



# Accrediting Commission for Schools Western Association of Schools and Colleges

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## ACS WASC Postsecondary School Initial Visit Visiting Committee Report

This form is for use for postsecondary schools using the ACS WASC  
Postsecondary Accreditation Manual, 2013 Edition.

### Part I

Name of School: Highland Community Charter School

Address: 1333 Grand Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95838

Grades Reviewed: Adult Postsecondary

Initial Visit Chair: Dr. R. Allen Baraldi

Initial Visit Team Member(s): Conrad Bitter

Date of Visit: April 6, 2016

The Visiting Committee recommends to the Commission that **Highland Community Charter School** be granted **accreditation** status through June 30, 2019\_\_\_\_\_.

**IMPORTANT: This recommendation is CONFIDENTIAL. It should NOT be given to the school.**

## Introduction

The Superintendent of the Twin Rivers Unified School District approved the petition for Highlands Community Charter School (HCCS) on March 25, 2014, as an independent charter school, adult-serving charter school, where all students are 22 years of age or older.

HCCS primarily focuses on serving low-income:

- High School Dropouts
- Parents
- Immigrants
- Ex-Offenders
- Veterans

### **Ethnicity of Students**

HCCS high school completion program serves a wide range of races and ethnicities school, races/ethnicities including African Americans, various Latin Americans, Asian Americans, and a large majority of “white” foreign born individuals from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) make up a large majority of the student population. Many of these individuals need basic English language skills.

### **Student Enrollment Patterns**

Highlands Community Charter School has enrollment throughout the year. The school general budget is paid using the same methodology as a traditional charter school. This means that any student who enrolls after the P2 period (approximately April 15), generates no apportionment funding for the school. This requires the school to maintain its operational budget constraints and HCCS stops enrolling new students later in the school year. Natural attrition patterns to the student base, by the end of the school year, resulted in the school rebuilding much of the student enrollment for the 2015-2016 term.

### **Community Information**

Highlands Community Charter School serves a wide geographic area, which stretches from West Sacramento, to eastern Sacramento, and also both South Sacramento and North Sacramento. The school’s main campus is located in North Sacramento.

The schools overall area or responsibility for enrollment has sections of the city with over 50% not having a GED and or high school diploma. This stresses the need for basic skill curriculum and course to a provide students the opportunity obtain basic educational achievement.

An average of 30 % of the population served has a household income of under \$30,000 per year and is on one or more forms of public financial assistance. One of the goals of the school is to increase the educational and employment level of students so they can become self-sufficient.

20-30% of the percentage of the population in the district covered by HCCS are foreign-born with many of the people who are racially “white” are ethnically from regions of the former USSR. Many of these individuals need remedial instruction in English language and job employment/training course. Transportation to the school’s campuses and child care is a major issue faced by the HCCS School’s administration for student enrollment. Many of the female students have young children needing child care during the class periods. Access to personnel vehicles or private transportation to the main campus and/or satellite school sites is limited for many of the students. Bus passes are issued to those students in need and car pools are organized by the school to support this effort.

## ACS WASC Postsecondary Criteria

### **Criterion 1 — Institutional Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes**

- Authority — Postsecondary schools must have a charter and/or formal authority from an appropriate governmental agency (where such agency exists) to award a certificate or high school diploma. A school must meet all legal requirements to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level. If incorporated, the school must submit a copy of its articles of incorporation.
- Mission — The school’s educational mission must be clearly defined, adopted, and published by its Governing Board. The mission must identify its broad educational purposes, its intended student population, and its commitment to successful student learning. The mission must be foundational for school planning and school decision-making processes.
- Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs) — The school must develop measureable learner outcomes that are global in scope and reflect the school’s mission and purpose.

#### **Visiting Committee comments:**

Highlands Community Charter School (HCCS) is a California Public Charter School authorized by the Twin Rivers Unified School District as its chartering authority. HCCS is operated by Highlands Community Charter and Technical Schools (HCCTS), which is a California Public Benefit Corporation, authorized by the California Secretary of State. The school is authorized to serve adults through exclusive WIA Partnerships as required by California Education Code § 47612.1.

HCCS meets the Bureau of Private Postsecondary Education regulatory requirements for providing education beyond the secondary level, per exempt status under Education Codes § 94874(c) and 94874(f). The school currently does not charge any tuition nor collect apportionment from their students.

The school’s motto is: To Serve the Unserved.

The mission statement of HCCS is as follows; “The mission of Highlands Community Charter and Technical Schools is to serve adults who are unserved and underserved for their career, civic, and academic educational needs. We believe it is never too late for our students to accomplish their educational goals; as our motto says “It is never too late to graduate!” Our goal is to instruct students to such competency levels that they are qualified for initial employment and/or career advancement; to motivate students to greater civic participation; and to broaden the horizons of students to become more self-actualized individuals. By developing individuals, we strengthen families, and build communities.”

The School-Wide Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) of HCCS are as follows:

- Students will achieve academic success
- Students will complete their education goal with our school
- Students will go on to postsecondary education and/or a viable career
- Students will gain recognition and celebrate their achievements

The SLOs directly support who we want our completers to be:

- Employees or Entrepreneurs in Livable Wage Careers and/or be Better Parents
- Productive and Contributing Citizens of the United States of America
- More Self-Actualized Individuals who have Gained a Broader Understanding of the World

## **Criterion 2 — Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership**

- **Governing Board** — The school must have a functioning Governing Board responsible for the quality, integrity, and financial stability of the school and for ensuring that the school’s mission is being carried out. Its membership must be sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all Board responsibilities.
- **Administrator/Director** — The school must have an administrator/director appointed by the Governing Board who possesses the requisite authority to administer Board policies. This person cannot serve as the chair of the Governing Board.
- **Administrative Capacity** — The school must have sufficient staff with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support the school’s mission, purpose, and academic programs.
- **Operational Status** — The school must be operational with students actively pursuing its instructional programs when it applies for accreditation status. Schools may not apply for accreditation before they begin operations.
- **Academic Credit** — The school must award academic credits based on generally accepted practices. Public schools governed by statutory or system regulatory requirements must provide appropriate information about awarding academic credit. (Non-academic classes such as arts & crafts, senior exercise classes, etc. do not apply). Reminder: ACS WASC accredits schools, not individual programs in schools. All programs will be reviewed during the accreditation site visit.
- **Admissions** — The school must adopt and adhere to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs.
- **Procedural Infrastructure** — The school must have a system of policies and procedures that govern school operations and administrative decision-making processes.

### **Visiting Committee comments:**

The school has an Executive Director of the public benefit corporation, Highlands Community Charter and Technical Schools, who has been appointed by the Governing Board to administer Board policies over the charter school, Highlands Community Charter School. He serves as an officer (treasurer) to the board, but is not on the board of the charter school, and does not serve as the chair of the board. He has experience administering adult programs as a former administrator with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. By the California Charter School Act, administrators are not required to have a credential.

Highlands Community Charter School in addition to its administrative staff and instructors currently employs a School Secretary, an Office Assistant, a Data Integrity Technician (in charge of testing and data), an ICT Support Technician (computer technician), and a Counselor.

Highlands Community Charter and Technical Schools maintains a Policy and Procedures Manual that governs the school operations and administrative decision-making processes. As being a charter school, the “mega waiver” in Education Code § 47610 applies to HCCS. As a new school, if there is need of a policy for a situation that has not been anticipated the school administration is allowed to use a “blanket policy”. This allows the use of Twin Rivers school’s policies, pending revision of the HCCS own policies/procedures as needed.

Highlands Community Charter School became operational during the 2014-2015 school year. Students in self-paced courses earn credits based upon the actual work they complete. The school uses time-based methods determining how many credits a course is worth, with the use of assessment to determine what a student earns as a grade within a course. High school courses, follow Title 5 § 1600(a)(2) in that every 12 hours of class, a student may earn 1 high school credit.

For career technical education (CTE) courses that may give dual credit of high school and lower division credit, the school follow the rules of the Council on Occupational Education for the maximum amount of credit that can be earned. In this area the school follows the precedence set in Title 5 § 1634, in which a course worth 10 high school credits will be worth 3 lower division credits.

HCCS admits all students it is legally allowed to serve, which generally are those who do not yet hold a U.S. High School Diploma, through an online registration system. All students admitted must meet the exclusive WIA agreement requirement of being age 22 or older, and who also have registered for at least WIA (WIOA) core services.

### **Criterion 3 — Faculty and Staff**

- Faculty — The school must have a qualified faculty which is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the school’s educational programs. Faculty responsibilities should include their participation in curriculum development, assessment of student learning, and professional development activities.
- Personnel Policies — The school must have policies and procedures that govern how faculty and staff members are hired, evaluated, and compensated.

### **Visiting Committee comments:**

Highlands Community Charter and Technical Schools has teachers who either already hold an appropriate California Teaching Credential, or by California Education Code Ed. Code 47605(l), teachers can have an equivalent document. Teachers, who hold an equivalent document, generally have two years to earn a full credential. CTE teachers, who work for an accredited partner organization, may use the equivalent document indefinitely.

Faculty participate in at least one week of professional development provided by HCCTS each year, and are encouraged to seek out other professional development opportunities.

The Executive Director of HCCS has substantial overview of the teacher evaluation methods.

As the school has been operation for over a year student achievement, and enrollment data is now becoming available to provide information on trends and student advancement. In addition to traditional method of purely using a classroom observation for teacher observation and evaluations, HCCS is initiating a multi-factor approach, which includes: standardized outside measures (such as CASAS benchmarks or student licensure/certification rates for CTE), course completion rates, student attendance rates, student survey results, a classroom observation, and a teacher growth portfolio, which detail the teacher's professional development.

#### **Criterion 4 — Curriculum**

- Educational Programs — The school must offer educational programs in recognized and emerging fields of study that culminate in identified student outcomes leading to certificates, licensure, or other indicators of program completion.
- Curricular Mapping — The school must have an organized curricular plan that provides direction for faculty members as they plan for instruction and assessment.

#### **Visiting Committee comments:**

The school has a curricular flow that starts at very basic skills at a low grade level appropriate for English learners, who need basic English, as well as some basic knowledge in other academic areas. There is a detailed curriculum requirement path towards full high school graduation, and postsecondary dual credit from CTE.

HCCS continually get student feedback on programs and evaluates the effectiveness of its programs. In response to student request a detailed document for each student is maintained in their assigned class. The tracking allows the students to obtain a progress report showing what academic goals they have achieved and the number of credits they have earned. The VC was impressed with the detail of the tracking documents. The students interviewed stated it was encouraging to get the periodic reports on how they were progressing.

The schools administration has partnered with a local beauty college for CTE programs and is presently establishing a Diesel Mechanics program in conjunction with its present CTE Truck Driving School program.

HCCS provides funding for careers that require licensure, our programs include training towards that licensure, and covers the cost of licensure for students and graduates. For careers that have an industry standard certification that significantly improve employability opportunities, the school's programs train for that certification, and covers the costs of the certification.

### **Criterion 5 — Instructional Program**

- Student Learning and Achievement — The institution must define and publish the learner outcomes for each program. Through regular and systematic assessment, it must demonstrate that students who complete programs achieve these outcomes.
- Instructional Strategies — The school must provide qualified faculty members who use a variety of instructional strategies that meet the diverse learning needs of students.
- Technology Integration — The school must develop technology resources for students and have expectations embedded in the instructional program so that students can be prepared with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

#### **Visiting Committee comments:**

Highlands Community Charter and Technical Schools only has teachers who are either already hold an appropriate California Teaching Credential, or by California Education Code Ed. Code 47605(l), teachers can have an equivalent document. Teachers, who hold an equivalent document, generally have two years to earn a full credential. CTE teachers, who work for an accredited partner organization, may use the equivalent document indefinitely.

The HCCS classes, both academic and CTE, integrate technology into the curricula. ELD classes have a small computer lab within the classrooms, or have access to a computer lab on campus. Most of the High School classes have a computer available to each student in the classroom. Additional computers are being purchased and installed. CTE courses use computers to assist students with the curriculum.

### **Criterion 6 — Use of Assessment**

- Analysis of Learning Data — The school must have a process in place to gather learning data from multiple sources, disaggregate and analyze the data, draw conclusions and develop recommendations to address identified learner needs.
- Use of Assessment Results — The institution must use learning data analysis results in curriculum review, development of the instructional program, provision of professional growth activities for teachers, and for long-term institutional planning.

#### **Visiting Committee comments:**

The school has made a number of improvements to testing procedures, use of data, curriculum tracking and student feedback reviewing student achievement since it first report to WASC. In direct response to student feedback a student tracking system was initiated that shows the rate assignment completions, hours of study and number of credits earns. This report is provided to student every six weeks.

The classroom teachers are the primary resources for this information and it is reviewed by the schools counselor to assist student in achieving success in academic and CTE programs. The fast response by the school's administration on student needs showed them the need to add an

additional “Bridging Class” to ELD programs. This program provided more practice on regular day to day use of English Language skills encountered by students. It was an transition class to those entering the HCCS high school program classes. The response to the class was highly favorable from the students who attended.

### **Criterion 7 — Student Support Services**

- Student Services — The school must provide appropriate services that support student learning and development within the context of its institutional mission.
- Counseling Services — The school must provide personal counseling support as well as college planning counseling services.

#### **Visiting Committee comments:**

Highlands Community Charter School has a designated full time School Counselor, who meets with all high school students to review their prior academic history, create a learning plan for them, and then assign them to classes. Career planning is also part of the services provided to HCCS students. She also is available to students on a continued basis to help monitor their progress and assist related school attendance issues. Discussion with instructors indicated that informal counseling is given to students as needed for academic assistance. Appointments are scheduled with the school’s counselor who also travels to offsite locations to provide services.

It was noted by the VC that the counselor leads a student support group for students who are at-risk into falling back to past behaviors (such as drug addiction, alcoholism, dropping out of school, etc.) to stay motivated and focused.

It was noted that the student and had organized a school prom with the support and backing of the HCCS administration to be held in April 2016. In talking to the students it would be their first time attending a prom for those who had not completed regular high school and those immigrants who had never experienced the opportunity of attending an American school tradition.

### **Criterion 8 — Resource Management**

- Information and Learning Resources — The school must provide access to sufficient information and learning resources that support its instructional programs.
- Financial Resources — The school must manage its financial resources to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to assure financial stability.
- Financial Accountability — The school must annually undergo an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or public agency and report results to school stakeholders.
- Facilities — The school must provide facilities that are clean, safe, and adequate for the academic programs and courses offered.

**Visiting Committee comments:**

Highlands Community Charter School has its financial resources managed by Delta Managed Solutions that specializes in supporting charter schools, and has over 30 charter schools that it presently supports.

Per California Education Code 47605 § (b)(5)(I), Highlands Community Charter School undergoes an annual audit of both its finances and of specific regulatory compliance. HCCS uses Hosaka, Rotterdam & Company as its auditor. This audit are submitted to the Twin Rivers Unified School District, and placed on the school's website for public viewing.

The school has reviewed all locations that are used for instruction at the main campus and at satellite locations. The school has many satellite locations that allow easy access to classes due to transportation issues of their student population. They have provided bus passes, at no charge to students where necessary. New air conditioners were installed at the main campus and placed at the "Play Care" center that provides supervision for young children while the parents attend classes. Two academic classes at satellite locations were recently relocated due to rodent problems that the landlord would not provide pest control. The program locations viewed by the VC were clean and had adequate books, supplies and furniture for all the students.

**Criterion 9 — Community Connection**

- Public Information — The school must provide a catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information regarding its programs, available financial aid, admissions requirements, and student fees.
- Connection to Community — The school must make an effort to connect to community leaders, businesses, and organizations that can enhance the educational opportunities for students.

**Visiting Committee comments:**

HCCS charges no fees for attending classes within it programs. It was noted that in many cases it provides funding for fees to obtain licenses and certification in the CTE programs. It also provide bus passes for transportation to students without available or reliable transportation.

The school's website (<http://www.hccts.org/index.php>) provide information to the public on the academic, ELD and CTE programs available to the general public. The site also lists the schools current status with governance and board policies. It was noted that several of the areas are still "under construction" as new school polices and classes are being set up for the new school term on August 17, 2016.

HCCS has partnerships which include the Greater Sacramento Urban League, Volunteers of America, Sacramento's Department of Human Assistance, Sacramento Food Bank, Asian Resources Inc. Community Services, La Familia Counseling Center, Inc., Lao Family

Community Development, Inc. Meetings are held during beginning of the school year and will be set on a quarterly basis to keep members of the partnership active.

**Criterion 10 — Action Plan for Ongoing Improvement**

- Institutional Planning and Evaluation — The school must systematically evaluate and make public how well it is accomplishing its purposes, including the assessment of Schoolwide Learner Outcomes. The school must provide evidence of planning for improvement of institutional operations and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning levels.
- Schoolwide *Action Plan* — The school must have a user-friendly schoolwide *Action Plan* that guides school improvement efforts and provides the basis for all ongoing improvement activities.

**Visiting Committee comments:**

The HCCS staff, students, alumni, and community members, including employers work on the Local Control Accountability Plan which posted on the schools website and deal with adult education issues. The school has also created a School Accountability Report Card, which is submitted to the California Department of Education, and also placed on line. As a school that follows the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM), we are able to include factors on this report, which are likely more relevant to the adult students we serve, such as employment attainment.

The school's website (<http://www.hccts.org/index.php>) provide information to the public on the academic, ELD and CTE programs available to the general public. The site also lists the schools current status with governance and board policies. It was noted that several of the areas are still “under construction” as new school polices and classes are being set up for the new school term on August 17, 2016

The HCCS school administration and board identified four critical areas for follow-up from the school's Action Plan that will receive the greatest focus in the next three years.

The critical areas addressed for follow-up from the Action Plan were;

- Improving the Collection and Use of Student Learning Data
- Revising Organizational Structure and Policies
- Improving the Communication of Public Information
- Fully Developing and Implementing a Health and Safety Plan

The VC team considered these critical areas were appropriate for the school's focus. The implementation of strategies to assess and work toward improvement in these areas would address student achievement, enrollment increases, and improvement in the schools policies and procedures.



## Ongoing School Improvement

### Schoolwide Areas of Strength

1. The HCCS obtains student feedback on a regular basis. This has allowed the school to adapt programs to address student academic and CTE needs and provide social services available at the school to students to allow them to attend classes. Providing bus tokens for transportation to school sites was one school services that was seen by the VC teams to address existing student needs.
2. On site education and career counseling at the home campus and satellite locations has allowed students without the ability to travel long distances to obtain services.
3. The staff at HCCS is able to provide quality instruction to students extend a wide range of age, ethnic, cultural and language backgrounds. The school has worked toward inclusion of all cultures at the school to be part of social activities such as a student prom put on by the students.
4. The school administration has been able to work with the local area business, religious and service organizations in obtaining classroom space for additional academic programs throughout its area of operation.

### Critical Areas for Follow-up

1. The HCCS administration is encouraged to continue and increase its networking with local service organizations, county and city support services to obtain additional classroom/program space.
2. Attendance procedures should continue to be updated to allow the HCCS administration to have accurate student population data on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.
3. The HCCS administration indicated that increase availability of child care services for students would increase enrollment. The school is encouraged to continue to work towards it efforts increasing these student services.