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John H. Woodson Junior High School Secures Reaccreditation with New Virtual Requirements Set by Middle States Association

ST. CROIX, USVI – The Virgin Islands Department of Education celebrates the successful reaccreditation of the John H. Woodson Junior High School—the first school in the territory to complete the new virtual reaccreditation process due to the coronavirus pandemic. The virtual reaccreditation process was established by Middle States Association (MSA) of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools to assist schools operating fully virtually.

For its successful reaccreditation bid that secured Woodson’s accreditation for the next seven years, the school used the protocol, “Excellence By Design: A Protocol for Self-Study and Accreditation.”

Woodson’s virtual reaccreditation process, which began on Nov. 30 and concluded on Dec. 2, involved three days of rigorous interviews from a panel of four validating team members from New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and St. Thomas. The school was required to provide the team with a pre-recorded video showcasing the campus. Additionally, each validating team member conducted virtual meetings with school administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

The team investigated the evidence Woodson Jr. High provided for each of the 12 Standards set by MSA, eventually awarding the school an exemplary rating in each category: Standard 1: Philosophy and Mission; Standard 2: Governance and Leadership; Standard 3: School Improvement Planning; Standard 4: Finances; Standard 5: Facilities; Standard 6: School Organization and Staff/School Climate; Standard 7: Health and Safety; Standard 8: Educational

Programs; Standard 9: Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning; Standard 10: Student Services; Standard 11: Student Life and Student Activities; Standard 12: Information Resources and Technology.

According to Woodson administrator in charge of reaccreditation, Assistant Principal Vincent H. A. Gordon, Jr., Ph.D., with assistance from Sally A. Camacho, Ph.D., chairperson of internal coordinators of the steering committee, English as a Second Language and English Language Arts teacher, the process began two years ago. However, Woodson was first accredited in 2012, and was the territory's first and only junior high school at the time to receive accreditation.

"I am very proud of the hard work of all the faculty, staff, students, administrators, external and internal stakeholders, steering committee, and internal coordinators who contributed their time, energy, ideas, and positive words of encouragement," Gordon said. "I am also grateful to the visiting validating team who caused us to self-reflect and to realize the effective work that we are doing. This reaccreditation helps us to continue to provide opportunities for continued growth for students, and for faculty and staff."

Reaccreditation means that Woodson Jr. High "has proven itself as a legitimate institution as a secondary school, offering academic and elective courses with extensive support for all students in an environment that is safe and conducive to the academic atmosphere," Gordon explained.

When a school loses its accreditation or is not accredited, it will forfeit federal and state funding. Additionally, colleges or universities may not recognize a diploma or credits from an unaccredited high school. Furthermore, students enrolled in unaccredited schools will also be ineligible for scholarships when preparing for college.

Since Woodson is a junior high school and not a high school, "receiving accreditation at this level means that the academic rigor, in addition to academic and elective course offerings with extensive support for all students, are provided at a higher standard, compared to other schools," Gordon said.

Evidence of higher standards at Woodson Jr. High is the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program, a school-wide approach providing students with learning strategies to become successful in school while preparing them for college and career. These strategies across the curriculum include a focus on writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading. Woodson also focuses on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which enhances students' self-efficacy while continuously teaching and supporting positive behaviors around campus.

Woodson chairpersons, co-chairpersons, faculty, staff, students, parents, external stakeholders, and administration also contributed to the school's successful reaccreditation.

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