



**DR. BELLE S. WHEELAN TO RETIRE FROM  
SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS  
COMMISSION ON COLLEGES  
AFTER 20 YEARS AS PRESIDENT**

(Atlanta, GA – July 10, 2024) Belle S. Wheelan, PhD, has announced her plans to retire as president of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) in July 2025, concluding a 20-year tenure with the Association. Dr. Wheelan is the first woman and first African American to serve in this role in the history of SACSCOC.

“It has truly been an honor to serve as the leader of the organization responsible for ensuring educational quality at our member institutions for the past 20 years,” Wheelan said. “To see the increases in student achievement and know that we had a little something to do with it has been extremely rewarding. I have spent my entire professional career focused on helping students achieve their educational goals and being president of SACSCOC has been the icing on the cake.”

Wheelan joined SACSCOC after serving for 28 years in community colleges in Texas and Virginia and as Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Her illustrious career with the association began at a time of significant transition for higher education accreditation nationally. Addressing the challenges of these transitions, Wheelan oversaw the development of two new iterations of the *Principles of Accreditation* and the adoption of a differentiated accreditation review process in response to institutions that showed continued compliance with certain criteria of the *Principles*. Recognizing the impact of these transitions on member institutions, Wheelan initiated a series of forums for members, CEOs, and staff and developed a *Resource Manual* to guide institutions in understanding the *Principles of Accreditation*. Wheelan also engineered the uninterrupted review of institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During her time as president and chief executive officer of SACSCOC, Wheelan navigated the separate incorporation of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) from the K-12 division and the parent company (SACS) and the purchase of its headquarters building. Under her leadership, the accreditor developed its first Strategic Plan. Wheelan also supervised the launchings of the Summer Institute, which provides professional development for member institutions in institutional assessment and student learning outcomes, and the Small College Initiative, which focuses on the challenges of small, private colleges and HBCUs with the *Principles of Accreditation*.

In her more than 50 years working in higher education, Wheelan has made major contributions to higher education on both a state and federal level. She has actively participated in organizations related to education, including serving on the Board of Directors for American College Testing, Inc.; the American Association of Community Colleges; the Lumina Foundation for Education; the National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame; *Excelencia* in Education; and

the National Student Clearinghouse. Wheelan served two terms as Convenor for the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) and on the Accreditors Advisory Council for the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

“Dr. Wheelan is a well-respected-leader with decades of experience in higher education,” said Barbara Gellman-Denley, President of the Higher Learning Commission. “She will be greatly missed not only within the accreditation community, but also across the country as someone with great influence on the growth of community colleges. Her contributions are numerous, her wit is singular, and her courage exemplary.”

During its annual summer meeting, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees began the process of identifying the next association president, which will involve engaging an executive search firm. As Wheelan will remain in the role until 2025, the board plans to be thorough in the search for an individual who can successfully build on Wheelan’s legacy.

“Throughout her storied career and especially her tenure as association president, Dr. Wheelan has been first and foremost a champion of student learning and student experience. This commitment has been to the benefit of every student who has attended a member institution,” Executive Vice President of Lees-McRae College and current SACSCOC Board of Trustees Chair Blaine J. Hansen said. “Dr. Wheelan is a stalwart advocate for continuous improvement in higher education and we thank her for her dedicated service.”