



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

SAIS-SACS Dual Accreditation

VISIT REPORT

for

Franklin Road Academy

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

SAIS and SACS 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 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 as SACS) 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 is the largest accrediting agency in the world and is one of only six agencies that accredit both public and nonpublic educational institutions.

The current SAIS-SACS 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 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 accredited school is part of an international network of accredited schools which have demonstrated success in educating children. As such, SAIS-SACS 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 conducted an on-site visit at Franklin Road Academy on March 5-7, 2007. The team was comprised of five members from Tennessee whose diverse independent 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;
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.

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

The last five years of Franklin Road Academy's 35 year history have been a time of building upon the accomplishments of the past while preparing the structures and infrastructure that will support Franklin Road Academy students in the new millennium. An exciting amount of growth and change have taken place in this current accreditation cycle. Two of the most visible signs of growth are the campus expansion and 7th -12th grade students using tablet PC's on a daily basis at home and in the classroom.

New Upper School classrooms and labs provide state-of-the-art learning environments. Teachers in kindergarten through grade 12 have been integrating the use of technology into their classrooms in order to engage and to equip students with the skills they will need for the 21st Century workplace. Franklin Road Academy is proud to be one of few independent schools in the nation with a tablet PC initiative. The Action Plan developed by the 2002 SACS Self-Study has guided the academic program improvements which have taken place over the last five years. The lesson coding data included in this report provides evidence that these goals have been addressed. The 2006/2007 steering committee has compiled written summaries and a complete evidence file of how each 2002 self-study goal has been attained.

As the school celebrates the goals it has met in providing impressive physical and outstanding technological achievements, the priority at Franklin Road Academy has always been to create meaningful relationships among students and teachers in a positive learning environment. Franklin Road Academy remains true to its mission.

The steering committee determined to utilize a Strategic Planning Model for this self-study. This thorough analysis has resulted in a complete profile of where the school has been, is now, and where it is going. As Franklin Road Academy celebrates its 35th year and completes the first phase of its current campus plan, trustees will consider the implementation of the strategic plan which was adopted by the board in April, 2006. This plan includes the following items:

- Capital funding and completion for the future phases of the master plan
- Growing endowment through planned giving and cultivation of major donors
- Creating student, faculty, and staff diversity
- Ongoing faculty salary study which tracks progress of a stated goal
- Continued funding for technology
- Focus on professional development goals
- Targeted cash reverses as set forth in the plan document

A yearly agenda was outlined at the board retreat. A committee structure was designed to support the year's agenda. The Board of Trustees will continue to structure its membership to represent the greater Nashville community with task-specific trustee selections. The board will place emphasis on internal and external marketing of the Academy through a specific planning document.

The leadership structure includes: Board of Trustees, Head of School, Dean of Studies, Dean of Upper School, Dean of Middle School, Dean of Lower School, and Academic Council. Franklin Road Academy's re-accreditation process began in the spring of 2006.

PROFILE

Franklin Road Academy provided a comprehensive profile of the school with extensive supporting documentation that clearly illustrated its commitment to continuing its mission-driven focus dedicated to academic excellence and to providing a broad spectrum of opportunities for its students. Survey results reflect broad support for the school and high levels of satisfaction among parents, faculty, students, and alumni.

Commendations:

- The entire school community has embraced the mission of scholarship, integrity, and balance.
- Faculty and staff dedication and longevity is to be commended.
- The students have a high regard for the faculty; Franklin Road Academy students value the supportive relationships with faculty and staff.
- Parent involvement is strong and positive, enhancing the school's programs.
- The school has facilitated smooth student transitions from one division to the next.

Recommendations:

- Consider a thorough examination of racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity among the faculty and student body.

VISION

Franklin Road Academy boasts a beautiful, secure campus, new buildings with impressive facilities, and a dedicated faculty and staff. The school is evolving as a strong educational institution, and the administration, faculty, and staff are dedicated to academic excellence, a variety of activities and experiences for the students, and fulfilling the mission of the school.

Franklin Road Academy faces the challenge of competing with several good academic schools in the area. The leadership of the school, as well as the faculty, parents, and Board of Trustees, remain in continual forward motion and have developed a plan of action which will carry them into the next five years of growth.

Commendations:

- Franklin Road Academy has a dynamic Head of School who has the complete support of the school personnel, the parents, the students, and the Board of Trustees. She is a visionary who is well-respected and trusted.
- Franklin Road Academy has a clear mission statement which is supported by all of the stakeholders – the leadership, the faculty, the parents, the students, and the Board of Trustees.
- Franklin Road Academy is a spiritual school where both Christians and non-Christians are comfortable.

Recommendations:

- While the school is expanding and growing, consideration should be given to keeping the honored traditions and history of the school.
- Marketing and advancement efforts should continue in order to retain students, attract new students (especially students from diverse backgrounds), and increase endowment.

PLAN

Driven by its mission and beliefs, Franklin Road Academy has undertaken an all-encompassing strategic planning process which provides a comprehensive long-term plan for the future. In spring of 2006, the Dean of Studies asked the members of the Academic Council to begin the strategic planning process by preparing written narratives for each major academic area.

Forty-four school stakeholders accepted the invitation and participated in a two-day strategic planning retreat led by Dr. Krenson of AdvanceED. Following the development of the plan during the retreat, the results were shared with faculty and the wider Franklin Road Academy community.

Derived from the Strategic Plan, five-year goals were developed for the following areas: governance, facilities, personnel, marketing/advancement, development, alumni, spiritual development, technology, student services, athletics, and fine arts.

Commendations:

- The strategic planning process included a wide range of stakeholder input, and the strategic goals are measurable and data driven.
- The plan was well written and comprehensive.
- The school has successfully planned for and implemented one counselor per division to help students in the area of personal counseling.
- The majority of Franklin Road Academy students are actively involved in school life, balancing a wide range of academic, athletic, and fine and performing arts activities.
- The school has successfully implemented numerous technology initiatives and changed the way teaching and learning occur.
- The professional development grant program and the commitment to spending 1% of the operating budget on professional growth is to be commended.

Recommendations:

- Continue to improve visibility within the Davidson and Williamson Counties communities as a means of increasing enrollment.
- Investigate the benefits of an educational technology integrator to assist faculty.
- Evaluate and strengthen the advisor program in the Middle and Upper Schools.
- Continue to assign a designee for scheduling in each division.

RESULTS

In order to establish a process for setting priorities for the upcoming years, the Franklin Road Academy faculty, staff, parent, and student groups engaged in a comprehensive self-analysis process. This process included pre-retreat, retreat and post-retreat phases. Survey questions were developed by the steering committee, and surveys were sent to all of the above groups via SurveyMonkey. The results of the surveys were compared with the feedback and opinions shared through the SWOT analysis and were found to be consistent. The Alumni were also asked to give feedback via the Franklin Road Academy website.

The SWOT analysis was a thorough process and gave the administration a comprehensive list of possibilities and concerns as defined by the different constituent groups. By all indications, the results of this exercise will supply the Franklin Road Academy leadership with concrete long-range planning details on which a strong vision for the upcoming years can be based. Thus, these results and strategies will become viable, living strategies for continuous school improvement.

Commendations:

- The process of SWOT analysis involved representatives of all stakeholder groups, the results of which provided the basis of a new strategic plan as the next model in school improvement.
- The school has improved commitment to comprehensive testing, assessment and data-driven decision-making since the last five-year visit. The AP course assessments and school-wide evaluations of the CTP IV scores are particularly strong.

Recommendations:

- Aggressively pursue the strategic plan adopted in 2006 that strategizes:
 - Growing the endowment
 - Targeting cash reserves for faculty salaries and financial aid
 - Creating funds to support the need to increase diversity on the staff and student body
 - Retiring debt while supplying funds to complete the master campus plan
 - Planning for reasonable tuition increases
 - Increasing planned giving

General Commendations and Recommendations

The visiting team commends Franklin Road Academy on the following:

- A dedicated Board of Trustees supportive of the mission and vision of the school
- A devoted, nurturing, approachable, and confident Head of School
- A thorough, annual professional evaluation process for all faculty
- A community atmosphere built upon a sense of family present throughout the school
- The addition of the Director of Student Learning Services
- The installation of keypads at major entry points, significantly improving security without hindering typical traffic flow
- The well-designed additions to the campus which give a continuity to the architecture and significantly increase instructional and administrative space

The visiting team recommends that Franklin Road Academy consider:

- With Board leadership, seeking ways to enhance the Annual Fund and to develop a culture of giving to support the mission-related goals of Franklin Road Academy
- Reviewing additional staffing needs
- Evaluating the need for a health and wellness course focusing on issues such as nutrition, exercise, body image, drug & alcohol education, and making healthy choices
- Continuing curriculum alignment and mapping in all grades

SUMMARY

The visiting team spent two days on the Franklin Road Academy campus and was graciously welcomed. The team found Franklin Road Academy to be an outstanding school with excellent leadership and a dedicated faculty. The team interviewed students, parents and faculty. Each group acknowledged the presence of a Christian and community atmosphere, parental involvement, and quality student-teacher relationships. Students are challenged academically and have the opportunity to be involved in a variety of school activities. The faculty embraces growth with an inviting and positive manner. The school is a safe, caring place for students to grow, where enthusiasm for teaching and learning is evident.

CONCLUSION

The visiting team wishes to express appreciation to the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and all stakeholders for their efforts in preparing for the review team's visit and for their gracious hospitality during the visit. Additionally, the visiting team applauds the significant improvements made since the last SAIS/SACS five year visit.

The visiting team finds:

1. Franklin Road Academy is in compliance with all standards of the SAIS-SACS dual accreditation process.
2. 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. Franklin Road Academy is unanimously recommended for SAIS-SACS dual accreditation.