

## REL Pacific Ask A REL Response

Educator Effectiveness  
August 2020

### Question:

**Is there any research on implementation fidelity of accreditation processes?**

### Response:

Following an established REL Pacific research protocol, we conducted a web-based search for resources related to effective implementation of accreditation processes (see Methods section for search terms and resource selection criteria). We first prioritized studies in the Pacific and other Indigenous contexts for greater relevancy to our partners in the Pacific region; however, we included studies with more generalizable findings due to the limited amount of research available in these contexts.

References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. Descriptions of the resources are quoted directly from the publication abstracts. We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, our search included the most commonly used research resources, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.

### Research References

Biddle, C. (2017). Trust formation when youth and adults partner to lead school reform: A case study of supportive structures and challenges. *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership, (2)*2. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144806>

*From the abstract:* “Schools that build and support high levels of trust between stakeholder groups have been shown to support greater collaboration amongst those groups, including parents, teachers, administrators, and students (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). When stakeholders in schools feel the sense of psychological safety that accompanies trust, they are more willing or likely to engage in the behaviors that support continuous improvement, including speaking up about concerns or mistakes, seeking help or feedback from one another, innovating, and engaging in relational bridge-building across traditional institutional boundaries (Cosner, 2009). In addition to fostering collaborative behaviors, trust has been found to be related to a host of other positive organizational outcomes, such as the establishment of more just organizational structures in schools (Hoy and Tarter, 2004), greater organizational attachment by teachers (Bryk and Schneider, 2002), and healthier school climates (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2015). Rarely, however, has trust between youth and adults been studied to understand how it might contribute to their successful collaboration and accomplishment of organizational goals or objectives (aside from student learning itself). This tendency is likely due to a strong institutional bias towards positioning students as the

passive recipients of organizational reform efforts, rather than as active participants or collaborators in designing reforms to better serve their needs (Bragg, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001). This study seeks to identify the factors that led to trust formation between youth and adult teams engaged in one such initiative: a collaborative peer review project which engaged administrators, teachers and students in a quality review process developed as an alternative to the typical pathway to accreditation. Three schools participated in this alternative program in which joint teams of administrators, teachers, and high-school aged youth from each school used a variation on the practice of instructional rounds to gather information for continuous improvement efforts. The central research questions were: How was trust established between youth and adults working within collaborative peer review teams? What practices, beliefs and processes did participants perceive supported or undermined the formation of trust within these teams?"

Enomoto, E. K., & Conley, S. (2014). Accreditation routines in a demoralized school: Repairing, expanding, and striving for improvement. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management* (2)1, 74–96. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1111664>

*From the abstract:* "The purpose of this paper is to explore how accreditation processes aided a school principal in making reform happen. Using routinized action theory (Feldman, 2000), we examined how the routines in school accreditation were used to transform what had been a demoralized, low performing middle school. This theoretical lens is important as it demonstrates that routinized actions can offer more than stabilizing elements in a school organization but also help administrators seeking to make change. We begin by describing the setting of Ironwood Middle School, presenting the research inquiry methods, and examining how accreditation processes enabled the school to move forward in the face of uncertainty and instability."

Faber, D. (2019). NSBECS program effectiveness surveys: A tool for strategic planning and school improvement. *Journal of Catholic Education*, (22)1. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1218387>

*From the abstract:* "When the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) were first developed, principal and superintendent of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan, David Faber writes in this article of his elation at the possibilities for measuring quality and for addressing total school improvement that the standards would provide. After being introduced to the standards, he began promoting their use within the diocese to benefit strategic planning and school improvement efforts. As a direct beneficiary of the new system, schools in Faber's diocese were able to take full advantage of the tools and resources provided by the Catholic School Standards Project website not only to assist through the accreditation process but also as a framework for strategic planning and school improvement. Faber describes how the program effectiveness surveys proved to be valuable because of their close alignment to the standards and the ability to use the data gathered to inform planning and to track school improvement progress. Faber specifically affirms the program's effectiveness surveys as an integral tool embedded within the planning and improvement processes of his diocese. He says the survey results are used as a 360-degree element of the administrator appraisal process. The results are also shared each year with both the pastor and the school's local board of limited jurisdiction. The surveys are also used as part of the collection of evidence during the self-study and accreditation school visit. Lessons learned from the field are provided in this article."

Fisch, B. (2010). Evaluating organizational quality through narrative: A case for accreditation using the school portfolio. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, (13)4, 455–487.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ908567>

*From the abstract:* “This case study examines the narrative form of communication as used by educational leaders and their constituencies for quality school improvement. The school portfolio was used as an alternative accreditation process in one public school of over 800 students. This narrative approach used observation, interviews, and document analysis to validate the viability of the school portfolio. The findings from this study are important in order to demonstrate that narrative contributes to evaluating the quality of our organizations in terms of becoming a cultural symbol, providing an organizational experience for quality school improvement and offering a shared vision.”

Gibbons, D. A. (2017). *Factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska public districts and schools* (Publication No. 27737645) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska Lincoln]. ProQuest

Dissertations Publishing. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED576398>; full text available at

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/281/>.

*From the abstract:* “Public schools and districts in Nebraska are required to be accredited. The Nebraska Department of Education allows two methods to reach accreditation, the Nebraska Frameworks model and AdvancED Accreditation model. This study examined the factors that drive accreditation activities in Nebraska public schools and districts. It sought to answer questions regarding the importance of the two models' policies and procedures, the actions that schools took in response to external visits and what factors went into choosing an accreditation model. The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to determine the critical factors that influenced accredited public schools in Nebraska and to identify what factors played the strongest roles in determining which accreditation method schools or districts chose. In an electronic survey, teachers and administrators were asked to provide their perceptions regarding accreditation procedures in their schools. It was found that there were many similarities between schools that follow AdvancED Accreditation and schools that follow Nebraska Frameworks. For example, AdvancED schools need to meet published standards while Nebraska Frameworks schools need to meet criteria on a rubric. Participants from both sets of schools rated the standards or rubric as being moderately important to their accreditation procedure. Both sets of schools expressed similar responses to their external visits as well. The majority of schools met to discuss their visit, engaged in professional development and created formal action plans, but very few did any formal follow-up of their visit. The results of this study demonstrated the need for further study. An in-depth qualitative analysis of a small number of schools to determine why these schools chose the accreditation model could add to the body of knowledge of accreditation in Nebraska. During this study, it came to light that at least one school has changed their accreditation method from AdvancED to Frameworks. A study to determine why schools would change could also be significant.”

Hubbard, K. P. (2019). *The role of school leadership teams in elementary schools identified as accreditation denied in the Commonwealth of Virginia* [Doctoral Dissertation, George Washington University]. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED600701>

*From the abstract:* “As a result of federal legislation (ESSA, 2015) accreditation ratings of elementary schools are based on the performance of third through fifth grade students on the end of year

assessments in the content subjects of reading and math. As a result of these requirements schools that fail to meet these standards are identified as Accreditation Denied in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Once a school receives this designation certain requirements are mandated by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to assist in the improvement efforts toward accreditation. Two of these requirements are the implementation of a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and the formation of a School Leadership Team. Schools and School districts implement a variety of approaches to the responsibilities of team members and the required components of school improvement planning. As a result of these approaches, toward school improvement processes and distributed leadership responsibilities, research confirms that when both are aligned with the needs of the school population improvement goals increase and accreditation ratings improve (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Benolieil, 2017; Bush & Glover, 2012; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Dufour, 2004, 2008; Elmore, 2014; Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Gronn, 2000; Harris 2004, 2008; Hayge et al., 2014; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Rigby, 2013; Smylie, 1992; Spillane, 2005; Wallace, 2002). This study determined, through an instrumental case study, what the role of the school leadership team is in relation to the school improvement process in schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The theoretical framework of distributed leadership was used as the foundation for the conceptual framework for this study. This study provides a systematic approach to the development of the school leadership team through the distributed leadership framework and professional development for the School Leadership Team in the Instructional leadership responsibilities in elementary schools denied accreditation.”

Rosa, V. M. (2013). *Perceptions of high school principals on the effectiveness of the WASC Self-Study Process in bringing about school improvement* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of La Verne].

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED554990>

*From the abstract:* “The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which California public high school principals perceive the WASC Self-Study Process as a valuable tool for bringing about school improvement. The study specifically examines the principals' perceptions of five components within the Self-Study Process: (1) The creation of the Self-Study Document; (2) The development of ESLRs; (3) The implementation of ESLRs; (4) The development of the Action Plan; (5) The implementation of the Action Plan. The study also examined the differences in perceptions of principals based on the accreditation term their school was awarded and their school's API scores. The relationship between the accreditation term awarded and API scores of the schools in the study was also examined. Methodology: Multiple quantitative methods were selected for this study utilizing three research methodologies: descriptive, ex post facto, and correlational research. A total of 216 public high school principals, who went through the WASC Self-Study Process in the 2005/2006 school year were surveyed as the sample for this study. Findings: Examination of the descriptive data in this study indicates an overall positive perception that the WASC Self-Study Process brings about school improvement. The development and integration of ESLRs was perceived as less beneficial than the development and implementation of the Action Plan. Differences in perceptions based on accreditation term and API scores varied, however fewer differences were indicated in regard to ESLRs than the Action Plan. A relationship between accreditation term and API scores was identified in the study. Conclusions: Schools must approach the WASC Self-Study Process as a valuable tool for school improvement and not an exercise in achieving an accreditation term. Although each component of the Self-Study Process has a distinct value in itself, the Action Plan is

considered to have the most impact in bringing about school improvement. Recommendations: Further research into this area is advised including replications of this study with a sample of principals from other accreditation years and other types of schools. A replication of this study with an extension to include the perceptions of teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders is also advised.”

## **Additional Resources to Consult**

Wixom, M. A. (2014). *States moving from accreditation to accountability. Accreditation: State school accreditation policies*. Education Commission of the States. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED560997>

*From the abstract:* “Accreditation policies vary widely among the states. Since Education Commission of the States last reviewed public school accreditation policies in 1998, a number of states have seen their legislatures take a stronger role in accountability—resulting in a move from state-administered accreditation systems to outcomes-focused state accountability programs. Even in states maintaining accreditation programs, accreditation is often a component of the larger accountability system that evaluates school, district, and state educational performance on a number of indicators. This document provides details regarding the public school accreditation of the 50 states.”

Education Commission of the States. (2018, May 31). 50-state comparison: States’ school accountability systems. <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-states-school-accountability-systems/>

*From the resource:* “This resource captures an important transition period in state accountability systems by providing a national overview of these systems as described in current state statute and regulation (as of December 2017), where available, and in states’ ESSA plans (as of May 31, 2018). State statute and regulation often outline or provide a foundation for accountability systems. In some cases, states may operate multiple systems to ensure school quality, not all of which are described in statute and regulation. To help fill in the blanks that are not described in state policies, other resources (where publicly available) have been provided.”

## **Methods**

### ***Keywords and Search Strings***

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- “Accreditation” AND “school improvement”
- “Public school accreditation” AND “implementation fidelity”
- “School accreditation” AND “implementation process”

### ***Databases and Resources***

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database EBSCO.

### *Reference Search and Selection Criteria*

REL Pacific searched ERIC and one other academic journal database for studies that were published in English-language peer-reviewed research journals within the last 10 years. Sources included in this document were last accessed in August 2020.

REL Pacific prioritized documents that are accessible online and publicly available, and prioritized references that provide practical information based on peer-reviewed research for the district leaders who requested this Ask A REL.<sup>1</sup> For questions with small or nonexistent research bases, we may rely on, for example, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites. Additional methodological priorities/considerations given in the review and selection of the references were:

- Study types—randomized control trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, etc.
- Target population, sample size, study duration, etc.
- Limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Pacific Region (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Hawai'i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL Pacific) at McREL International. This memorandum was prepared by REL Pacific under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-17-C-0010, administered by McREL International. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.