

**MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS**

**COMMISSION ON
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**



**REPORT OF THE
ACCREDITATION FOR GROWTH
VALIDATION TEAM**

**Duke Ellington School of the Arts High School
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pages

Introduction

The Context of **Duke Ellington School of the Arts**

The Planning Process

The Planning Team

Role of the Administration

Role of the Governing Body

Role of the Internal Coordinator

Role of the External Facilitator (if included)

Communication and Awareness Activities

Action Plan / Implementation Teams (if included)

Annual Review

Content of the Plan

Relationship of AFG Plan to District Plan (if included)

Mission

Beliefs

Objectives

Internal Scan (if included)

Action Plans

Standards of the Middle States Association

Accreditation Recommendation

Next Steps

Conclusion

Appendices

Validation Team Roster

INTRODUCTION

The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools is a non-governmental, nonprofit, peer-administered organization of diverse educational institutions committed to the highest quality education for students. Its purpose is to ensure the continuous improvement of its member schools through effective leadership, self-study, peer evaluation, accreditation, exemplary programs, and supportive services. For more than 75 years, the Association has provided leadership in school improvement for its member schools in six states in the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, the subcontinent of Asia, and Africa.

Accreditation for Growth (AFG) is a unique accreditation process that uses strategic and site-based planning as vehicles for school improvement and growth in student performance. The process, developed by the Commission on Secondary Schools (CSS), Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, provides linkages between district and site planning efforts. The primary determinants of progress are actual student results rather than the input of resources. *AFG* requires the school to base its objectives on a vision of a preferred future and thus is a future-oriented process. *AFG* provides for a continuous review of programs and services and allows diverse constituent groups to participate in charting the future of the school.

The *Accreditation for Growth* process requires that the school meets CSS standards. A school site plan, developed by a planning team of representative stakeholders from the school and community, should be consistent with the vision of the district's strategic plan. It should contain the following components: mission, beliefs, two to four measurable student performance objectives, and action plans that detail activities, timelines, individuals/groups responsible, and resources provided to accomplish these objectives.

In addition, a planning process should be in place that will ensure that the school has both the capacity and the will to implement its action plans. The planning process typically includes an internal coordinator responsible for monitoring the plan, procedures for communicating planning activities to the school community, provision for annual reviews of the plan, and one or more action plan teams responsible for implementing the plans.

By choosing *AFG*, Duke Ellington School of the Arts has made several commitments.

- 1) It has committed to focusing on the end result – improved student performance – as the primary priority for school improvement efforts.
- 2) It has committed to operating from a vision of where it wants and needs to go with the mission and beliefs serving as a unifying force for change.
- 3) It has committed to including a varied spectrum of stakeholders in the process of continually defining a preferred vision, in developing the means to get closer to that vision, and in implementing action plans developed by these stakeholders.
- 4) It has committed to a process where progress will be continuously reviewed.

- 5) It has agreed to participate in a peer review and external validation process by accepting outside visitors.

The Middle States Validation Team is a group of professional educators appointed by the Commission on Secondary Schools to visit a school using the *Accreditation for Growth* process. The purpose of the team visit is threefold. First, the team assesses the planning processes used by the school in developing the plan; the team determines the school's adherence to planning requirements as outlined by the Commission as well as whether the planning processes will ensure continuous improvement and commitment. Second, the team reviews the content of the school's plan to judge the validity and clarity of the plans along with the level of commitment to implementation. Finally, it is the team's responsibility to review the school's maintenance and implementation of the CSS standards.

The five members of the Validation Team to Duke Ellington School of the Arts used the three and one-half day visit to review written documents regarding the plan and its development. The Team interacted with as many of the school's stakeholders as possible regarding their knowledge, understanding and support for the plan. The groups interviewed included the internal coordinators, the Board of Education, staff, administration, student leaders, a randomly selected group of students, guidance counselors, library staff, department heads, curriculum supervisors, implementation team chairs, the Planning Team, supervisor of buildings and grounds, student activities coordinator and class advisors. The Team concluded that it had a full and rich experience of the school leading to the following report and assessment.

CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

In 1974 the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) partnered with Workshops for Careers in the Arts (WCA) to create a school with a dual curriculum combining exceptional academics with arts training to prepare students for both colleges and conservatories. The new school would take the name of one of DC's most acclaimed and beloved artists, Duke Ellington, to become the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. The Duke Ellington Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization, was founded in 1978 to provide financial support to the school.

In September 2000, the Ellington venture evolved into the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project (DESAP), welcoming new partners, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and The George Washington University, along with DC Public Schools and The Ellington Fund. DESAP's goal is to continue Ellington's tradition of providing an educational experience that includes college preparatory courses, pre-professional artistic training, and access to the cultural and intellectual resources of the District of Columbia.

DESAP operates the school under a contract with the District of Columbia Public Schools – a contract that provides basic funding through the school system and recognizes that the school's dual art/academic curriculum requires additional funding. The contract anticipates supplemental funding by the school system and additional outside funding.

Under the DESAP contract, DESAP is authorized to hire faculty and staff without going through DCPS hiring process. However, Ellington continues to function as a DC Public School, following the same calendar and system for scheduling, maintaining student records, and determining fulfillment of graduation requirements.

The new partnership structure has paved the way for a future bright with the excitement of exploration. Ellington students and faculty experience the professional world of the arts through workshops, master classes with renowned artists, professional development opportunities, and performances and other resources provided by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and George Washington University. Ellington's new structure is a model for the District of Columbia Public Schools, with the primary purpose of improving student achievement in the arts and in academic areas.

The Duke Ellington School of the Arts was built in 1898 as Western High School. This majestic old building sits at the edge of the historic section of Georgetown in an upscale residential area, which also includes the Wisconsin Avenue Georgetown commercial strip area, Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, Hardy Middle School (a DCPS school), a branch of the Corcoran Institute, Georgetown University, and Georgetown University Hospital. The building is generally in very poor condition and in need of immediate repairs. The dance floor was being replaced during our visit and the DCPS facilities department is planning to replace the roof this school year. More extensive renovations are slated for **2012** however; staff and board members stated that it is imperative that Duke Ellington School of the Arts be renovated/repared immediately.

The Duke Ellington School of the Arts students come from all parts of the District, including some of its most under-served neighborhoods. The school also attracts a number of students from Maryland and Virginia suburbs, who must pay tuition to DCPS in order to attend. The student body, 480 students in grade 9-12, reflects the make up of the District of Columbia: 83% Black, 9% white, 6% Hispanic, and 2% Asian.

Duke Ellington School of the Arts has a faculty of 76 full and part-time teachers. The secondary support staff includes the head of school, one assistant principal, a dean of school operations, a dean of students, two counselors, a comptroller, a business manager, admissions coordinator and 17 other support staff. The staff works effortlessly to achieve a student attendance rate of 88%, a dropout rate of less than 1%, and attain the fourth highest standardized test scores in the District of Columbia. It is one of only four DC public high schools to pass 2005-06 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report card mandated by the No Child Left Behind legislation.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

In the spring of 2002, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts community began its venture into the process of Institutional Growth and Improvement Initiatives. School-wide retreats were held in April 2002, March 2003, and March 2006. During the March 2003 meeting a five-year strategic plan was developed. The goals identified by the school were to focus on improving student achievement, the recruitment of students, increasing school funding, developing integration opportunities for arts and academics, supporting the retention of faculty, and integrating technology throughout the school. Members of the Planning Committee included students, parents, staff and administration along with Ellington's formal business partners. During meetings with stakeholders it was apparent that the member groups were all invested in making substantial improvements to Duke Ellington School of the Arts through the process of strategic planning, candid and open dialogue and a broad representation in committees.

The general agreement of the Planning Team was that throughout the Duke Ellington School of the Arts community the process of planning was well worth the effort. "The fact that we worked cooperatively and respectfully with each other was a great positive result." Students, staff, administration and parents echoed that the AFG process allowed them to focus on the future of their school and bring into perspective their current position. Staff discussed how their perspectives were altered and that the AFG process provided them with new opportunities to have conversation about the school's vision. Because teacher members of the committees were from both the academic and arts faculty, opportunities for adults to connect and appreciate each other on different levels became more apparent. "Every voice that wished to be heard has been heard." The retreats were viewed as opportunities for "turn around" wherein the school mission, student profile and financial status were shared and discussed openly. The retreats also allowed teams to identify goals and develop strategies that required school-wide awareness. The AFG process also has allowed dialogue to occur where the focus has become the "vitality of what the teachers want" for students.

Many members of the team are excited and optimistic about the implementation of the school plan. "Continue meetings after the Validation Team visit." They look forward to seeing their hard and time-consuming work take root and grow. Many members of the planning team (including class of '07 students and parents) plan to remain on the team and assist in the implementation of the process outlined for growth. Throughout the process the team has invited stakeholder input as well as allowed for the ease of viewing the draft form and completed plan. The complete awareness of the plan and the viewpoint of all involved are not entirely known by the visiting team.

The Planning Team

The composition of the Planning Team was well thought-through in both intent and structure. The Planning Team consisted of students, members of SHADE (the school parent organization), members of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project (DESAP) Board, academic and arts staff, representatives of the Ellington Fund and members of the Ellington administrative team. Many of the members of the committee were solicited to serve on the team. It was apparent to

the visiting team that the Planning Team members reflected various view points as well as the school community. On the committees for reviewing standards the majority had parents, students and school staff serving as members; the Organizational Design and Staff committee had both parents and teachers as members; the Learning Media Services and Technology and the Assessment of Student Learning committees did not include a parent representative; the Student Services, Finances, and the Health and Safety committees had only staff representatives. It is apparent to the team that no member of the guidance department was involved in the committees. Our interviews confirmed that the meetings were focused, open and productive. Planning Team members felt that “prevailing points of view” were shared and that consensus was reached when developing goals. The Planning Team members shared how the “Big Picture Philosophy” of Ellington was openly discussed. Teachers on the team used the words “reawakening” and “rebirth” to define the process and the outcomes of open dialogue about the holistic development of students. Staff also discussed that “jobs were better defined” and that “greater responsibility” has taken place by staff members. Throughout conversations with the team, reemphasis was placed on how the Ellington Community had gained “clear ideas on what to do and how to accomplish” their school goals; that a feeling of “movement from individual department ideology to a school-wide focus” was becoming more apparent; and that the “ideas developed will be kept alive.” As stated previously, the members of the Planning Team have made a commitment to monitor the Action Plan periodically.

Role of the Administration

Dr. Michael Clarke, Dean of School Operations, served as the Internal Coordinator administrative chair. Dr. Clarke was responsible for developing the questionnaires used throughout the process as well as providing for the distribution of data collected and assisted in disaggregating data as needed by individual committees. Dr. Clarke was credited in gathering the “voice of the Ellington community” for the AFG Process. Fr. John Payne, Dean of Students, served on the Student Life and Student Activities committee. Ms. Treva Lindsey, served on the Governance and Leadership committee. The Administration provided the necessary time and support for the planning process. They encouraged participation in the process. The Visiting Team had one concern that academic faculty chairs may not have been as open in their communication with the members of the Visiting Team as they could have been due to the presence of an administrator at the time of the meeting. Duke Ellington School of the Arts began the Accreditation for Growth process under a different head of school.

Mr. Pullens, Head of School, joined the Ellington School of the Arts less than one year prior to our visit. Mr. Pullens inherited the AFG process. Since joining Ellington parents and staff have noticed improved communication between administration and the community. Mr. Pullens has been described as being perceptive, professional, knowing students, responsive, easy to work with and is “willing to listen and accept ideas”. During each conversation with stakeholders, the mention of Mr. Pullens’ name brought a smile to the face and complimentary words were used to describe what he has already accomplished in his short time at Ellington. It is the belief of the Visiting Team that Mr. Pullens’ vision for Ellington, which is aligned with the school’s Action Plan, will be accomplished and that the charge Mr. Pullens has been given by DESAP is within reach and attainable.

We commend Mr. Pullens on his accomplishments thus far. We appreciate the relationships that Fr. Payne has with his students and the “family” he has created at Ellington. We thank Dr. Clarke for his valued assistance and continued points of clarification. It is evident that school leadership supports on-going school improvement processes that include a commitment to growth and change by a stakeholder groups. Our recommendation is that members of the administration continue to move forward with the school’s mission and act as support systems for the Ellington community as it continues in this on-going process.

Role of the Governing Body

The DESAP Board serves as a governing body of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Curricula, curricular support materials, and curricular professional development related to core curricular areas are supervised by DCPS. The DESAP Board advises and approves policy, hiring of teachers and budget allocation. DESAP was involved in the approval to the planning process and in support of the identified objectives developed by the Planning Team. Ellington administration, its governance board, DESAP, its fundraising arm, The Ellington Fund, and the parents’ organization, SHADE, have worked together to take ownership of the school plan. Each stakeholder group has identified responsibilities that support the actions outlined in the plan. Without the DESAP Board and the financial support provided by the Ellington Fund the unique educational opportunities offered at Ellington would not be possible.

Role of Internal Coordinators

Ellington has selected four individuals to serve as internal coordinators. Dr. Michael Clarke, Dean of School Operations acted as the Administrative Chair for the team. Dr. Clarke is both a musician and a mathematician. He also serves as a Chair for Middle States Accreditation for Growth teams. Also serving as internal coordinators were Mr. Charles Feeser, chair of the English Department, Dr. Janet Peachey, Instrumental Music Department and Ms. Sandra Fortune-Green, Dance Department. These staff members were approached by the then head-of-school and asked to volunteer as coordinators. Each of the internal coordinators felt that their individual strengths were tapped, skills developed in the areas of analyzing data and that the AFG process as an opportunity for professional growth.

The Internal Coordinators looked upon this process as an opportunity to connect with people that they usually would not see/meet during their teaching day. Their driving force for improvement, and for the awesome task was that they were going through the process “for us—our future!” The agendas that were developed for meetings and retreats were focused on debriefing the staff on the school mission, the financial process, and profiles of graduates. From candid conversations they were able to identify specific school needs. The Internal Coordinators were impressed with the student responses and perspective that they received from the surveys in the areas of academic rigor and academic support. Student replies correlate directly to the school’s focus of school improvement in the areas of student achievement and performance. The Internal Coordinators helped identified the school’s needs and encouraged the Improvement Plan to be generated by individual departments after the goals were presented.

The Visiting Team was impressed with the objectives that the Internal Coordinators had set specifically for the visiting team: provide constructive feedback; review both the academic and artistic programs; and identify how the current staff can leave a legacy for the next generation of Ellington students.

Communications and Awareness Activities

The Duke Ellington School of the Arts has a visually impressive website that shares much of the important information needed by a potential Ellington student. The Community Handbook is of great value to anyone who reads it, is interested in the pulse of the institution, looking for information on how to apply to Ellington or who needs to know the school's Mission Statement, the Ellington Creed, information about the school partnerships and the purpose of the dual curricular focus. The handbook also provides as close to a comprehensive calendar a school can share and have a handbook printed before school begins. The Visiting Team was especially impressed with the Duke Ellington School of the Arts 2006-2007 Community Handbook as a valuable resource. We also would like to acknowledge RHYTHMS, the Ellington Fund Newsletter, which provides quarterly updated information about recent events, teacher spotlights, student spotlights, community partnerships, alumni achievements, performance and gallery opportunities, and identifies individual student success. This document is an amazing tool to share school success with all interested stakeholders.

The Planning Team used surveys to collect data from all stakeholder groups. The surveys responses reflected that approximately 50 faculty and staff, 120 parents, and 200 students took time to participate in providing data. Information about the survey, its deadlines, and the importance it made to the Planning Process were provided in monthly newsletters, phone calls home, and through student Computer Technology and English classes. Staff was provided time during scheduled faculty meetings. Each staff meeting since the inception of the process has included information about the Accreditation for Growth developments. In addition, stakeholders could review updates through newsletters, and weekly bulletins. The need for communication from administration to staff, parents and students was a priority when the process began. Since Mr. Pullens arrived, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders, that communication has become less of a concern. The openness and passion of Mr. Pullens with the visiting team, the frankness of both arts and academic teachers with the visiting team and the fervor shared with the visiting team by both sets of student groups allowed for an accurate assessment of what is happening at Ellington. Because of the dual faculty, a good bit of information was shared informally between classes and lunch periods. Kudos should be given to the Museum Studies Department for their assistance in making the school mission statement, profile of graduates and beliefs statements an integral part of the school lobby. The Ellington Fund also designed a website so that donors would be made aware of the school's unique mission.

Action/Implementation Teams

In the documents presented, there is a statement that no formal team was constructed to develop the Action Plan, yet the Action Plan is a natural outcome for what the Ellington community wants from AFG Process. The Action Teams were formed around the standards of the AFG process, and the goals and objectives set by the School Improvement Plan. Many members of the Planning Team have agreed to serve as members of different committees to see that what has been identified as areas of need and concern will have follow-up. Each member is in a voluntary position with a written commitment to review the Action Steps so as to monitor the implementation of the team; maintain documentation; collect and analyze student performance; and use authority as an Implementation Team to make adjustment to goals. Throughout conversations it has been made obvious that the Ellington Community would like the AFG document to be a living document that will be a driving force for school continuous improvement.

Annual Review Process

The Planning Team has established a schedule to meet monthly and to keep all stakeholders informed of their progress. The function of the process will be to review, assess, analyze and make adjustments to parts of the school plan. Stakeholders will continually be informed of the benchmarks as the growth of the program continues. Since this plan has been collaborative in development, it is suggested that collaboration continue in the design and implementation of all future school goals.

CONTENT OF THE PLAN

Relationship of AFG Plan to District Plan

The Validation Team conducted a thorough review of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts' mission, beliefs, objectives, and action plans. The team was impressed with the comprehensiveness of effort, and the level of support in evidence from all stakeholder groups.

Duke Ellington School of the Arts' Mission, Belief, Objectives and Action Plans are all in compliance and alignment with the District of Columbia Public Schools.

Mission

A school's mission should reflect the school community members' deepest desires for what they want the school to become. Therefore, it is inappropriate for a Validation Team to fundamentally alter the direction or focus that the mission sets. The same is true of belief statements. Only members of the school community can define their vision and identify their deeply held beliefs.

A Validation Team can, however, offer an objective perspective on what is unclear or seems inconsistent or incomplete in these documents. Ultimately, it is the school that has to decide if the Team's comments are legitimate and relevant. It is in this spirit that the following observations on the Duke Ellington School of the Arts mission and beliefs are made.

A mission statement should describe in broad and visionary terms what the school is and is striving to become. It should be outcome-based, providing clarity on the school's audience (whom it serves), its action (what it does), its aim (the purpose for which it exists) and its function (how, in broad terms, it will do it).

The mission of Duke Ellington School of the Arts is to nurture and inspire passion for arts and learning in talented students who might not otherwise have an opportunity to develop their artistic skills. We ensure that our students are prepared for post-secondary education and/or careers in the arts by offering an intensive arts-based program. We prepare our students to become productive citizens in our global society through our strong focus on community service.

The AFG Validation Team's analysis of the mission statement suggests that The Duke Ellington School of the Arts clearly sees its primary audience as the students, which is a fitting and worthy focus for any school. This mission aptly describes the purpose and aim of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and reflects the unique environment and climate of Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Belief Statements

Belief statements serve as the foundation of a strong strategic plan. They are the formal expression of a school's fundamental values and serve as its ethical code. Beliefs describe the moral character of a school. In a planning process involving diverse stakeholder groups, they represent the composite of the personal values held by individual planning team members.

Because belief statements are a matter of faith, not a matter of fact, they express the school's overriding convictions, its inviolate commitments. They outline what members of the school community are willing to "go to the mat" defending. Because beliefs identify the "line in the sand", they can be used as a lens through which to examine the worthiness of the school's potential decisions or future actions.

Belief Statements

- Students learn at different rates and in different ways.
- All students deserve a challenging and broad education, regardless of ethnicity or economic status.
- A quality teacher knows the subject and lives it and conveys it with clarity and with love with every teachable moment.
- Learning how to learn provides the necessary framework for academic and artistic success in school and in one's personal and professional life.
- Education is the shared responsibility of the school, the family, the government, and the community.
- Education in the arts is essential to the development of the whole person.
- Artists play a vital role in an enlightened and culturally rich society.

The above statements provide a general understanding of what the school believes about the importance of education in the lives of students. The beliefs note the relationship of student learning to high expectations and the development of well-rounded students.

What the school has written as belief statements adequately fulfill the Middle States requirement to include a set of values as a part of the strategic plan.

Objectives

The *Accreditation for Growth* process requires schools to have 2-4 measurable student performance objectives. Duke Ellington School of the Arts has developed the following two objectives that meet all Middle States criteria for *AFG* objectives and one Non-*AFG* Objective.

Objective #1: By the year 2014, Ellington students will demonstrate improved academic achievement and improved artistic and technical proficiency as measured by:

- a. A 37 percentage point increase in the percentage of students passing the DC-CAS in math with Proficient or above, in compliance with NCLB.
- b. A 33 percentage point increase in the percentage of seniors taking the SAT. An 80 percentage point increase in the percentage of juniors taking the SAT.
- c. A 46 point increase in the average student SAT Critical Reading score, a 48 point increase in the average student SAT Writing score, and a 104 point increase in the average student SAT Math score.
- d. A 35 percentage point increase in the percentage of students enrolling in AP course.
- e. A 42 percentage point increase in the percentage of students enrolled in AP classes who take the AP exam at the end of the year.
- f. A 14 percentage point increase in the percentage of students passing AP exams with a grade of “3” or higher.
- g. A 14 percentage point increase in the percentage of seniors with at least 3.4 cumulative GPA and a 14 percentage point increase in the percentage of seniors who are members of the National Honor Society.
- h. A 21 percentage point increase in the percentage of students earning a grade of “B” or higher on their senior thesis project.
- i. A 37 percentage point increase in the percentage of students passing the DC-CAS in math with Proficient or above, in compliance with NCLB.
- j. A 33 percentage point increase in the percentage of seniors taking the SAT. An 80 percentage point increase in the percentage of juniors taking the SAT.
- k. A 46 point increase in the average student SAT Critical Reading score, a 48 point increase in the average student SAT Writing score, and a 104 point increase in the average student SAT Math score.
- l. A 35 percentage point increase in the percentage of students enrolling in AP course.
- m. A 42 percentage point increase in the percentage of students enrolled in AP classes who take the AP exam at the end of the year.
- n. A 14 percentage point increase in the percentage of students passing AP exams with a grade of “3” or higher.
- o. A 14 percentage point increase in the percentage of seniors with at least 3.4 cumulative GPA and a 14 percentage point increase in the percentage of seniors who are members of the National Honor Society.
- p. A 21 percentage point increase in the percentage of students earning a grade of “B” or higher on their senior thesis project.

The Validation Team commends Ellington for its bold statements expressed in Objective #1. Student Achievement is a worthy goal. The DESA baseline data is very comprehensive and will enable the Action Plan Team to begin successful implementation of new programs. The measurement criterion is well documented and should result in a greater understanding within the development of the Action Plan.

Objective #2

Motivation and Responsibility:

By the year 2014, Ellington students will demonstrate improved motivation for learning and an increased sense of responsibility as artists and citizens.

Ellington's increase in enrollment and in daily attendance rate as well as a decrease in student transfers is evidence that the Ellington student's motivation is high and is on the rise.

It is clear that the Ellington faculty and staff not only want the student to be well disciplined and talented artists, but a part of the students training involves development into artists with a concept of how they will change the world. Students not only receive, they give back to the community with required service hours and thus accept responsibility for the further development of their communities.

Non-AFG Objective

By the year 2014, the learning environment at Ellington will improve through facilities and technology upgrade and improved faculty ability to support student achievement and college acceptance.

The Validation team believes the staff truly understands student needs as well as the need for a facility that is up to standards for the twenty-first century.

Action Plans

Action plans are the point of contact between vision and reality; they are the bridges to the future. Here is where teams shift from poetics and emotion to metrics and task analysis. Implementation of the action plans is the point in the process where idealism and creativity meet the realities of time constraints, the budget and the natural and frustrating resistance that accompanies innovation and change.

Objective #1 Action Plan

The Validation Team commends Ellington for its bold statements expressed in Objective #1. Student Achievement is a worthy goal. The DESA baseline data is very comprehensive and will enable the Action Plan Team to begin successful implementation of new programs. The measurement criterion is well documented and should result in a greater understanding within the development of the Action Plan.

Objective #2 Action Plan

Duke Ellington School of the Arts has committed itself to implement Action Plans for the development of seniors in community service. These Action Plans seem easily attainable as Ellington has a great reputation for community outreach.

The Visitation Team is pleased that Ellington has installed its new STAR system software and that all staff has been in-serviced to use. While it's clear that this system will alter the need for hard copies of attendance, grading, up keep of transcripts etc., the Team recommendation is staff and faculty use this software for greater communication and faster responses. Ideas in the Action Plan to bring notice and reward students with an attendance scholarship definitely set the tone for the Ellington student to continue to strive for excellence.

In Action 3 the Visitation Team is very pleased that the parents will be involved in this area and held to the ideas of supporting the "Ellington Experience".

Finally, the Team is very pleased at the strides that Ellington is making to address increasing the number of Ellington students that stay and graduate. A tracking system, exit interviews and parent and student opinions serve as great attempts to increase Ellington graduation numbers.

Non-AFG Objective Action Plan

Action: Facilities and technology upgrade

Meeting with students allowed the team to gain another perspective about Ellington's facilities and technology situation. One student explained, "I've never had a lab science." Another added, "We can't build anything if we don't have the money." Many students chimed in with other needs of the school, basic things such as the cleanliness of bathrooms, classrooms, stairwells, and studios. A representative from DCPS said that the school must prioritize its needs, "the squeaky wheel gets the oil."

In the Ellington action plan in place for the facilities and technology upgrades, it is important that DCPS is able to address as many of these action steps as soon as possible. The team encourages Ellington to move forward with the action plan as designed. The plan has addressed many issues which concern all of the Ellington stakeholders.

Action: Improved faculty ability to support student achievement and college acceptance

Ellington students are expected to achieve and pursue post secondary options upon graduation. The students are intrinsically motivated to succeed. Ellington is where the arts and the academics come together.

“I didn’t think college was for me until I got here,” shared a student. Ellington provides students with SAT fee waivers, college application fee waivers, and support from guidance counselors and DC CAP to promote further education.

The team feels that Ellington would benefit from a weekly bulletin and a master calendar that is available to all staff. The information will provide updated information for the staff about any event that take place in both art and academic departments. If a shared drive is available on a school network, the documents can be placed for the staff to access.

During the interview process, administrators ask the teachers how they would incorporate the arts into their classroom. As a result of the spring 2006 retreat, teachers were able to come together, “foster better relationships,” and communicate opinions and ideas. The team recommends more integration of the arts with the academics and the academics with the arts. If Ellington can provide common meeting time for teachers, they can use the time to share best practices with one another, collaborate to create new ideas, and address student concerns.

The Ellington action plan is created to continually support student achievement and college acceptance. It is important that all members involved in the action plan are aware of their role. Most action steps involve the administrative team and the guidance department. Ellington should be able to address as many of these action steps as soon as possible. The team encourages Ellington to move forward with the action plan as designed. The plan has addressed many issues which concern all of the Ellington stakeholders.

STANDARDS OF THE MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION

Duke Ellington School of the Arts gathered information regarding how well the school meets the Middle States standards by having subcommittees of faculty members complete the survey provided by Middle States. The Validation Team found that Duke Ellington School of the Arts is in continued compliance with the standards set forth for accredited members of the Middle States Association.

C.1. Philosophy, Mission, Beliefs, and/or Objectives – *The institution has clearly written statements of philosophy, mission, beliefs, and/or objectives that convey the general and specific purposes of the educational programs and that express expectations for quality. Stakeholders, including staff, parents, and governing body members, understand, accept, and give input into the development of the organization’s philosophy, mission, beliefs, and/or objectives. These documents are appropriate for the groups served and are reviewed periodically.*

The Philosophy, Mission, Beliefs, and/or Objectives standard is met.

The Mission, Beliefs, and Objectives are universally understood by the entire Duke Ellington School of the Arts community. All facets of the community had an opportunity to give input to the creation of the Mission, Beliefs, and Objectives. These constituencies are welcomed by the school to continue to give input as the program moves from planning to implementation.

The Validation Team hopes that the high spirit shown at the time of the visitation will continue as the plan is disseminated to future students and their families as well as future staff. It is obvious to the Validation Team that these written statements are the cornerstones of long range planning and will serve as the schools' driving force for years to come.

C.2. Governance and Leadership – *The governance and administration work in partnership to ensure the integrity, effectiveness, and reputation of the organization through the establishment of policy and oversight of leadership. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and purposeful effort on behalf of students and their learning. The administration of the organization provides a productive work environment, timely and open communication, and the leadership necessary to plan both day-to-day operations and the long-term future of the institution. The school is chartered, licensed, or authorized by a state, nation, or authority, which operates in the public interest.*

The Governance and Leadership standard is met.

The Validation Team found a “new ray of light” in the administrative team of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Through interviews and perception data, it was shown that a period of time existed where the leadership of the Ellington School did not meet up to the standards of AFG. Since January of 2006, the new “head of school” has brought a wealth of energy and knowledge to a worthy and starving school. After numerous formal meetings with the administrative team, the Validation Team was exposed to honesty, integrity, and a drive for excellence not often seen. The head of school has actively become accountable for a “productive learning environment.” It is refreshing to observe an administrative team which is dedicated to student achievement, aware of student concerns, and genuinely cares for the school and the entire student body and faculty. This knowledgeable and professional team is prepared to implement changes that coincide with their specific AFG objectives.

Unlike other schools in the Washington, DC metropolitan area; the Ellington School has advantages and disadvantages when related to the upper administration and management of the school. Ellington is a special Performing Arts Magnet School within a struggling inner-city public school system. Due to political changes and a lack of consistent supervisory administration, the Duke Ellington School has been challenged with a mix of funding shortfalls, miscommunications about graduation requirements, and relationship issues with the Board of Education. Under a special contract, the school has literally two supervisory boards: the DC Public School System (DCPS) and the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project (DESAP). The Validation Team was enlightened by the Executive Board of DESAP and earned a greater

understanding of how their role impacts and shapes school operations. DESAP provides additional direction, hiring practices, funding, and special partnerships in the community where DCPS is lacking. The DEFAS partners and board are focused on the special needs of an arts and college preparatory school, especially with an admittedly troubled school system and under funded school board within DCPS.

C.3. Organizational Design and Staff – *The organizational structure of the institution provides the vehicle for carrying out the established philosophy, mission, beliefs, and/or objectives of the educational program and support services. A clearly defined set of reporting relationships exists and administrative, instructional, and support staff are qualified, competent and sufficient in number to allow the effective delivery of quality education to students. Staff assessment procedures are in place, are clear to all involved, and are collaborative. On-going professional development, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and collegial relationships among staff and administration are evident and conducive to cooperative action.*

The Organizational Design and Staff standard is met.

Classroom observations and group interviews have shown a well educated and dedicated staff at the Ellington School of the Arts. There are over 70 full-time and part-time faculty members at Ellington. Students reported a love and respect for their teachers, and their desire to work hard for them. Comments surfaced from numerous students about how “my teacher wants me to succeed” and “I am here, learning my craft, because of the dedication of my teacher.” The entire staff is lead by a supportive and well-informed administrative team, especially with the recent development of multiple staff communiqués and a master calendar of events. In addition, department chairpersons create a professional and respectful atmosphere with their colleagues. Many of the class sizes are smaller than typical schools, designed to reflect the individual artistic training that Ellington is known for.

Even though the staff is highly educated, with a majority holding masters and doctorate degrees, a concern was raised about the certification of the teaching staff. Faculty hired by the DC Public School System, fulfills state requirements in staff development and teacher certification. All seventeen DCPS employees are “highly qualified teachers” with current certification. On the other hand, almost all of the artistic staff and many of the academic staff members hired directly by the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project do not have typical educator licensure. Provided staff rosters did not specify if any DESAP hired employee held any certification at all. As the *No Child Left Behind Act* evolves and is now encompassing charter schools and other special institutions, it is highly suggested that the school enhance pathways of professional development to ensure as many teachers can complete certification requirements alongside other DCPS employees.

The Validation Team has found two separate faculties within the Duke Ellington School of the Arts; the academic staff and the artistic staff. Due to the enhanced education in the arts that Ellington strives for, the school day is extended two hours longer than other public schools.

Academic classes are typically taught in the morning and arts classes in the afternoon. Scheduling the duty day for the staff has resulted in an academic staff which begins two hours earlier than the artistic staff, which works later into the evening. This unusual scheduling model ensures contractual duty days are followed but does not allow for many full faculty meetings and activities. In addition, a strained relationship can be witnessed between the academic and artistic staff, both concerned with ensuring student achievement in their own specific areas. The team was not even able to meet with the entire staff because of this unique scheduling situation. Through determination of the administrative staff, bridges between the two faculties are being built; however, opinions still surface about which goals are more important and how much time spent with the students in individual fields, is highly debated.

C. 4. Educational Programs – *The educational programs consist of both carefully planned and well executed curriculum programs that include appropriate standards, solid instructional pedagogy, and appropriate assessment based on research and best practices. The educational programs are sufficiently financed, periodically reviewed, and mission-appropriate. They are developed to meet and address the needs of students and are designed to produce student learning at all levels. Effective policies and practices are in place, along with instructional materials, technology, and equipment that are appropriate, functional, and well maintained.*

The Educational Programs standard is met.

Duke Ellington School of the Arts offers its students a truly intense and unique arts and academic education. The “Ellington Experience” stresses commitment, responsibility, empowerment, excellence and dignity and has been responsible for introducing, maintaining and preparing Washington, DC and the surrounding suburbs with unmatched training in the arts. Ellington does have its challenges; however, the faculty, staff, students and parents seem to welcome change as the school enters into this new level of accreditation. All involved seem to carry positive attitudes about the Action Plan and even though it was apparent that not everyone experienced the entire hardcopy of the Action Plan, all seemed ready to accept a new paradigm in the approach for improvement and the key to this shift most definitely is the Head of School and his immediate support staff.

The area the Validation Team feels that needs particular attention is the dynamics and communication between the academic areas and the arts areas. “There seems to be a wall” voiced one Ellington senior. In order for the expectations and implementations of the Action Plan to be successful this proverbial “wall” must tumble.

The Ellington student certainly favors and rightfully, should favor the arts areas because it is these areas that have sparked their passion for learning. In interviews, the students expressed their passion for their craft and admiration for instructors in the arts areas. They also were filled with emotion for the academic area as well, especially English. A few interviewed students did voice their concerns over their AP math class and their SAT scores. After viewing the creative ways of addressing problems of low scores in math, the team is comfortable that by 2014 all

Ellington students will be proficient and advanced in the math content areas so that the scores for the DC-CAS and SAT will indicate improved student performance.

Because Ellington is such a unique and eclectic school it is important to note that there are two clear components that need improvement and that is the area of technology and laboratory science. This area of concern should be remedied as any deviation would not align these areas with the district's guidelines for technology immediately. Additionally, the science areas need labs that have all of the necessary equipment to meet the curriculum standards for high school science.

The team also recognizes the tireless and often uncelebrated sacrifices and effort of the faculty to see that every student lives the "Ellington Experience".

C.5. Learning Media Services and Technology – *Learning media services and technology function as important tools to enhance classroom instruction and other school activities as grade level appropriate. Well-organized information resources reinforce knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned in other program areas and broaden minds by providing opportunities to conduct research and interact with information.*

The Learning Media Services and Technology standard is met.

The Ellington Media area is staffed with a Librarian and a Media Assistant that have a great sense of how to best aid the students and faculty in their quest for information and warmly welcome for requests assistance. The team was impressed with several pieces of equipment that is stationed in this area. These are current periodicals such as newspapers and magazines, language and other computer software, several computers with wireless internet connections, a large screened monitor, a smaller viewer for a nationally broadcast student cable access channel, current Encyclopedias, distant learning equipment, card catalogues, a typewriter, reference guides and books.

The Validation Team was particularly impressed by the overwhelming volume of arts related books and materials in every artistic area and various time periods and languages.

The Team does recommend that funds be greater allocated to the media area to enhance the collection of books and computer software so that it may be updated regularly as old software quickly becomes obsolete.

The Technology area could be more expansive and up to date; however, it is clear that students have access to a computer lab, wireless internet, computer software and a Computer Technician. The Validation Team understands that the current conditions of the building make it difficult to install new hardware but we were very impressed with the tenacity of the Computer Technician to persevere.

C. 6. Student Services – *The school provides services to students that optimize their preparation for learning. Chief among these services are health services and, at appropriate*

levels, guidance including academic and personal counseling. Preventive and emergency health care services are provided and health and safety policies are clear and well understood. Other services that may be provided include transportation, food service, services for special needs students, and admissions and placement.

The Student Services standard is met.

The team was in the Ellington community the moment we walked through the main entrance. After meeting with students, guidance counselors, academics and arts teachers, the team has found that the students at Ellington have been provided with many services that are imperative to their growth as a student as well as an artist.

The guidance department has many programs in place that allow students to feel welcomed into the building. The Shepherding program has many successful activities. One of which fosters relationships with new students before the beginning of the school year. New students are encouraged to attend an overnight summer bridge program. This event allows new students to ask questions in a safe environment. Many upperclassmen volunteer their time to work with these underclassmen during the summer break. They work with faculty members and quickly begin to understand the personalities and the needs of the new students.

Other events coordinated by the guidance department allow parents and students to understand the expectation and culture of Ellington. Each month, all parents are invited to participate in a college preparation workshop. The information is focused on the college process; often times the guidance department has experts from other institutions walk parents through the challenging application and financial aid process. All guidance events are advertised in the *Guidepost*. It is a monthly newsletter, keeping families abreast of current events and scholarship opportunities. *Guidepost* is mailed electronically to the 92% of the parents who have signed up and sent home as a hard copy with all of the students. Ellington has also been able to utilize the voicemail system, placing calls to the homes of all students about these upcoming events.

Through DCPS and the DC College Access Program (DC CAP), a part-time counselor is available twice a week to work with students on their scholarship and financial aid applications. All Ellington students may take the SAT free of charge. Students applying to colleges are also eligible for a college application fee waiver. In the spring, panels of Ellington alumni return to the school to speak to students about their college experience.

Although many programs in the guidance department are successful, students still express concerns about the amount of one-on-one time spent with their counselor. The team encourages that counselors address student issues during the monthly meetings with the students. During every advisory, students gather by grade level to receive information. Designing a curriculum for the quarterly meetings can maintain focus and consistency throughout four years. Guidance can use this time as a venue for information to be disseminated and discussed.

At the beginning of the school year, the guidance department gives seniors a packet of information, providing them with a timeline for college deadlines, handouts to prepare them for the application process, and more. Even with the information provided, many students are still

struggling to get through their last year at Ellington. A senior student who was interviewed was frustrated. The student explained to the team, “I have not applied to any schools. I have no idea where to begin. I haven’t had the guidance.” In fact, as of December 6th, 2006, only 19 out of 69 seniors had requested transcripts for college admission. Students need more opportunities to meet with counselors about individual concerns, especially when the concerns relate specifically to college preparation.

The administrative team expressed that it was “critically important” that the guidance counselors gain more knowledge about the post-secondary opportunities for Ellington students. Funding was available to send the counselors to “key schools that our students are applying to” in order to gain first hand knowledge about the admission requirements. Recently, the counselors have become more actively involved with the faculty, becoming the communication link between the arts and academic departments. Teachers may have contacts with universities and art schools that the guidance department does not. The team encourages the guidance department to meet with the faculty more often to share and exchange information about post-secondary programs and services for Ellington students.

After interviewing the students and parents on the planning team, it is also very clear that a guidance counselor needs to be a member of the committee. Those junior and senior students involved felt that college preparation information should have been distributed during their freshman or sophomore year. The team recommends that a guidance counselor become an active member of the planning and the implementation team.

Health Services:

Ellington has a full-time school nurse in the building from 8:00am – 4:30pm, Monday through Friday. When the nurse is not in the building, there is a staff member who is certified through DCPS who is able to distribute medication.

The nurse works closely with the guidance counselors and the student support team in regards to a student who may need additional attention. The health room is located directly across from the guidance department fostering their working relationship.

Transportation Services:

Ellington has little to no parking available. Students who choose to drive to school are responsible to find their own parking location. With the nature of the student body, students use the metro and bus system to get to school. Discount passes are sold to students who live in the District and are under the age of 19. Students who live outside of the District of Columbia area have their own private mode of transportation. Due to traffic and transportation issues, often times lateness excuses are handled on a case by case basis.

Food Services:

Students are scheduled to eat on campus in the cafeteria or the areas surrounding the cafeteria. Breakfast and lunch are both available to students at little cost. Vending machines with snacks

and beverages are also available for students to purchase before school, during lunch, and after school.

Special Needs:

At Ellington, students who require special needs are met by two groups of individuals. The special education chair and special education teacher work with the Individualized Education Plan for the 22 students who qualify for the federally mandated services. Two other staff members work with the 6 students who have 504 behavior intervention plans.

Students who receive accommodations take courses during the school day to support their education plan. The special education coordinator works closely with all students, evaluating their academic needs, assisting during the audition process, managing a department budget, schedule, coordinate, chair and write all IEPs, and most importantly, educate in the classroom.

Admissions and Placement:

A student was asked how they got involved with the planning committee and why they felt it was important to be a part of the conversation. The student said it very quickly in just one thought, “At the end of the day, it’s about us.” Students at Ellington have a different way of thinking, it’s the Ellington thinking. Another student shared, “This is the only school I have ever enjoyed.” Admission to Ellington is competitive, high expectations are set and they must be met.

In the community handbook, the admissions process is very clear. All students, transfers and middle/junior high students go through the same application process: audition, interview, take academic placement tests, and submit past academic and attendance records, along with letters of recommendations.

A teacher shared that the academic placement test for math has recently been updated. It is now a new and a “more appropriate diagnosis of Algebra I and Geometry concepts.” The team was unable to ask but hopes that the English placement exam is also updated as often as needed.

Tuition fees only apply to those students who are not residents of the District of Columbia. The tuition rate for the 2006-2007 school year is \$8,550.

C. 7. Student Life and Student Activities – *A healthy atmosphere exists for all students. At all levels, non-discriminatory, appropriate student activities that supplement classroom experiences or community life are provided. An appropriate student activities program fosters a positive intellectual, cultural, and social climate, promotes growth in student leadership and social interaction skills, and encourages students’ special interests.*

The Student Life and Student Activities standard is met.

Student Life

The positive relationships between the staff and students are obvious. During a group interview, the students were asked to share one thing about what it was like to be an Ellington student, one said, "I have been able to live out my dream. I have been given the tools to live out my personal passion." Another student felt that, "Duke has taught me to be me. Duke has taught me to be my best." As the team walks through the hallways, in and out of classrooms, it is apparent, the students at Ellington know what they are here to do, obtain an education and pursue a personal passion.

The students at Ellington are working on two schedules, the academics and the arts. Students have shared that it is difficult to manage time. However, they quickly admitted their prior knowledge of the challenge of time management. Many upperclassmen seemed to have a better grasp of the idea of the balance, some underclassmen shared their frustration. A student acknowledged, "All of the teachers work hard to make it happen. This is a life changing experience."

The student group who was interviewed felt that they had a strong connection with the staff. One student stated, "Our teachers go above and beyond all of the time." The students were extremely vocal about how the teachers motivate them to learn. Another student stated, "The teachers are such vibrant people, it's exciting to learn from them." Over and over again, the students told the team that Ellington was their home and that they have the best of both worlds with the academics and the arts combined. In fact, students said, "it's like a family."

Student Activities

Between 11:40 and 12:20pm, students have the opportunity to eat lunch, receive additional help from peers and teachers, participate in clubs, and do what all teenagers do, socialize. Ellington clubs meet during the lunch hour because that is the only moment the students have time to take part in an additional activity. Teachers are not provided with stipends to sponsor the clubs. In fact, if funding is necessary for any club activities, the students must find a creative way to raise their own funds.

All students and teachers are encouraged to join the clubs in Ellington. Clubs such as the International Club (in conjunction with Model U.N.), give students the opportunity to discuss current issues, visit foreign embassy's, and participate in the national conflict resolution conference. During Roundtable, volunteers from a local law firm facilitate event discussions, relating all topics to the rights of students. In fact, at the end of the school year, one Roundtable student is selected to become an intern for the firm during the summer vacation. In the Chess club, the meetings are both instructional and informal. The students and teachers involved hope to teach the game of chess to newcomers and learn the importance of planning, action, and consequence.

Ellington students are required to complete 100 hours of community service before graduation. One way a student is able to obtain the service hours is through the after school tutoring program. The Shepherding coordinator schedules upperclassman who have received an A or a B in their English or Math class with an underclassman who is struggling in one or both academic

areas. Student volunteers from Georgetown University also work with the students who are in need of additional academic support.

There are many ways for students to participate in club activities; all sponsors have an open door policy. The team encourages the sponsors to create a master calendar with the meeting dates for all of the clubs, allowing students to have access to the information. Displaying a calendar along with a description of each club/activity in a high traffic area can also increase student interest.

C. 8. Facilities – *The school facilities, consisting of the site, building(s), and equipment, provide a safe, well-maintained physical environment that supports optimal student development and achievement. The school facilities are appropriate to implement the stated philosophy, mission, beliefs, and/or objectives of the school.*

The Facilities standard is **not** met.

The Duke Ellington School of the Arts is housed in a 107 year old building in the historic Georgetown Neighborhood. The age and disrepair of the facility is a major distraction and consistent problem for the school. The casual observer can notate a variety of issues in almost every room or floor within the structure. Some of these issues include: peeling paint, cracked and warped floors, a lack of handrails in the stairwells, poor lighting, inadequate heating and cooling, unavailable or unclean bathrooms, no science labs with working water, exposed wiring, nonworking and damaged individual lockers, and a consistent reported leakage from the ceiling. These problems have been addressed to the district administrative offices, with a lack of follow through on projects from the DCPS Board. A major renovation of the building is needed for the health and safety of the students and staff. The Validation Team believes the building size is adequate in meeting student needs at its current population. The team was presented with numerous unfilled facility work orders and witnessed numerous unusable areas such as the unfinished dance studios, which is hampering the educational process. If the DC Public School system is unresponsive or unwilling to improve the conditions of the building, then proper education and specific arts programs such as dance will not be able to grow or succeed. DCPS is wrought with disorganization and under funding throughout the system, and impacts the development of Ellington. On another note, it was fantastic to see student and faculty artwork along the walls, in addition to partnerships with the Georgetown businesses in an attempt to beautify the surrounding grounds.

C. 9. Health and Safety – *A safe and healthy environment for teaching and learning is provided. Both preventive and emergency health and safety procedures are clear and well documented. The school environment is productive and orderly.*

The Health and Safety standard is met.

During the summer, all DCPS students receive an information packet about the immunizations and shots that are required. Inside the packet there is a list of mobile units, local clinics and hospitals that provide those services. The nurse has direct access to updated student records and is able to contact the parents of students who have not received the appropriate shots. With the

help of the Department of Health, the nurse is able to maintain student records in an organized manner through the use of an electronic database.

Each year, the nurse is able to meet with the principal and discuss the needs of the health room. In order to promote health education, besides in the health classrooms, the nurse has plans to create information sessions during lunch. The nurse is located on the same floor as the cafeteria, therefore, naturally receiving the student traffic. The team recommends that the paint in the health room be replaced. Due to the peeling paint off of the walls, the beds in the health room can not be dressed with clean sheets until a student arrives. This can be a serious health concern, especially if and when an emergency arises.

The District of Columbia Police Department assigns a police officer to every high school in the district. The officer is on campus from 8:00-4:30pm and works very closely with the Hawk One security team. The officer is stationed on site to assist the administrators and the security team during the school day.

Any person who arrives on the Ellington campus is required to use the “R Street” entrance. There, the Hawk One security team monitors the students as they go through metal detectors and place their belongings through a scanning machine. The team suggests that Ellington place signs on the exit doors to notify visitors who are not familiar with the campus where to enter the building.

There are three Hawk One guards on campus. Once all of the students and staff arrive in the morning, one of the guards remains at the main entrance, another monitors the security cameras, and the third guard walks the campus. All of the guards are in constant contact with the DCPD officer.

There is an evacuation and crisis plan in place. Many areas of the building have a red sheet which describes the various exit points of the building. However, the directions posted are not for a particular area. It is extremely important that each room in the Ellington facility has a clearly marked exit plan. The team suggests that all rooms have emergency exit directions posted beside all exit doors. This sign should describe the specific route which can be understood by anyone inside the building, directing individuals to the closest stairwell and exit door.

Many of the issues the team has witnessed in regards to the safety of the students at Ellington relate to the current state of the facility. Safety concerns such as peeling paint, leaking pipes, lack of running water, roof replacement, handrails in the stairwells, expired elevator inspection certificate, and temperature control in the building are only a few. The team would like to see those basic safety issues solved as soon as possible.

C. 10. Finances – *Financial resources are sufficient to provide the educational opportunities defined in the school’s philosophy, mission, beliefs, and/or objectives. The business practices of the institution promote confidence in the organization’s ability to manage fiscal and material*

resources in a responsible manner and to follow prescribed budgeting and accounting principles. The majority of resources raised for school purposes must be dedicated to school operations.

The Finances standard is met.

Like other schools within the DC Public School System, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts is completely under funded. Political situations and an ever changing upper administration within the Board of Education has resulted in a lack of resources for simple items needed by every school, to include textbooks, art supplies, science labs, and technology growth. Ellington's special situation with two separate supervisory boards and additional partnerships within the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project, specifically the Ellington Fund, allows for shortcomings to be filled easier than other schools in the district. The Ellington Fund, a not for profit organization, compliments the yearly budgetary needs by over twenty percent per year. This additional funding, has allowed staff to be retained, supplies to be ordered, and programs to be offered that other schools can not match. Like all public schools, issues still remain that hamper the development of programs, and resources are typically the blame. Increased student enrollment, reduction in district allocations, and additional salaries has stressed the operational budget of the school. This year alone, the district allocation was reduced by over \$600,000. The Ellington Fund has assisted in saving programs and staff with continuous grant writing, foundations, community relations, and reaching out to business partners and organizations. Through these avenues, **DESAP** and the Ellington Fund have been able to provide desks, instruments, artistic master classes, scholarship programs, and SAT Prep Courses, enhancing the educational process at Ellington. While ensuring program development and supplies needs are met, a significant amount of debt as been accrued by the Fund and thusly the school. Gains are being made to reduce that debt and the controller stated: "...coming out of one of the most trying years ...the process has made us more confident." The 2006-2007 school year has brought the first balanced budget in many years, and a debt reduction plan is in place. The Validation Team congratulates the **DESAP** partners, the Ellington Fund, and the administration for making strides toward fiscal strength under extreme conditions, but concerns are raised about the funding resources needed to implement many of the new programs within the action plan.

C. 11. Assessment of Student Learning – *The assessment of student learning outcomes enables students to monitor their own learning progress and allows teachers to adapt their instruction to the specific learning needs of students. The school's effectiveness is assessed by examining areas such as student learning and performance, program evaluation, performance results for support services, graduate success, and client satisfaction. Results are used to develop strategies for improving service and program quality. Assessment results are communicated appropriately to parents/guardians, students, staff, and school community.*

The Assessment of Student Learning standard is met.

Duke Ellington School of the Arts uses several forms of assessment. These include individual arts and academic classroom assessment, the DC-CAS, AP examinations and the SAT. The team commends the students and faculty for being one of four senior high schools in DCPS to meet its AYP goal. While Duke Ellington School of the Arts clearly has an uphill battle to raise test scores so that all students will be advanced and proficient in math, there is no question in the mind's of team members that if all of the plans that are articulated in the Action Plan are met, the scores will rise in collaboration with the freshly organized math department.

C. 12. Planning – *The school makes use of strategic, long-range, and operational planning to continuously improve its educational programs and services. Improvement plans focus on student performance and organizational growth and engender continuous improvement across all aspects of the school organization. Externally validated processes for evaluation, strategic planning, and school/district improvement are continuously maintained. Systematic analysis regarding student performance and organizational growth is coupled with analyses of instructional and organizational practices to ensure alignment with the school's philosophy, mission, beliefs, and/or objectives. Trends in outcomes and results are projected and goals of demonstrated strategic merit are identified.*

The Planning standard is met.

A written school/district improvement/strategic plan is developed and is available to the school community. Where appropriate, it is approved by the governance. School leadership and staff plan, organize, manage and support ongoing school improvement process that has broad-based school community participation and commitment.

The school provides opportunities for representative elements of the community to offer input into the school's strategic plan. The action plan is reviewed and updated annually by the SIT with input from various stakeholders. SIT continuously monitors the school's progress toward meeting targets and suggest and implements changes as necessary to ensure success.

ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDATION

As a Validation Team we are asked to make an accreditation recommendation to the Commission on Secondary Schools at the conclusion of our visit. Our five person team has unanimously concluded that

- 1.) The school has clearly defined appropriate objectives.
- 2.) The school has established conditions under which they can be achieved.
- 3.) The school is working toward achieving the objectives now.
- 4.) The school should be able to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

In addition, the Validation Team believes that Duke Ellington School of the Arts has shown evidence that each of the following *Accreditation for Growth* parameters are in place.

A Focus on Student Performance and Growth

- There is a focus on student performance and school improvement efforts are aimed at student learning, student performance, and student results.

A Culture of Accountability in Student Performance

- The objectives are measurable, there is a viable internal monitoring process, and an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the action plans has been developed.

A Planning Ethic

- The school is engaged in a continuous clarification of its unique mission, beliefs, and expected student performance objectives. The school is action-oriented as shown by the development of long-term strategic action plans that integrate program, services, facilities, and support to address growth needs.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

- The school is committed to continuous evaluation, an annual review process, peer review, and a dynamic process with the flexibility to modify action plans.

Involvement of Representative Constituents

- There is a climate of inclusiveness and evidence exists of the involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the planning process.

The Validation Team will be pleased to recommend continued accreditation with stipulation for Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

NEXT STEPS

Duke Ellington School of the Arts proceeds with the implementation of its strategic plan, there are a number of “next steps” the school will be expected to take in order to maintain accredited status. These include the following:

- Conduct Annual Reviews

While Middle States does not “collect” evidence of the school’s annual review, Duke Ellington School of the Arts is expected to conduct a review each year. The purpose of the annual update is to review progress that has been made on action plans, update the plans as needed, and pause to celebrate successes. Duke Ellington School of the Arts should keep a record of what transpired during each annual review. The meeting agenda, minutes, documented changes to the plans, and summaries of progress made over the past year are examples of evidence to collect.

The Mid-Point Reviewer and the next Validation Team will want to see these examples of growth.

- Host an On-site Mid-Point Reviewer

In a sense, the annual review conducted by the planning team takes the place of the traditional progress reports that used to be submitted to MSA. In addition, however, the Commission on Secondary Schools will appoint a reviewer prior to the midpoint of the seven-year accreditation cycle to make an onsite visit to the school, typically at the two and one half year mark. Where possible, the reviewer will be someone from the original Validation Team since this individual should require less explanation of what the school is aiming to do in its planning activities. S/he should be able to readily see the progress that the school has been made.

Typically, the visit will last one day; the school will be responsible for the Mid-Point Reviewer's travel expenses. The school will not be expected to prepare extensive materials in advance of the visit. Rather, the visit should be perceived as an "informal visit from a critical friend." The school will want to show the reviewer evidence of progress to date and interviews with key people should be scheduled.

- Prepare for Reaccreditations

Some time during the sixth year of the school's accreditation cycle, thought will need to be given to the visit of the next Validation Team. However, if the *Accreditation for Growth* process has been an ongoing process as expected, preparing for the team visit should be an extension of work already underway.

As the school prepares for the Validation Team visit, the planning team will want to do the following:

- Revisit the mission statement to ensure that it still describes the preferred vision for the school.
- Reconfirm commitment to the belief statements.
- Conduct internal and external scans.
- Examine the objectives to determine if new objectives need to be developed, if current objectives need to be modified, or if current objectives need to be recycled.

CONCLUSION

The five member AFG Validation Team enjoyed a unique professional experience while visiting the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Washington, D.C. from December 4-7, 2006. The AFG Team, comprised of both teachers, coordinators and administrators, enjoyed the accommodations and hospitality afforded by the Duke Ellington School of the Arts staff. The team also enjoyed the rich interaction with the faculty, staff, students, board of directors, and central administration, including a member of the Board of Education.

Mention is to be made of the candor and openness of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts student body. It is hoped that the community, school, DCPS, and the Duke Ellington School of

the Arts Project can continue to work together to bring a quality education as well as a safe learning environment to all Duke Ellington School of the Arts students. The faculty and staff are dedicated to continued improvement, high expectations, and a safe and secure atmosphere for all students and staff.

Finally, the team would like to mention the importance of continued central office support of the overall Duke Ellington School of the Arts program. It is difficult enough for a school to educate its student body when minimal issues are present. It's become incumbent for the central office to fill the void wherever possible to "level the playing field." This challenge is not unique to Duke Ellington School of the Arts and is present throughout America, yet the overall support of all of our students, regardless of economics, is a major challenge for public education. The AFG Team encourages the Duke Ellington School of the Arts administration and staff to continue to work with the DCPS to bring about immediate and necessary building repairs, remodeling and updating that directly effects the learning environment of all students.

In closing, the AFG Validation Team commends Duke Ellington School of the Arts for its preparation and hosting of the Middle States visit. Our best wishes go out to all involved in the education of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts "A-Train." Your mission is noble, worthwhile, and essential.

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