



**Southern Association of Independent Schools
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools**

SAIS-SACS Dual Accreditation

VISIT REPORT

for

**The Katherine and Jacob
Greenfield Hebrew Academy**

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Southern Association of Independent Schools and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools: **SAIS-SACS/CASI Dual Accreditation**

SAIS and SACS/CASI member schools are part of a remarkable history of quality assurance in education.

SAIS began its organizational life in 1903 as the “Mid-South Association of Independent Schools,” providing training for teachers in private schools and some early public schools in the southeastern states. In 1953, another organization began as the Southern Association of Independent Schools, providing a forum for independent school administrators to work with public schools through SACS and to contribute to the larger interest in accreditation in the southeast. SAIS and SACS merged in 1986 to form the present SAIS, with an emphasis on accreditation through SACS for independent schools and professional development for administrators, trustees, and teachers. Today, SAIS works to help both established and emerging schools approach these issues with creativity and innovation. Working at the state, regional, and national levels, SAIS serves and strengthens member schools through the promotion of the highest quality educational standards and ethical conduct.

Established in 1895, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (commonly referred to since 2004 as SACS/CASI, Council on Accreditation and School Improvement) is a non-governmental, voluntary organization that accredits more than 13,000 public and non-public institutions from early childhood through university. Since its inception, SACS has served the educational community by dedicating its mission to helping schools improve student learning. Today, SACS/CASI is the largest accrediting agency in the world and is one of only six agencies that accredit both public and non-public educational institutions.

The current SAIS-SACS/CASI partnership offers schools a process for dual accreditation. In today’s world of accountability in schooling, accreditation serves as a critical component of a school’s demonstrated effectiveness and ability to provide successful schooling for children. A school that is able to achieve accreditation demonstrates a commitment to a process that requires the school to meet a set of rigorous, research-based standards; to engage in a program of continuous school improvement; and to demonstrate quality assurance to its stakeholders through self-evaluation and peer review. SAIS-SACS/CASI accreditation provides schools access to an integrated network of services and technical assistance that supports every school’s ability to identify and meet its goals for improving student performance and the teaching and learning process.

A SAIS-SACS/CASI accredited school is part of an international network of accredited schools which have demonstrated success in educating children. As such, SAIS-SACS/CASI accreditation is recognized throughout the world as a symbol of quality in education for students and teachers.

To earn accreditation, schools must meet quality standards, be evaluated by an outside group of peer professionals, and implement a school plan focused on strategic improvement and student performance. Accreditation is voluntary and must be renewed each year.

Roster of Team Members

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The Review

A team representing SAIS and SACS/CASI conducted an on-site visit at Greenfield Hebrew Academy on November 7 and 8, 2005. The team was comprised of five members from Georgia whose diverse school backgrounds provided an array of expertise.

In conducting the on-site reviews, the visiting team was responsible for:

1. Assessing the adequacy of the self-study process;
2. Identifying strengths of the school deserving commendation;
3. Developing recommendations that may help to strengthen the programs of the school;
4. Assessing compliance with the standards of SAIS-SACS/CASI;
5. Developing a written report of the findings.

To fulfill the team's responsibilities, team members:

1. Reviewed documentation provided by the school;
2. Conducted interviews with board members, parents, school personnel, students, and community members;
3. Applied the standards for accreditation;
4. Developed a draft of commendations and recommendations;
5. Contributed to the content and focus of the written report;
6. Provided input as to the determination of accreditation.

The primary focus of the self-study process is to demonstrate the capacity of a school to meet the requirements for accreditation. A typical self-study consists of:

- Analysis and response to accreditation standards;
- Identification and demonstration of a continuous process of improvement;
- Implementation of methods that provide for quality assurance.

The study addresses four critical questions:

1. **PROFILE: *Where is the school today?*** The PROFILE should include clear, comprehensive information reflecting current student performance data, stakeholder perspectives, community characteristics, and analysis of strengths and limitations in the areas of student learning and school performance.
2. **VISION: *Where does the school want to go?*** The VISION is a clear, compelling purpose communicated through the school's vision and mission statements, beliefs, and core values.
3. **PLAN: *What is the plan to get there?*** The PLAN should be based on an analysis of pertinent data, research of best practices, and alignment with generally-accepted expectations for student learning at schools with similar missions.
4. **RESULTS: *How will the school know when it had accomplished its plan?*** The RESULTS are documented evidence demonstrating successful implementation of strategies that resulted in accomplishment of the school's mission and student achievement gains related to the school's mission. (Included in the Executive Summary and monitoring procedures.)

The visiting team sought the answers to these four critical questions within the framework of the school's self-study. The following pages contain the findings.

The Self Study

Greenfield Hebrew Academy (GHA), founded in 1953, is the oldest Jewish day school in Atlanta, Georgia and the first such school in the country to be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The school has won many honors and awards, including the Blue Ribbon School Award from the United States Department of Education.

In addition to age-appropriate, well-equipped classrooms and science laboratories, the school has a 700-seat auditorium, an art room, a very modern media center, three computer laboratories, a gymnasium, two playgrounds, and athletic fields--all thoughtfully and attractively arranged on over 18 wooded acres.

The 458 students are taught by 85 teachers. The largest class has 18 students, but the average class size is 15. In the *M'silot* (Pathway) Program for children with learning disabilities, the teacher-student ratio is never greater than 1:5. The 30 staff members include head of school, principal, 5 division heads, a media specialist, 2 counselors, a drama program director, a band director, a physical education director, a network administrator, an occupational therapist, 6 non-academic administrators, 4 kitchen staff, and 4 maintenance staff members.

All teachers and administrators were involved in developing the action plans after considerable study and administration of surveys involving parents, teachers, students and board members. After the committee carefully reviewed several whole school, middle school and lower school issues, consensus was reached to focus on three Action Plan goal areas: Honor Code, Measuring Student Performance, and the Talented and Gifted Program.

GHA is fortunate to have faculty members with an average of nine years of service at the school.

VISION

The school Board established a committee consisting of parents, Board and faculty members to evaluate the school's mission and core values. The committee members met on numerous occasions and presented their final product to the Board members, who voted to approve it. The mission covers the educational component (curriculum) through societal influences. It expresses a commitment to being a community school and focuses on embracing the diversity on many levels: economic, religious, and educational.

Commendations:

The school deserves commendation for:

Having the vision to incorporate all areas of growth through academics in both general and Judaic studies as well as awareness of society outside the Jewish area.

Its continuous emphasis on the historical and religious as well as the important connection with Israel.

PROFILE

Commentary on school profile:

GHA is clearly described in the self-study as an independent Jewish day school whose community members have a strong spirit, enthusiastic involvement, and common goals. The faculty is experienced, with a high percentage holding advanced degrees. The facilities have been expanded to include spaces such as the theater and the outdoor classroom, and other areas have been improved. Additional computer labs with a school-wide technology emphasis have been created. The variety of extra-curricular activities and academic programs engage a large continuum of learners. Standardized test scores and survey data have been analyzed and used to establish priorities for student learning and school improvement.

Growth with vision, commitment and student achievement were evident in both the description provided in the self-study and observations made during the SAIS-SACS/CASI visit. Despite the many strong and readily apparent positives, enrollment has declined somewhat. In addition the special pullout programs currently provided may be more numerous than the population can realistically support.

Commendations:

GHA should be commended for the following:

- the expansion of the facility, including the outdoor classroom, fine arts studio, performing arts auditorium, and expanded gymnasium.
- the technology emphasis, including expanded computer labs, wireless connectivity, and portable laptops.
- the media center and its seating areas, computer work stations, library look-up stations, and abundant circulation materials.
- the emphasis on recognizing and addressing individual differences (e.g. the Discovery program, math enrichment, learning differently initiative, *Ulpan*, and *M'silot* program).
- teacher education in the areas of test score interpretation, analysis for trends, and use in planning while understanding the need for a variety of ongoing assessments to assess student performance; and
- the active spirit and participation among school, community and stakeholders (e.g. PTSA fundraising; community service).

Recommendations:

GHA should consider:

- exploring Differentiated Instruction (including pretests to test out of specific units) as an approach for meeting many individual differences within *heterogeneous* classrooms, possibly reducing the need for acceleration and support pullout programs.
- finding ways to further explore reasons for the decline in enrollment, possibly conducting exit interviews, to continue addressing this issue.
- collecting and analyzing test data in addition to portfolios and informed assessments; monitoring the “diminishing gap” noted in 8th grade CTP scores to ensure that this difference is not attributable to only one 8th grade class.
- continuing to explore ways to inform the greater Atlanta community about the mission of GHA, its strong academic focus, and its unique setting that respects the “broadest possible spectrum of Jewish families.”

PLAN

Commentary and brief description of school plan:

Note: The plan includes three goal areas; comments on each goal follow.

Goal #1: The Honor Code portion of the plan is designed to address the problem of students' lying, cheating and plagiarizing. The plan for addressing this problem involves developing and implementing a rubric for the students to abide by. The school also plans to introduce a new *Chumash* curriculum incorporating the study of ethics and values which the students will be encouraged to apply and discuss in all of their schoolwork and subjects. The school also plans to keep track of the number of honor offenses and measure differences in the students' perceptions and attitudes toward lying and cheating. Their benchmark of success involves student surveys and the counting of detentions issued for lying and cheating. The starting point for this plan should be making the students aware of what lying, cheating and plagiarizing are, and what it means to live under an Honor Code. The middle school is probably the level at which it should be introduced.

Goal #2: The plan for improving the measurement of student performance involves reevaluating the school's grading system. The school hopes to be better able to measure gradations of student performance. Many great ideas for changing the grading system are contained in the list of possible suggestions. The plan is definitely still in its formative stage. Some time should be spent in looking into grading systems used at other independent schools.

Goal #3: The school plans to appoint a committee to develop a talented and gifted program for the middle school students. The exact nature of this program is still under study and will be handled by the soon-to-be-appointed Talented and Gifted Committee. Professional development for the middle school teachers has also been planned. An in-class approach to challenging these children should be seriously considered.

Commendations:

GHA should be commended for:

- having recognized the honor problem through the results of the student survey. The school should also be commended for being willing to admit that it is a problem and to be willing to address this as a problem.
- recognizing the need for a grading system which gives the parents and students more information about their progress.
- the efforts it is already making to design units in math which challenge even the most gifted students.

Recommendations:

GHA should consider:

- making certain that the students understand what the Honor Code is in advance; making students aware of this code by posting it in classrooms; putting it on all tests and quizzes; and addressing what behavior would be considered cheating on individual assignments as they are given. An assembly each fall in which, through skits, the students are introduced to examples of violating the Honor Code is one method of introducing students to the code.
- describing how a grade for each class is determined. The course description should explain credit for various areas such as homework, quizzes, projects and tests or grammar, spelling, literature, and creativity. The school could look into descriptive methods used by other private schools for grading lower school students. A numerical rather than a letter grade could be given to middle school students to get away from their seeking all A+'s. A simple statement could be sent out with every transcript describing any new system.
- restructuring Goal #3 to provide a more specific plan. Also consider the reasons and necessity for a pullout program rather than working more within the classroom to challenge all of the students.

RESULTS

Commentary on school's results:

According to the executive summary, the last five years at Greenfield Hebrew Academy have been “a period in which the school has aggressively implemented strategies to improve how the school functions; to raise the caliber and professional development of the faculty and most importantly to enhance student learning.” This is very evident in that the school took to heart the recommendations from the SACS review team that visited the school in December 2000. In order to address the recommendations the school did the following:

- Appointed a group of directors to facilitate conversation within the levels as well as communications with the parents.
- Allowed teachers to meet together to discuss specific subject areas in order to make student transitions easier.
- Integrated their general and Judaic Studies along with introducing a curriculum mapping program.
- Improved staff development in the use of technology. All staff members are required to post information on Edline and many are encouraged to use the curriculum mapping program.

By addressing the recommendations made by the visiting team, the school was also able to progress with their three action plans:

1. A complete revision of their Judaic Studies program.
 - Added a basic Chumash curriculum upon which teachers can build.
 - The Lower School department implemented a new language curriculum program.
 - The Middle School department implemented a revised Hebrew language curriculum and has added Judaic electives.
2. Monitor and evaluate their curriculum on a continuous basis.
 - Implemented a curriculum mapping program in order to begin to create a spiral curriculum from grades 2-8.
3. Use of student performance data as a basis for decision making and school-wide improvement plans.
 - Changed to using the CTP4 standardized test and have made some curricular changes because of this.
 - Use more level appropriate textbooks.
 - Assign students into more homogeneous groupings in the upper levels.

To ensure that the school is able to progress with their action plan over the next five years, a standing *School Improvement Committee* has been formed consisting of the headmaster, the SAIS/SACS committee chairs and four staff members. The staff members will transition out after two years. This committee will meet once every month and will present a report to the administration and the Board of Trustees on an annual basis.

Commendations:

GHA should be commended for:

- Adding electives to the Judaic Studies Curriculum in the middle school. Several of the parents commented on their survey that this was important to them as well.
- Implementing the recommendations from their 2000 visit. Many of the changes made have improved the school on many levels.
- Forming the School Improvement Committee to ensure that the three new action plan goals will be addressed and implemented in a timely manner.

Recommendations:

GHA should consider:

- Evaluating the curriculum goals for the General Studies Program in more detail. In particular, the school should evaluate the success of using the curriculum mapping software.

General Commendations and Recommendations

The visiting team commends Greenfield Hebrew Academy on the following:

Exemplifying extremely noteworthy school pride, hospitality and cordiality on the part of all stakeholders.

Promoting a highly supportive atmosphere undergirded by the school's strong and healthy culture.

Displaying student work prominently throughout the school.

Providing the excellent *M'silot* program for children with learning disabilities .

Implementing a collegial observation program wherein all teachers observe other teachers twice each quarter and then write reports about the observations.

Developing a fabulous science program and allowing the teachers to implement a plan that works for them and that fosters curiosity in their students.

Implementing a pilot inquiry-based science program in the middle school and supporting the middle school science teachers in their choices.

The outstanding leadership, vision, organization, and supervision of the school.

The extremely thorough organization and the systematically planned infrastructure used in analyzing information for this review and in planning improvements.

The technological advances made during the past five years. Instituting Edline, Curriculum Mapper and technological training for the faculty has led to many advances, including improved communication between the school and parents as well as improved vertical and horizontal curriculum coordination.

The outstanding commitment of the faculty to the mission and success of the school.

The visiting team recommends that Greenfield Hebrew Academy consider:

Developing a slogan or motto that encompasses the essence of the mission statement.

Using a standard format for content areas within the curriculum guide in which students' expected demonstrations of specific curriculum skills and content knowledge would be described in terms of expected performance of skills and knowledge.

Marketing the school more vigorously to in-town families and continuing to inform the greater Atlanta community about the school's mission, its strong academic focus, and its respect for the "broadest possible spectrum of Jewish families."

Establishing an endowment program for faculty chairs of Judaic Studies and various subject areas.

SUMMARY

GHA is a truly unique community, providing an excellent education for its students. The Quality Assurance Review Team agreed that it was virtually impossible to find students, faculty or parents who expressed anything but appreciation and enthusiasm for the school. Teachers and staff worked together diligently to determine what plan of action would best serve the school during the next few years. The collaborative effort that resulted in the current plan should ensure that the plan will succeed.

The school took the self-study very seriously, viewing it as an opportunity to improve even further. Every school is unique, and so is Greenfield. The school truly lives its mission.

CONCLUSION

The visiting team finds:

1. That GHA is in compliance with all standards of the SAIS-SACS/CASI dual accreditation process.
2. That the self-study conducted by the school meets the standard of quality and thoroughness required by the dual accreditation process and answers the four critical questions as outlined in the Guidebook.
3. That GHA is unanimously recommended for SAIS-SACS/CASI dual accreditation.