Either Marilyn or Dave or Lee will get back to you OR staff will find an experienced chair for you to talk with.

- You may need to continue to remind VC members that their role is not to tell the school “how we do it back home.” A technique I use is to cover my name tag & literally take one step to the side as I say something like, “Our role on the VC is to help you see your students more clearly, identifying what’s not working well and make decisions on what you might be able to make better - not to tell you how to do it. But, if it would help, let me step outside that role & share with you an idea/technique/how I’ve seen it done other places or where you might get help.” (Never at “my school!”) Often, I’ll ask if they’ve check the research to see if there are programs which have a success rate OR to check to see if what they think they want to do has any chance of being beneficial.
- Have members sign two copies of the term recommendation form on Sunday. Tuck them away so that work is done. I do two copies for that “just in case” coffee spill. However, it’s a good idea to pull them out once the term recommendation has been made to show the “X” in the correct box.
- Watch your talk at dinner. You never know who is sitting at the next table or serving you or who owns the restaurant. Same for the hotel lobby. Make sure your conversation is professional!
- Consider “write then eat then talk” in the evenings. Sometimes, eating gets in the way of writing. And, it’s easier to talk (big ideas, term) later when you can’t write another word! I stay at the school after the last meeting on Monday & Tuesday, capturing time when ideas are fresh. We go to dinner directly from the school then return to the hotel. Small groups may need to do preparation work for the next day, but you’ve gotten the bulk of the hard writing done. Abundant prewriting & writing earlier rather than later can prevent the dreaded late nights of some visits.
- Cell phones on vibrate or off when on campus!
- Encourage VC members to do deep breathing (or something) to rebuild energy & posture for the afternoon meetings. This is particularly true for Tuesday. **Every** group deserves your focused attention.

### *During the Visit: Structuring the Work of the Visiting Committee*

- Sunday morning/afternoon’s work is preparing for Sunday meetings. Big ideas/concerns. On target? Perceptions are based on their reading & YOUR knowledge of the school given your work with them.
- Sunday night’s work is teaming (spend time just getting to know one another), refining perceptions/ideas based on the meetings, & preparing for Monday. Review the schedule, remind people of their leadership role in meetings & the need to meet before hand to be prepared. Rethink & agree on big ideas to presented at Monday’s morning meeting with Leadership Team
- Monday night’s work is writing sections of Chapter 4 based on Monday’s focus group meetings and, where possible, editing Chapters 1-3. Then, prepare for Tuesday. Review the schedule, remind people of their leadership role in meetings & the need to meet before hand to be prepared. Rethink & agree on big ideas to present at Tuesday’s morning meeting with Leadership Team.
- Tuesday night’s work is the rest of Chapter 4, term, & big ideas to make sure are included in Chapter 5. Prepare for Wednesday. Maybe a start on the Documentation & Justification. Generally, I find the Doc & Just is homework for the chair.
- Work at the school on Monday and Tuesday. Capture the time between the end of the last meeting and about 7 p.m. Folks have just met with the Focus Groups and have all the ideas rushing around in their brains. Go from the school directly to dinner. Then, return to the hotel for final thoughts and preparation for tomorrow. (Yes, a few may have some additional writing work to do.) I’ve found that this schedule truly helps avoid late nights.
- There’s a difference in the conversation depending on whether you take a secret ballot for term or let the number(s) emerge from the discussion. Neither seems better or worse, just different. I generally let the conversation continue for a time. If consensus seems easy, we just continue. If there seems to be a stronger difference of opinion, I move to the secret ballot – giving everyone a chance to go “on record” anonymously.

### *During the Visit: Technology*

- When (if) we work in Word®, I've started using "comments" as the way to capture questions/find out about issues in the preliminary writing. They're easy to remove when the information has been found, the question answered or dropped. For Office 2007 or 2010, comments are in "Review" as "Comments." ON Google Drive, you're working in the same document and individuals' comments are in different colors. Easy to remove – highlight and "delete comment." When done, you can "delete all."
- I also use line numbers in the Word® drafts for ease of reference. Keeping the chapters separate also helps ease the revision/print burden. I don't put the entire report together until after the visit – back home in the quiet. In the drafts, I number pages using both chapter number and page number.
- If you work in Word®, date & time all drafts. Some chairs use different colored paper for different drafts. Early on figure out who/how you're going to pull together all the various writings. Insist that committee members either use your word processing program or the files can be easily converted. Many laptops do not have floppy disk drives. Look for an inexpensive USB drive that can be quite small. Mine has a large "dangle" to prevent loss. I make mine the "master" – everyone loads their files onto that one so that I can put the report together for the next day. In fact, I make directories for each day – Sunday, Monday, etc. Files are saved appropriately and it's less likely that files will be overwritten and materials lost that might need to be used later. While I'll pull together the final document, it's helpful to keep all drafts by chapter or sub-chapter (for Chapter 4) during the visit. Yes, page numbers won't be contiguous, but re-blending the entire document each night is way too much work – plus you'll more likely be giving them parts and pieces to review. Make back-up copies of your work every day! (P.S. Try Google Drive; I'll be your coach!)
- Think about asking the school to loan VC a small printer to have at hotel. Make sure you have the right cords & drivers! Will you need an extra toner/ink cartridge? Paper? Team members may want to print questions, new ideas for the written report, or even do additional editing.
- If you're working on laptops, you can connect an external monitor (17 inch works much better than a 15 inch) so two or three VC members can read/edit in the evenings at the hotel if necessary. That laptop screen just doesn't allow for good reading/seeing by more than one person. (Hook it to the "video in" connection, then press "Alt" & "F7" or "ALT & F8" keys simultaneously. That seems to work on most pc laptops. When in doubt, look for the symbol on the function keys that looks most like a monitor!)

### *During the Visit: Working with the School*

- Remember, this is as much about celebrating success as it is finding areas for work.
- Tell folks on Sunday that meetings will start on time, you'll be taking notes, you won't sit together in meetings, & other general behavior agreements. Ask them to share the word with colleagues. The school's telephone tree is working hard on Sunday night whether you encourage it or not!
- DAILY contact with self-study coordinator & principal. Remember to ask if there are any difficulties with committee (perceptions, language, smile too much or not enough). It's a two-way street. These conversations should be open & candid. There should not be any surprises on Wednesday.
- Continue to feed drafts of written report (marked drafts) to school staff.
- Be sure to establish with principal & self-study coordinator the responsibilities and timing for paperwork (to you, WASC, & CDE). Who's going to send what where? Remember you've got the VC report (2 weeks), the Doc&Just, and a revised Action Plan to plan for. WASC recommends that the school be responsible for the VC Report and Action Plan; you, of course, have the Doc&Just.
- If it's a question of language in the VC Report & the school's suggestions are OK, use theirs not yours. The school may want you to add additional examples in your report – often things omitted in their self-study. Again, include them.
- Try a "stand up" VC-school feedback meeting at the end of the day Monday & Tuesday. Short (we're standing) but all will hear the information. Make these only as long as necessary. Sometimes you can touch base earlier in the day and say "nothing new thus no need to meet."

### *During the Visit: Meetings, Observations, and Informal Interviews*

- Listen more than you talk. Ask open-ended questions. Wait time is important!
- Work to structure **all** meetings around those large topics which most clearly lead to the action plan. My practice is to either tell school folks in the morning that “when we meet with the Assessment & Accountability Focus Group this afternoon we’ll want to talk about A, B, & C plus other topics they want/need to put on the table,” or if we’re not sure that early, do it at the beginning of the meeting. This gives school folks time to think & helps keep the conversations from centering on details of the self-study OR from topics about which you already know enough about. Team members who are in the meetings should do prep work on real questions to ask & individual roles within the meeting.
- Consider using John Sugiyama’s techniques for levels of questioning and reflective interviewing. These require a level of comfort with both the self-study and the overall process.
- However the meetings are conducted, plan your questions!
- Have Focus Group meetings in the place where the Focus Group has met (if they’ve had a home). It’s a clear statement of the VC continuing the work in progress.
- Never underestimate the importance of introductions. The earlier a person speaks in a group setting, the more likely he/she is to speak later!
- VC members who are in charge of focus group sections in Chapter 4 also conduct the focus group meetings. They should meet prior & agree on the three or four big ideas to be discussed confirming and confirming with others VC members. Then, they have the responsibility for ensuring that these ideas got out on the table. Agendas help control the meeting flow!
- Take the last few minutes of every Focus Group meeting & “give it to the school.” Let them add information &/or ask questions. Leave 3-5 minutes for this; often it’s the BEST information you will get!
- Good meeting closing language. “Thanks. We’ve all clarified & extended our understandings and hope the same is true for you. We now have another meeting/work to do. If you’d like to talk more, we’ll be on campus tomorrow. Catch up with one of us.” Sometimes you can dismiss the group but stay a few minutes to talk with individuals who have more to say. Or, try walk & talk.
- Generally, only part of the VC needs to meet with District Office folks. Select the most appropriate ones and inviting any/all others to attend should they choose and if you don’t need the time for campus observations.
- All should meet with families/communities & with the student groups. For these meetings, I like to establish a “rules of confidentiality and no names.” This is particularly important for student meetings. You don’t want students to leave the meeting and spread all over campus what “x” or “y” said about school issues.
- Consider asking staff to bring some student work to focus group meetings.
- Pick your battles. Think about the 10-10-10 rule: What might the situation be 10 minutes from now is we/they/I take action or not? Will this matter? What about in 10 months? What about in 10 (or maybe 6) years?
- Invite about half again as many students as you want to meet with to the ad hoc group. Some won’t come & others are absent. Make sure you have a sign-in sheet for attendance. One way of managing this meeting is to have each VC member (or pairs) meet with 6-10 students. You can structure these groups as students come in. This allows more air-time for all students. Make sure this group of students is truly representative. Don’t just select the students in the back rows of the classrooms. Make this a “no name” meeting (have them speak of “a teacher” not Mr. X).
- Have VC members spread themselves out (seating arrangement) in all meetings. You don’t want to imply “us vs. them.” If there are enough VC members, have one sit near the back or on the back row. It dramatically changes the dynamics of the group.
- Let staff know up front that VC members will be taking notes just to remember who/what. Remind VC members that they should be able to lose those notes on campus & not be embarrassed.

- I always count students in each classroom. Often you'll hear about overcrowded classes. Make sure you know what's real. My second observation is on "who is doing the work."
- VC members should mark on a master schedule not only the teachers they visited but which periods. You want to ensure that you're seeing the range of classes offered at the school.
- Assign classroom visitations based on geography not content areas. VC members won't be running all over campus rather than observing – they'll see & learn more.
- Make sure VC members see the beginning, middle, & ends of classes plus pay attention to passing periods, snack, and lunch times.
- Send a VC member to the office to observe & chat just after lunch. What's the discipline situation? Students backed up in the Counseling Office?
- Make sure a VC member speaks personally to all classified staff in the office (clerical, attendance, nurse, registrar, others). They are too often not fully engaged in the self-study & don't always see their link to student learning. Do as much as you can with custodial, food services, & security personnel.
- Don't forget the health office, career center, special program offices, library, parent center, & any other special locations on campus.
- If necessary, send someone early one morning to see band practice (or other interesting but off schedule events). Other "events" might be ROTC marching practice, play rehearsal, booster club meeting. I've even been asked to attend a Board meeting & be introduced. It's important to recognize & acknowledge the school's political needs.
- While school may let you know where substitutes are on campus, visit them as well. They see the school & students through different eyes. You'll learn much about school culture speaking with them!
- Members on teams with me eat lunch Monday with the staff (maybe just department chairpersons if this seems beneficial) (often we go to places on campus where they gather in smaller numbers) & with students on Tuesday eating the same food available to them. VC members may not cut in line! Avoid bean burritos & potato salad. I've lost VC members for 48 hours because of poor food choices.
- At one school, we had one VC member available in the committee workroom after school for "drop-in" conversations (while focus groups were meeting so people not in those meetings each day could come in). This school had a number of disparate voices that needed just to be heard. While you may never need to do something like this for any reason, it is an example of adjusting in the process to meet the special needs/situations of the school.
- Ask where the unusual, "star" events in classes will be while you're there & go there – the debate in Government class; play rehearsal third period. One team invited students & staff to come by the workroom & leave post-it notes on the door as they either had new places for the VC to go or new information/ideas/questions to pass along. I'm thinking of giving this a try.
- "If I were a ....." questions are comfortable, non-threatening stems for students & families. "If I were a new student in this class, how would I know about my grade?" "If I were a new family in this school, how would I know about classes & programs available to my child?"
- A minority report on status is possible. Should a member not agree with the consensus of the rest of the team, they should write a minority report stating their reasons for a different term (shorter or longer) to attach to the Documentation & Justification statement for Commissioners.
- While a typical schedule does not call for department meetings or meetings with individual groups (other than families and students and focus groups), sometimes meetings with certain departments or groups (often classified employees) are important for the school and/or the visit. Be flexible! Make sure you're attending to the culture and needs of the school.

### *During the Visit: Wednesday*

- On Wednesday morning, send a VC member (or two) out to finish seeing all the teachers.



- For the VC, I mirror the chart of key areas for follow-up done from the school's report showing our key areas for follow-up for each of the criteria. Again, these should be a clear roadmap to overall critical areas for follow-up summation at the end of Chapter 4.
- Ensure in your writing and conversations that the school understands "what to do" with these overall critical areas for follow-up. Most often, they identify areas where action steps need to be strengthened (professional development, data analysis) NOT new, large areas for the action plan (reading, standards proficiency, closing the gap between subgroups). Schools are not to rewrite their action plans around these types of key areas for follow-up; rather they incorporate these into their existing action plan. However, it's possible that a school missed important general areas for work. These, of course, can be added, remembering the general rule of three to five "big ideas" in the action plan. Just make sure the school leadership understands the nature of each of these critical areas (a strategy to add to the plan, ways to strengthen ideas already in the plan, or [very, very unusual] a new area to add to the plan). Don't forget the three parts: Who, What, Why!
- Decide who will work with Leadership Team to refine Plan of Action & who will work on the VC Report. When discussing the report (which the school has had copies of each day – no surprises), have one or two committee members be the body language watchers & one or two take notes on editing. You should chair this meeting. About an hour before the afternoon public report, bring the VC back together to finish up. Mark the cover page of Documentation & Justification statement recommending term; complete expense reports, thank you notes, & chair evaluations. Agree on process for VC review of final report. Will they want to review before it becomes final? If yes, you'll need to work even more quickly (or promise a slightly later date to get this to the school). If yes, send out with a note "If I don't hear from you by x date, I'll assume you have no additional edits or additions." Often, VC members will leave this last editing to you.
- Prepare the Wednesday presentation carefully. You should not read the report, rather "report briefly" on the report.
  - \* I've started using a brief PowerPoint® presentation along with the oral report. Perhaps, a half-dozen slides resetting the two key questions upon which FOL is based, importance of the action plan and follow-up process, criteria and overall school strengths, and clarity about key areas for follow-up. I leave this with the school for use with their constituency. Remember, this adds an extra dimension to your work – putting this together isn't always as easy as you think! It helps if the school can send you some photos ahead of time; the yearbook office always has plenty! E-mail me if you'd like to have my sample. Or, you can download it from my website. WASC also has one on their website.
  - \* Or, look to the report for the 5-7 sentences which are most important/indicative. They copy & paste these to a new document, increase the type size, then, practice talk-read. They are less likely to give a false positive & the meeting will be shorter. Some want to include strengths & key areas for improvement. If these are the same as what the school included in the self-study, don't read them. Rather, say "right on." If there are new ones, consider adding this to the presentation.
  - \* And/or, review transparencies available (training for schools, VC members, & chairs) in case you want to use them in the final oral presentation. I've seen VC members use transparencies in their presentations – again, seemed to help keep them succinct & on target.
  - \* At any rate, **don't** conduct this meeting without speaking notes for everyone! Remember that most people will remember what's said in this meeting rather than what's in your written report. Make sure the content & tone match. Beyond Wednesday, what are important are the big ideas in the Action Plan & the school's management of that plan. Remember, schools don't really know how to fix things. If they did, they would already be doing it! The school's commitment to and capacity for implementing any plan over time clearly directed at student learning is critical!
- Principal should open & close the Wednesday meeting. You should open & close VC's portion. Read major strengths & areas for growth. I save the strengths for last to end on a high note. In fact, the school does not know what these will be. I give a copy of just the strengths to the principal & self-

study chair just before the beginning of the meeting. Yes, we've talked about this so they know our plan.

- **STAY** through the school's presentation of their plan of action and the close of the meeting. No need to comment, but I believe it's critical to honor their commitment. When you leave, do it politely (thank you so much for hospitality, plan of action seems right on target – good wishes in your work, appreciated the opportunity to visit your school/classroom) but keep walking! If anyone asks you a question about the visit/key areas for follow-up, refer the questioner back to the Leadership Team at the school. After all, you've spent 3.5 days talking about and working with them on all the issues. Note, however, **you** may need to stay & clean up things.
- Get the paperwork done and double-check on school/district reimbursement for appropriate out of pocket expenses.

### *During the Visit: Action Plan*

- I share the converging ideas for areas for growth daily with the principal & self-study coordinator. These are "telegraphed" in the Leadership Team-VC meetings. Most often I hope to say, "You've made good choices in your work. We're not picking up on any new, big things that should be added to your plan of action. As we've talked & was confirmed in today's meeting with the Assessment & Accountability focus group, that part of the plan of action needs to be more detailed. We identified some of those things this afternoon & the group has good notes for our work on Wednesday."
- Many of the VC's key areas for follow-up are actually activities or themes within the larger ideas already set by the school. These should identify the issue (focus professional development on...), not prescribe a solution (Bring in Jane/John Doe for professional development). Occasionally, the VC identifies something so important/key that it should be another whole section of the Action Plan. Make sure you're clear in your writing whether growth areas are to be a new separate sections of the action plan (students' reading skills) OR strategies that need to be incorporated into the existing action plan sections to strengthen them (add professional development, strengthen assessment strategies).
- Schools are most likely to work on those ideas they've identified. My experience is it's better to honor their selections & help further shape them (broaden, narrow, recommend they include certain ideas/actions) than to add to the list. Yes, this is not always possible. And, don't add much unless it's critical. Schools (individuals) can only work on three or four big things at once.
- Not every large section on the plan of action needs to begin immediately. Some might wait six months or a year.
- The nature of the strategy for monitoring & evaluating progress on the plan of action & the response to the previous recommendations or work on the previous plan of action is key to the decision on status. Are they (school & district) committed? Is there capacity? Look for an annual update of data, an annual review of planned actions for modification if necessary, and an annual report (a mirror of Chapter 3 of the self-study) on the action plan as **minimum** requirements for monitoring and evaluating progress.
- A plan of action: How will students benefit? How will you know student learning has improved? The conversation has shifted from "how many wonderful things we adults are doing/learning" to "what's improved in student learning." Examples of action plans given to schools now show clear measurable objectives (in the directions for the school they're called "growth targets") directly related to student learning. Issues of professional development, communication, technology, school culture are subsumed within the student outcomes as ways of reaching the goal of improved student performance.
- For a variety of reasons, schools may have multiple action plans (Single Plan for Student Achievement; II/USP Plan, Technology Plan, EL Plan, Strategic Plan, Professional Development Plan). They should be merged with the FOL plan into a single plan where the school identifies its strategic objectives. Neither the Department of Education nor WASC care about the format of the plan. (Note,

however, that the Accrediting Commission members have expressed a fondness for tables.) Both have required elements that almost exactly match. Both organizations know that plans will & should be amended over time. However, some times this just isn't possible! My approach here is to ensure that they are parallel. Have the conversation with the school about annually updating the profile, making an annual report on action plan progress, revising the action plan as necessary as ways of continuing FOL work within the fabric of the school's ongoing work rather than having accreditation be an incredible (perhaps distasteful or intrusive) "event" every few years. Schools moving in this direction report improved attitudes & understandings! Often the timing of official revisions to the SPSA is off. Work with the school in how to handle this. In my experience two things can work: (1) do a partial revision now based on VC input and wait to fall (the usual time for revisions) to move the SPSA through channels or (2) do an informal draft for the VC of what/where tasks will be added when the final product is developed.

### *After the Visit:*

- Tell committee members you'll send either/both to them with a short window for their comments or editing. Most won't; they'll leave it to you to finish the homework. However, make the offer!
- Evaluate committee members honestly & nicely. Identify potential chairs! Be clear about any folks with unusual agendas (they are few and far between but do exist).
- Once you have the VC report finalized (do these early or you'll forget the subtleties), get one copy in the mail to the school. Call them & let them know it is coming. Get the Documentation & Justification statement done at the same time & mail to WASC. The Commission can't take action on status until they have this & the final report. Make copies of both documents for committee members. **Check** the timelines established by WASC in your chair training notes.
- Remind school of their need to send 5 copies of the VC report to WASC – Northern Section and whatever other organizations require copies (CDE, religious oversight bodies, associations). Directions also call for a copy of the modified action plan to go to the Commission by June 1 (January 2 for fall visits)
- Consider writing a letter to each committee members' supervisors (and, maybe the supervisors' supervisor) commending the person's service on the VC – fairly short but with enough personalization to count. Copy the VC member. I'm hoping this will encourage folks to sign on again to be VC members and give some extra credibility to the value of the visit so principals/superintendents will encourage/permit staff members to serve. We need to continue to have District's support participation and we need to build expertise in returning members/chairs.
- When the Commission acts, you will receive a copy of the letter to the school announcing term. Add this to the packet for VC members & mail it off with a thank you note. Let members know this is your plan.
- Know that you'll take back at least five good ideas for your school/district. You'll make great friends. You'll improve your perception, leadership, speaking, & writing skills. Most important, you & the other committee members have contributed directly & positively to the life & culture at a sister school. We all benefit from this.