

**THREE-YEAR-TERM REVISIT  
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

**WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

**FOR**

**TILDEN PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

**1231 Solano Avenue  
Albany California 94706**

**February 27-28, 2012**

**Visiting Committee Members**

Susan A K. Haun Vice Principal Retired

Michele Janssen Vice Principal Retired

## INTRODUCTION

Tilden Preparatory School is a small, comprehensive high school located in Albany, a mixed residential and commercial area of the San Francisco East Bay. Tilden, originally named School for Independent Learners East Bay, uses the same format of one-to-one teaching and mastery learning that was first developed at School for Independent Learners (SIL) in Los Altos, CA.

Tilden changed its name from SIL in January 2009, following their final notice of accreditation, for a number of reasons. The name "School for Independent Learners" was misunderstood as a school that had students working primarily independently, rather than regularly with teachers. Most independent programs have roughly one hour of teaching time per 10 hours of homework, whereas Tilden is very hands-on, with one hour of teacher time per one hour of homework. Further, they were getting feedback from college counselors and students that they didn't like the name. They decided to include the community on the name-choosing process, and received input from parents, students, staff and Advisory Board members, who voted on Tilden Preparatory School as the best name.

Tilden Preparatory School is a primarily individualized program where classes are taught either one-on-one or in small groups. Students either enroll as full-time students or as dual enrollment students. Full-time students do all their coursework at Tilden, while dual enrollment students take individual courses at Tilden while remaining enrolled at their school of record. Tilden is geared toward helping students achieve success in school. They have a "no failure" grading policy, which is accomplished using a mastery learning model and tutorial-style instruction.

In response to the rapidly increasing enrollment, in January 2008 Tilden took over one additional suite adjacent to Tilden's two other suites. The new suite had the advantage of a secretarial area, more space for cubicles, a full laboratory space, and two enclosed offices for large group classes and meetings. In December 2009, Tilden further expanded to take over the downstairs suite formerly occupied by an art gallery, which gave space for study halls, a student lounge, and an art studio.

There has been significant growth in enrollment since Tilden first opened its doors in September 2006. Summer school has steadily risen each year to the point where this year they were at maximum capacity. Due to the fact that they have had so much growth both during both the school year and summer programs, and numerous requests from parents and professionals in the East Contra Costa area, they recently opened a second location in Walnut Creek at 1475 North Broadway, across from the Walnut Creek Main Library, and submitted a Substantive Change Form to WASC with this information.

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Similar to Tilden in Albany, the Walnut Creek location is in an office building in the highly desirable area of downtown Walnut Creek. There is an elevator accessible to all students and the location is fully ADA compliant, thus allowing the attendance of students with disabilities. The Tilden Walnut Creek campus has approximately 3,100 square feet in a four-story office building across the street from the newly renovated Walnut Creek Public Library and a park, which allows for easy socialization between students during the lunch break. There are also several restaurants such as Jamba Juice, delis and pizza restaurants that allow for students to get lunch during their lunch break. All other aspects of the Walnut Creek location are very similar to the Albany campus in that the building and science lab meet the same stringent requirements. Police and Fire Departments are one half block away from the school.

**MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND CRITICAL AREAS FOR FOLLOW-UP:**

The following are the five major recommendations left by the 2008 Visiting Committee and the actions taken by Tilden Preparatory School.

**1. THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE STANDARDIZED TESTING THAT CAN BE USED FOR COMPARING STUDENTS AT THE SCHOOL.**

Over the past year, Tilden has asked teachers to develop a standardized testing curriculum for each class that will be placed online, including both chapter tests and final exams as well as answer keys. The new tests assess concepts covered in each course based on their new curriculum guides.

For students who need backup tests, they now have test generating software for Geometry, Algebra 2, Pre calculus, and Statistics. They also have backup tests for Biology, AP Biology, Chemistry, AP Chemistry, and AP Physics and they are working on developing backup tests for other courses.

Students now take their tests outside of class time in study hall, unless parents have approved taking tests during class time with teacher supervision (a viable option for a student who needs support to address test-anxiety and other issues that interfere with showing his/her full understanding of the material on tests).

Tests are now all accessible to teachers through the progress reporting system, and teachers are able to print out these materials in preparation for their students. This ensures a standard means of testing students and increases the security of testing materials.

Tilden began administering the PSAT in October of 2009 in response to WASC committee recommendations. They also administer proctored SAT practice tests, SAT and ACT exams, and extended-time SAT and ACT examinations to approved students.

**2. CONTINUE TO EXPAND AND TRAIN TEACHERS FOR THE AP PROGRAM**

Tilden has made a number of improvements regarding AP classes to better prepare their students for AP exams. Tilden now administers AP exams, and does test preparation within the body of the course, including administering a practice AP exam at the end of each course. They have also improved all AP

curriculum guides to insure that they cover the material thoroughly.

Tilden does not prohibit students from taking AP courses, even if such a course appears to be beyond their capacity. They practice open enrollment, as directed by ETS guidelines for AP enrollment. Taking an AP course is both a way for students to challenge themselves and good college preparation, even if they don't score within a range that will result in college credit.

Tilden has also sent teachers to the College Board AP teacher conference so they can come back and provide training and information to our other AP teachers. AP teachers have also met and discussed best practices, in order to help improve their students' AP scores.

### **3. CREATE MORE INPUT FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE ACTION PLANS.**

Tilden has instituted annual individual meetings with each teacher to discuss specific policies that are or are not working at Tilden. They have also begun exit interviews for employees to learn what did and did not work at Tilden during their period of employment.

They have weekly meetings with the Administrative staff and in those meetings they solicit input about changes that need to be made at Tilden.

All stakeholders are welcome to make suggestions and provide feedback at any time to the Co-Directors, and this happens on a regular and frequent basis. In addition, surveys are provided to parents and teachers on an annual basis in order to elicit feedback in a more structured manner. The Co-Directors hold an all-school meeting for teachers and administrative assistants at the beginning of each school year, and conduct teacher evaluations each year. The Co-Directors also meet on a quarterly basis with the Board of Directors, and provide a comprehensive update on changes made to the school, and on feedback given by individual stakeholders and through surveys. Changes to action plans are developed directly from input given in these ways.

The Schoolwide Action Plan is a living document that can be changed throughout the school year as students, staff, parents and Board members suggest improvements to the program. Changes are discussed with all stakeholders through meetings, emails and announcements, and the Co-Directors take into account each response received by stakeholders

#### **4. INCREASE STAFF AND/OR DEPARTMENT MEETINGS.**

Tilden has All-Teacher Meetings and Department Meetings, one at the beginning of the school year, and subsequently on an as-needed basis. These meetings are mandatory, and teachers are paid for their time. The meeting is meant to be informative, and to serve as an open discussion forum where teachers and administrative assistants can voice concerns, give feedback to Co-Directors, and make plans to move forward.

Department Meetings often take place following the All-Teacher Meetings. These meetings provide a smaller group to discuss the progress of the department. Department Heads are also required to have office hours when they can meet with teachers one-on-one to discuss concerns.

Tilden has instituted weekly administrative assistant meetings with the Co-Directors to make sure they are all on the same page and provide a way for the administrative staff to voice comments and concerns.

In addition to formal meetings, Department Heads and all teachers are welcome to, and do, come into the Co-Directors' office on an informal basis to discuss specific students or overall concerns, and are also invited to talk informally with other teachers to receive feedback on teaching techniques. If a teacher raises a concern that affects others at the school, they follow up with conversations with Department Heads or other relevant staff in order to address such concerns in a timely manner.

#### **5. DEFINE THE ROLE OF THE ADVISORY BOARD**

The Advisory Board meets quarterly on a formal basis and board members are consulted informally on a much more frequent basis between quarterly meetings to discuss day-to-day decisions. All decisions that are critical to the viability of the school are discussed at the quarterly meetings. The Advisory Board offers input in the following areas:

- The Board advises in the creation of the school's mission and purpose.
- The Board helps to ensure effective organizational planning. The Board helps management to develop business plans, policy objectives, strategies, and priorities.
- The Board helps manage resources effectively.
- The Board advises the school on programs and services. The board's role in this area is to help ensure that programs are the most consistent with the organization's mission, and to monitor their effectiveness.
- The Board is one of the organization's links to the community.
- The Board helps to ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain

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- accountability. .
- The Board advises the school on teacher compensation, tuition, scholarship and any major other financial decisions as needed.

## **FOLLOW-UP PROCESS**

Since the last WASC visit on November 17-19, 2009, Tilden has made significant changes in every arena of the school. Some of these changes address the "Critical Areas for Follow Up" cited in the 2008 WASC Committee Recommendations, while others were made as a result of the ongoing feedback system Tilden has in place at all times (i.e., Student Questionnaires, Parent Surveys, Teacher Surveys, and informal feedback from all stakeholders).

The school has grown in many ways and has worked diligently on all areas for improvement as recommended by the previous visiting committee including the following:

- School facility growth
- Staff development
- Teacher and department head meetings
- Academic growth and curriculum development
- Standardization of grading policy
- Standardization of testing
- Administration of PSATs and SATs
- Lab organization
- Elective development
- Technological improvements
- Development of social activities and school community
- Scholarship opportunities
- Input of stakeholders in the action plan

## **FOLLOW UP PROCESS**

Tilden Preparatory School has accomplished or exceeded all of the recommendations of the previous committee.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

After a thorough review of the school it is apparent that the school has embraced the recommendations left by the former visiting committee and all have been dealt with. Tilden Preparatory School is in excellent condition and is a prime example of an exemplary independent school and should be proud of its' accomplishments.

## **COMMENDATIONS**

The Visiting Committee would like to commend the school on the following:

- The name change
- The addition of a campus in Walnut Creek
- That students can present ideas for new courses
- The obvious dedication of the entire staff
- The positive feedback from students and parents
- The obvious serenity level of students
- The expansion of space at the Albany campus allows students an area to meet, socialize and study
- The inclusion of a community service element
- The hiring of the Associate Director
- Tilden Preparatory School has moved to a new level!