

Mid-Cycle Visit

Visiting Committee Report

*Accrediting Committee for Schools
Western Association of Schools and Colleges*

For

California School for the Deaf, Fremont

39350 Gallaudet Drive
Fremont, California 94538

*California Department of Education
Division of Special Schools*

Original Self-Study Visit
3-6 March 2013

Mid-Cycle Visit
14 April 2016

Visiting Committee

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I. Introduction

The California School for the Deaf in Fremont (CSDF) is one of two schools for the deaf in California – the other campus is in Riverside. The Fremont campus is across the street from the California School for the Blind. Both schools used to be on the Berkeley campus of the University of California and were re=located in 1978. CSDF serves California deaf students from San Luis Obispo County to the Oregon border.

In 2011, the CSDF Superintendent retired after 36 years of service. A national search was conducted, and a CSD graduate was hired - Dr. Sean Virnig. In 2013, the school wrote a full self-study and went through a three and half day accreditation visit by both WASC and the CEASD – the Conference of Education Administrators for Schools and Programs for the Deaf. The two teams – the California team and the CEASD team – found that their processes were very similar, and the joint effort produced a report that was extremely comprehensive. The school was granted a six-year term of accreditation with a one-day visit after three years. The mid-cycle visit was conducted by a two-person WASC team, both of whom were part of the 2013 full visit. The CEASD did not participate this time.

Enrollment has remained constant. Enrolling deaf children when they are very young, as early as four years old, will always be a goal of the school, but it is difficult to convince parents to do this, because it means their children will live in one of the school's cottages during the week. However, if CSD teachers can begin working with a child at a very early age, the chances are significantly greater that that child will learn the social and academic language necessary to stay at or surpass grade level in all core subjects. CSD provides content instruction in both academic ASL and English and keeps academic work at grade level in both languages at all times. The longer a child takes to be exposed to and learn ASL (*American Sign Language*), the more difficult it is for that child to function at the highest academic level possible.

While most public schools in California have seen their budgets increase recently, CSDF has experienced a decline. For the 15-16 school year, this has meant the loss of seven teaching positions. Among these were three ASL teachers. These losses have necessitated transferring support personnel to teaching positions, thereby reducing support services. Other staff, though, are having difficulty with the high cost of living in the Bay Area, and some are considering leaving for other schools for the deaf in other states. The high cost of living also makes it difficult to recruit people for the school, certificated and classified.

One specific staffing reduction that has had a major effect is Outreach. Three years ago, there were 12 people involved in this – now there are two. This has meant less awareness in the community about CSDF and less contact with doctors and hospitals. Enrollment is projected to decline. Another reason for a decline may also be the increase and improvements in cochlear implant technology. Further, the cost of living may also be a factor.

Other significant changes or developments:

1. Parents who live near the school have become more involved, but, because many students live outside the Fremont area, board at the school, and go home on the weekends, many parents cannot participate as much as they would like.
2. In spite of budget reductions, the acquisition and use of educational technology has increased.
3. The previous visiting teams recommended the development, implementation, and regular practice of a safety plan, and this has been accomplished.
4. The number and type of serious disciplinary issues has declined as a result of a new reporting system being put in place.
5. Many more student clubs have been established and are functioning well.

Another recommendation of the last visiting teams was to keep the self-study process going, and the school has done this. All staff are members of a self-study committee, i.e., organization, curriculum, instruction, assessment, culture, etc. This has led to a follow-up process that has involved all stakeholders. These committees typically meet at least twice a month. Preparation of the mid-cycle progress report began in the fall of 2015, resulting in a very comprehensive document.

The Career-Technical program continues to be a standout part of the CSDF program. Students have the opportunity to take a variety of vocational classes, talk with counselors about colleges and other post-secondary options, meet with counselors about personal issues, hear presentations from businesses about job opportunities, and generally explore the possibilities of life after CSDF. It remains a challenge, though, as with all schools and their vocational programs, to find qualified teachers for any vacancies that develop.

II: Progress on Critical Areas for Follow-up/School-wide Action Plan

The three-part Action Plan that was developed for the full visit three years ago has been amended to include a fourth goal: *address issues related to governance*.

The first Action Plan was to increase achievement in ASL, English, and mathematics. All students in all levels – elementary, middle, and high school – met or exceeded their growth targets.

The second Action Plan was to increase enrollment and retention. A wide variety of activities and tasks have been employed to meet this goal, but, as noted above, the reduction of outreach efforts have hampered its progress. While enrollment may not be increasing, retention has been holding steady. The variety and number of activities has no doubt contributed to that.

The third Action Plan was to enhance student safety and welfare. As noted above, the development and implementation of a school-wide safety plan has been accomplished. The CHP, the school law enforcement agency, reports that the plan is well-developed and effective. Further, a new incident reporting form has been created. The school also holds regular workshops for parents, staff, and students on bullying, restorative discipline, self-reliance, digital safety, alcohol and other drugs, and abuse and personal safety.

The fourth Action Plan is to address issues related to governance. To this end, a system of measurements has been established to track the accomplishments of each ESLR. The school has added programs that address Deafhood and begun to explore establishing a school foundation. The school is also still working through the issues of transition from a long-serving Superintendent (36 years) to a new one who has been on the job for five years. There have been numerous meetings of parent groups and the administrative cabinet, separately and in conjunction. The new Superintendent has modified the admission policy for students, in accordance with state law, and this has resulted in some confusion, misunderstanding, and resentment. The previous visiting teams anticipated that this transition would be a major issue and thus listed it as its number one area of growth. The 2016 Visiting Committee was made aware of the ongoing nature of this process, and witnessed a commitment from all stakeholders to actively engage in its resolution.