VISITING TEAM REPORT
for

Brainerd Baptist School

Chattanooga, TN

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A History of SAIS Accreditation

SAIS 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. MAIS and SAIS merged in 1986 to form the present SAIS, with an emphasis on accreditations 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.

The mission of SAIS is to provide leadership, accreditation services, and professional development resources that will strengthen member schools as they fulfill their missions. The focus of SAIS's interest when it began in 1953 was to develop and maintain relationships with the expanding organization of SACS in order to ensure significant input from independent schools into the exploding world of public school accreditation. The post-World War II years of baby booming, facility planning, teacher training, and legislative entitlement funding eclipsed the scope and role of private education in America close to the current level of service. Part of this history of negotiating standards in a predominantly public-school oriented world of education caused SAIS to embark on its own method of accreditation in the late '90s. The efforts resulted in the SAIS method of accreditation available to member schools.

SAIS has designed and implemented a significant program of accreditation to assist member schools as they develop and promote high quality education in this region. This method is based on a school's stated mission and its own unique approach to thorough and vigorous self-examination.

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 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 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.

SAIS accredited member schools are part of an international network of accredited schools that have demonstrated success in educating children. As such, SAIS 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.
A Roster of Team Members

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The Review

A team representing SAIS conducted an on-site visit to review this school's self-study and standards compliance. The team was comprised of team members whose diverse independent school backgrounds provided an array of expertise. 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.

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;
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:

1. Analysis and response to accreditation standards;
2. Identification and demonstration of a continuous process of improvement;
3. 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 the 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 has 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.
School Snapshot

A brief overview of the school

The mission of Brainerd Baptist School is to provide a high quality, comprehensive academic program in a loving Christian environment.

The school is dedicated to the belief that young people need both strong educational and spiritual guidance to grow into adults who will be positive contributing influences in the community and world.

We realize that our parents have a choice for private education in the Chattanooga area. It is truly our desire to partner with our parents for a lifetime of achievement.

School Beliefs:

- Student learning in a Christian environment is the chief priority of the school.
- All of our student's needs should be developed to his or her potential academically, physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.
- An exceptional academic program is crucial. It is our belief that small class sizes, dedication to each individual child, and setting high standards in our curriculum set the stage to provide a rigorous, successful environment for our students.
- Each student's intellectual curiosity and critical thinking skills should be encouraged and stimulated.
- The curriculum should present clear goals with high expectations for student achievement through instructional strategies and learning activities.
- Students need to demonstrate their understanding of essential knowledge and skills, as well as be actively involved in solving problems and producing quality work.
- Character traits such as integrity, responsibility, kindness, diligence, and service to others should be emphasized across the curriculum.
- The commitment to continuous improvement is imperative if our school is going to enable our students to become confident, self-directed, lifelong learners.

The board, administration and faculty review our mission statement yearly. All remain in agreement that it is just as true today as it was when it was first drafted in 1973.

History of Brainerd Baptist School

Eisenhower was president and Miller Bros. suits were selling for $29.95 when Fonza Swafford Miller Barkley started canvassing the Brainerd area for youngsters to attend the Brainerd Baptist Church Kindergarten. “I drove up and down the neighborhood, and at every house that had a tricycle or a swing set outside. I'd stop,” said Ms. Barkley who for more than 30 years taught and directed the Baptist kindergarten, one of the only few church-affiliated kindergartens in the Chattanooga area. The state had no public-school kindergartens in 1953.

In 1953, under the leadership of the pastor, Rev. Connie A Dabney, our kindergarten was organized under the guidance and direction of our dedicated director, Mrs. Willard (Fonza) Miller. The kindergarten began in September 1953, with 53 children enrolled, including four and five year olds as well as a few three year olds and one 2 ½ year old. The kindergarten was located in the Nursery Building, 2nd floor, and then moved to the ground floor (where it is now located). When Fonza Miller retired, after having served 31 years as director, our kindergarten committee retired with her, leaving the leadership to Mrs. Mary Standard in 1985.

In early 1972, Brainerd Baptist Church established Brainerd Baptist School as a mission of the church. The school was established under the leadership of Dr. J. Ralph McIntyre, pastor of Brainerd Baptist Church.
August, the School Board announced the appointment of four teachers and the principal for the 1972-73 school year.

Then school began on September 5, 1972 and offered classes in grades 1 – 6. The school year began with an enrollment of approximately sixty students. Although grades 1 – 6 began in 1972, there was already a kindergarten program that had been in place since 1953. A few years later the school began adding grades to become a K-12 school and operated that way until 1989. Lack of high school enrollment forced the school to return to kindergarten through sixth grade, and the school continued that capacity until 1999.

In 1999, a strong demand from our families once again led Brainerd Baptist School to expand. In that year, BBS birthed what would become David Brainerd Christian School. The middle school was located in modular classrooms on the schools lower soccer field and consisted of 34 students in sixth and seventh grade. In 2000, a third building was added to house the eighth grade and enrollment grew to over 70 students. The Brainerd Baptist Middle School began to look for property to expand the school through twelfth grade. In the summer of 2001 property came available on Igou Gap Road and was purchased for the continued expansion of the middle and high school. On October 4th, 2001, David Brainerd Christian School was officially born and moved off the campus of Brainerd Baptist School. In their first year on the new campus, DBCS had grades six - nine. The school continued to add a grade each year, having their first graduating class in 2006. In the summer of 2009, low enrollment coupled with a struggling economy forced David Brainerd Christian School to close.

The current enrollment of Brainerd Baptist School is 307 students in PreK3-5th grade. There are 165 boys and 142 girls. Our Prekindergarten program, structured for 3-5 year olds, has 115 students and there are 192 students in 1st-5th grade. Our average class size is 13.5. And the Faculty to student ration is 1:9.1.

**SELF STUDY PROCESS**

Along with opening with the largest student body in over a decade in 2013-14, the school made final preparations for its second accreditation under the guidance of Headmaster Sean Corcoran. The school began its self-study in August of 2012. Committees were formed and met monthly. The committees consisted of a member from grade level teams, including resource team members, Board of Trustees, Parent Focus Groups and other various stakeholders. The committees reviewed the standards, strategic plan and other pertinent school information. The teams worked together to complete the standard indicators and self-study document. The committees met monthly and reviewed all gathered data to complete the self-study.

Once all the information was gathered, the Academic Counselor, now Director of Development, met with the administrative team to further discuss the gathered data. This information was also communicated with all stakeholders and their input for the Strategic plan was added. The standard indicators and supporting documents were reviewed one last time by the committees and Administration and mailed October 2013. The self-study continued up until our SAIS and visit.
Profile

Where is the school today?

Reading the Self Study closely, the visiting committee found the report to clearly articulate who the school is today and the journey the community traveled to become the current iteration of itself. Additionally, there was ample evidence to support their assertions of who they are. Spending two and half days on campus with various school constituents, the committee found much corroborating evidence and anecdotes to support the profile.

Founded in 1972, Brainerd Baptist School is a Christian school offering K3 through fifth grade in Chattanooga, TN. Thirty-one faculty members teach their 309 students in the 2013-14 school year. The student enrollment reflects 15% ethnic diversity as well as a number of students and families representing various faiths. Brainerd Baptist graduates matriculated to a variety of public and private middle schools throughout the Chattanooga area.

Interviews conducted by the visiting team with various constituent groups at Brainerd Baptist echoed a strong sense of family, high academic standards, and a Christian-based environment. One parent stated she would want to say to faculty, "Thank you for investing in my entire family, not just in my child." There is a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation from both the students and parents for the support of the School's faculty and administration.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for:

- Strong evidence of building bridges between church and school and maintaining healthy relationships between the two.
- Fostering a spirit of collaboration between administration and faculty (i.e. receptiveness of administration to faculty recommendation of the Foundations and Framework curriculum).
- Overwhelming sense of tight-knit community as evidenced in conversations with each constituent group.
- Maintaining an ethnically and religiously diverse student population.
- Increasing from 58% annual-fund parent participation to 75% in one year.

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider:

- Establishing, clarifying, and articulating admissions processes, internally and externally.
- Delegating and articulating responsibilities of administrative roles.
- Continuing to communicate need for participation in development and advancement efforts with all constituencies.
Vision

Where does the school want to go?

The Self Study did not clearly articulate and differentiate the vision from the plan. The report focused on the Board's 2009 Strategic Plan, which was, at the time of the writing of the report, finishing up. Although a new vision was not explicitly stated in the self-study, it was clearly evident there was an overwhelming sense of unity and consistency of thought about the future among all constituents: mainly that Brainerd Baptist is attractive to teachers and families due to the sense of family, high academics and Christian emphasis and these three will shape all that the school attempts in the future. These big three were consistent throughout all constituents, but among the parents the perceived “value” they were receiving for the money was also very important; the parents were clear they want this “value” to continue. Moving forward, it is clear that these four pillars must be maintained in the vision in order for the school to stay successful.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for:

- Creating a “family” environment.
- Creating a community of high academic standards, always pressing to improve the curriculum and testing. Teachers are empowered to “fix” things that aren't working, whether internally or finding external solutions. (i.e. successfully adopting Foundations & Frameworks).

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider:

- Since Brainerd Baptist has just become a 501c3, separate from the church: crafting a clear vision for the school. This vision should involve all constituents, including the church, throughout the vetting process. The vision, along with the mission, should drive future decisions. Timing is of the essence.
- Clearly articulating core values and/or a statement of faith in order to help clarify the type of Christian school Brainerd Baptist aspires to be. Once completed, during the hiring process ensure prospective employees are able to affirm the school's statement of faith and/or core values.
Plan

What is the plan to get there?

As was stated in the analysis of the Vision, the Self Study did not clearly articulate and differentiate the vision from the plan. The report focused on the Board’s 2009 Strategic Plan, which was, at the time of the writing of the report, finishing up. We found evidence that the plan has been executed over the past five years. The plan included goals in the following five areas: technology, academics (testing), academics (curriculum), professional development, and development. In the area of technology, the plan was to hire a full time IT person, integrate technology into each subject and provide comprehensive technology training for all teachers. For academic testing, the plan included implementing the ERB-CTP4, raising test scores, analyzing test scores and curriculum by grade levels. In the area of curriculum, the plan stated that teachers would vertically align standards and benchmarks, hire an academic counselor and conduct yearly reviews. For the goal of professional development, the plan included increasing the professional development budget and to encourage all in the community to be life-long learners. For development, the goals included hiring a development director, increasing giving, and publishing a bi-annual magazine.

The Committee not only found evidence that the school had diligently and effectively completed its 2009 plan, but they were actively extending and tweaking the plan to further improve the student performance and support faculty in this process.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for:

- Adding an Academic Counselor to the faculty who has been a great asset for the school in assisting the classroom teachers in helping students with learning issues.
- Creating a Director of IT position and filling it with a highly competent individual who has helped in the advancement of technology usage in the classroom; he is knowledgeable and available for the teachers when needed.
- Adopting the Foundation and Frameworks reading program which has helped to improve the standardized test scores in reading comprehension and verbal reasoning and appears to be a unifying program for the teachers in the school.

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider:

- Partnering with the broader Brainerd Baptist community, including the church, to redevelop a strategic plan, particularly now that Brainerd Baptist has become its own 501c3. The plan should be clear, focused and measurable. The plan should be informed from all constituents: faculty, staff, and parents.
- Forming separate faculty and Board committees to execute various aspects of the plan, both to fulfill the plan and to build community around the Strategic Plan.
- Annually informing parents of the plan through a “State of the School” address.
- Developing consistent parent education opportunities about Foundations and Frameworks and other curricular initiatives to equip parents to partner well with teachers.
Results

How will the school know when it has accomplished its plan?

This important question must be more overtly asked and consistently answered to evaluate the progress in its strategic vision for the future. Obviously some results are easier to measure than others, but there must be an attempt to evaluate each objective of the school's plan. Brainerd Baptist School developed several easily measured results to many of its plan objectives from 2009; most of which have already been realized.

The goal to have an increased emphasis on technology is easily measured in the school's hiring of a full time IT Director and the boost in the IT budget. How effective the use of technology is in the classroom is a result that is not as easily measured. The school should consider developing metrics to evaluate whether the use of technology has enhanced the curriculum.

Continuing to implement metrics that will allow the school to further evaluate academic progress is critical as well. The use of standardized tests, particularly the ERB-CTP4, has allowed for teachers to consistently review student progress year after year and provide a basis for evaluating results. The use of more testing throughout the school year could provide more real-time, ongoing evaluation of academic results.

The success of the *Foundations and Frameworks* reading curriculum points to an extremely positive result to the schools plan of strengthening academics. The increased test scores as well as the positive feedback from parents and teachers points to that success.

The increasing budget for professional development shows the school's belief that professional development of its faculty is a key ingredient of its future success.

Focusing not only on dollar amounts but on the participation rates in the Annual Fund has allowed the school to gauge the results of improving development efforts.

Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for:

- Switching to the ERB-CTP4 tests to evaluate academic progress.
- Increasing the budget and promoting professional development.
- Tracking and increasing participation rates for the Annual Fund.

Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider:

- Exploring other standardized tests like ERB's Children's Progress for K-4 through 2nd grade.
- Creating a thorough process through which the teaching faculty and school leadership dissect the individual and grade-level results of the CTP IV to better inform instruction.
- Scheduling ongoing training in technology for faculty and parents that is curriculum focused.
Additional Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations

- For collaborating with Brainerd Baptist Church to allow the school to become its own 501c3 and remaining a strong ministry partner.
- For the positive transformation of the school under Headmaster Sean Corcoran.
- For the outstanding faculty who know and love the children and reflect the mission of the school.

Recommendations

- Now that the school is its own separate 501c3, moving to an audit that is separate from the church and maintaining separate accounts in accordance with GAAP.
- The school should consider a written agreement with the church, defining the relationship as well as specifics about the roles each party plays in the operations of both church and school.
- Continuing to create more financial independence from the church.
Summary & Conclusion

Summary

The visiting committee found the Brainerd Baptist School community to be warm, welcoming, and gracious. There is a pervasive and extraordinary sense of unity and community, all focused on the children. The school showered the visiting committee with wonderful hospitality and complete transparency during our visit. Special thanksgiving goes to Ellen Baggenstoss, Accreditation Coordinator, for her tireless work in preparing the self-study and making sure the visiting committee had all it needed.

It is clear to the committee that the Senior Pastor of Brainerd Baptist Church has enabled and encouraged the school to simultaneously strengthen its commitment to its Christian mission and become independent from church oversight and control in many ways. We find this to be commendable and see clear evidence that this support of the school has significantly enhanced the school.

Conclusion

The visiting team finds:

1. That the school is in compliance with all standards of the SAIS and AdvancED/SACS accreditation process.

2. That the self-study conducted by the school meets the standard of quality and thoroughness required by the SAIS accreditation process and answers the four critical questions as outlined in the Guidebook.

3. That the school is unanimously recommended for SAIS and for AdvancED/SACS accreditation.