



2020 - A VISION FOR LEARNING

GUIDELINES for Virtual Visits for Schools

for Public Elementary, Middle and High Schools seeking Accreditation in 2020 and beyond

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Commission on Public Schools

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Introduction

The Commission on Public Schools (CPS) is employing a virtual Accreditation protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic. The distinguishing feature of virtual Accreditation visits is that observations, conversations, interviews, and group meetings are conducted using an online platform. A virtual visit requires the school and the visiting team to prepare and practice with the necessary technology prior to the scheduled visit. If conditions warrant, some elements of the visits may be accomplished by the chair and assistant chair in person.

Virtual Accreditation visits follow the CPS Standards and visit protocols. Visiting team members recognize the school’s developmental path, celebrate strengths, and help the school validate its understanding of opportunities for growth and next steps. Depending on the type of visit, there may be targeted conversations with key operational leaders about specific areas and more general, open-ended conversations with key stakeholders about learning. Visiting team members will want to explore how the school adapted to conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, including learning in-person and remote learning, health and safety, and what lessons have been learned. The visiting team will explore how learning looks and feels when the school is physically in session. The tone of conversations will be supportive of the school as they work through this unique and challenging time. NEASC/CPS team members understand that remote learning may not fully or accurately represent the typical learning environment provided by the school.

The virtual visit process will result in similar findings to an on-site visit, provided that the school and the visiting team understand the parameters and are flexible about the visit’s implementation. Visiting team members will be provided with training before the visit, and the visit will be supported by the school’s CPS staff liaison.

Visit Types and Length

Visit type	Duration*	Number of visitors
Decennial/Initial Accreditation	3½ days plus some pre-visit work (team orientation on Sunday or another agreed upon time)	6-8 CPEMHS 8-12 CTCI
Collaborative Conference	2-3 days plus some pre-visit work	3-4
Directed	1 partial day	1-2
Focused (CTCI)	2.5 days	3

Note: The final day of each visit is mostly reserved for the team to work together, finalize the report draft, and debrief with the leadership team.

*The number of visit days may be adjusted based upon need.

Key Considerations

Key criteria will help to determine if a virtual visit is appropriate and beneficial for a school and will be discussed with school administrators before any decision is made. The criteria include:

- the health and safety of students, staff, and visiting team members
- the current status of school operations: remote learning, in-person/on-site learning, or a combination of in-person and remote learning
- the availability of reliable Wi-Fi, bandwidth, technology, and IT support
- the observation of learning as a critical component of the visit, as visiting team members must be able to see learning taking place either remotely or in-person
- the school's current Accreditation status and a determination that the school is one in which improvement can be easily discerned
- the determination that the elements of the protocol can be accomplished virtually
- the school's willingness to engage in a virtual visit

Technology Requirements

- video conferencing facilities to allow small groups to participate in meetings
- reliable internet access
- portable devices and the wireless support necessary to stream live video of the school in action if it is in session during the virtual visit
- technical support personnel made available by the school
- a test of the technological requirements performed by the visitors and tech liaison from the school before the visit
- login credentials for all online learning platforms, curriculum documentation platforms, staff portals, etc., provided by the school no less than two weeks prior to the visit

Expectations for a School Hosting a Virtual Visit

- The school completes the required documents prior to any type of visit in accordance with the CPS Accreditation visit protocol including a short addendum to the Summary Report regarding the current situation in the school/district and/or current COVID-19 response.
- All members of the school community, as appropriate, are expected to take part in the visit.
- The school and the chair create a thorough and detailed schedule.
- The necessary technology and IT support are provided, including a platform to hold virtual meetings. NEASC strongly prefers Zoom.
- Faculty and staff members, administrators, and, as appropriate, students, parents, and other members of the school community will set aside uninterrupted time to speak with the visiting team in secure and appropriate settings.
- The school provides sufficient and appropriate spaces on campus for virtual interviews and discussions. These spaces should be free of interruptions and have secure and necessary technology.

- The school should anticipate that some unscheduled conversations, observations, and interviews may be requested by visiting team members.
- The school should provide at least two devices, or more if required by the visiting team, with cameras and mics to either record or allow visitors to view classes and other school activities from at least two or more separate vantage points. For example, one camera might be focused on the teacher and the second on the class or activity.
- The school and the visiting team will seek ways to take full advantage of technology to provide a thorough experience for the school and visiting team, such as scheduling remote and in-person observations of learning as applicable.
- The school provides the visiting team with a virtual tour by walking through facilities and describing what is seen including:
 - typical learning spaces
 - science laboratories, including preparation rooms and safety equipment, such as shower, eye wash stations, ventilation, storage of chemicals, etc.
 - makerspaces or design technology workshops with safety measures
 - art/music/drama facilities
 - library/information services
 - gymnasium/sports facilities and outdoor recreational facilities
 - career/counseling space(s)
 - special needs facilities
 - health services facilities
 - front entrance and perimeter security features, security cameras, etc.
 - emergency evacuation route signage
 - cafeteria and other common areas
 - appropriate safeguarding features, such as hand sanitizer, signage, etc.
 - other pertinent areas of the building and grounds
- There will be no recordings of interviews, observations, or meetings.
- There are no one-to-one interviews or observations between students and members of the visiting team.
- Appropriate permissions for student participation should be obtained from parents or guardians prior to the visit.
- The school will receive and respond to the visiting team's report.
- Upon the completion of a virtual Accreditation visit, the Commission reserves the right to require directed or focused visits should the Commission need additional information to assure that Standards have been met. Similarly, the principal may request additional activities, such as further conversations, interviews, or observations should he or she determine the virtual visit has overlooked, misunderstood, or distorted any key aspects of the school.

Guiding Questions for the School and Chair to Discuss Prior to the Virtual Visit

1. What is the status of reports/evidence collection and preparedness of the school community?
2. Is the school currently providing in-person learning, remote learning, or a combination of the two?
3. Does the school provide synchronous, asynchronous, or blended approaches?
4. Is it possible for visitors to view synchronous classes in real time?
5. Will there be any pre-recorded classroom observations in the evidence?
6. What platform(s) is the school using for its remote learning?
7. What specific issues about scheduling the visit need to be considered? How will Zoom meeting links be set up so appropriate team members can access the meetings or be invited?
8. What school or district requirements need to be adhered to for online safety, privacy, etc.?
9. If school is operating in-person, is it possible for the chair and assistant chair to be on-site for classroom observations and a tour of the school during the virtual visit?

Visitor Digital Code of Conduct and Online Etiquette

While NEASC engages with schools and their communities online, safety, privacy, and adherence to guidelines on child protection need to be ensured.

- The school should never create or allow one-to-one interviews or observations between a student and a visiting team member.
- Adequate lighting is necessary for all sessions. Backgrounds should be uncluttered and not show beds, pets, or other inappropriate distractions.
- If a visiting team member feels uncomfortable, for example, if a child appears alone in the home, ask the student to bring an adult to the device for help or to say hello.
- Appropriate attire is required for students and visiting team members (business casual).
- Any evidence provided by the school must be deleted when the visit is completed.
- Visiting team members will abide by the school's guidelines for safe interactions online and sign the school's code of conduct if required.
- Appropriate permissions from parents should be obtained by the school prior to the visit.

Video Call/Zoom Guidelines

- The school sets up the Zoom meeting links, and the assigned visiting team members join the meetings.
- Individual computers, laptops, or tablets tend to work better than large groups in the same room, and groups should be limited to 4-6.
- A visiting team member or school staff member should immediately end a Zoom session if anyone suspects that an uninvited person is present.
- Tablets and computers are updated to the latest versions of operating systems and the latest version of Zoom.
- The meeting host uses Zoom security protocols, such as passcodes and waiting rooms

and sets the default for screen sharing to Host Only for security.

- Students use only their first names as screen names, using names that are recognizable to their teachers and the other participants in the meeting. Visiting team members set their names to their professional name and are identified as a visitor such as “Mr. John Doe, NEASC visitor.”
- When observing live classroom sessions, visiting team members mute their mics and turn off their video after entry. The visiting team members could acknowledge presence to the teacher via the private chat feature.

FAQs

Does the team conduct classroom observations on a virtual visit?

- Yes. The school will provide one or more cameras with audio to be placed in classrooms, and the camera should show the teacher and learners. If the school is using remote/distance learning at the time of the visit, the school may include recorded videos of lessons in classrooms or have visitors attend remote/distance classes.

Does the visiting team shadow students or review student work?

- There is no shadowing. However, visiting team members may have meetings with small groups of 2-3 students to discuss the learners’ work, projects, and experiences. Visiting team members may meet with individual teachers to discuss student work. Alternately, some schools may choose a student-teacher or student-led conference format.

What if the school shifts from in session to online just before the scheduled visit? Will the visit be cancelled/postponed?

- Ideally, a virtual visit can flex to meet the school’s circumstances at that time; however, it may depend upon circumstances.

Will the visiting team judge the quality of teaching and learning differently since schools may not be at their best if working remotely?

- Students’ learning needs should be viewed through the lens of the Standards of Accreditation. The report can reflect how the school has faced challenges and/or opportunities created by the COVID-19 disruptions.

How will the visiting team learn about the culture of a school or get a sense of the intangibles that are gained during an on-site in-person visit?

- Make connections and communicate in smaller groups, so that each person can engage, and trust is built.
 - Team members can make explicit efforts to build trust and put the staff/students at ease by starting with statements of appreciation, empathy, and discussion of growth vs. judgment.
 - Use groups of 4 to 6 for interviews to allow the visiting team members to connect to individuals. If it’s a large group, it may be necessary to split the group into two smaller groups.
 - Meet with groups of 4-6 students from various grades.

Is additional training available?

- Yes. All schools will attend an Accreditation Seminar before the visit. The school's staff liaison is always available via email or phone for questions and assistance. The staff liaison will be available for consultation during the visit.

When will CPS resume on-site in-person visits?

- When conditions warrant. It is possible, under certain conditions, that the chair and assistant chair may be on-site for parts of a virtual visit.

What if I have other questions or suggestions?

- Contact the chair of the visiting team, your staff liaison, or Deputy Director Alyson Geary at ageary@neasc.org.

Sample Virtual Collaborative Conference Visit Schedule

Day 1

7:45-7:55 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:00-8:40 a.m.	Pre-recorded tour of the building and grounds video or Zoom virtual tour
8:50-9:20 a.m.	Self-Reflection Committee
9:30-11:00 a.m.	Classroom observations
11:15 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Concurrent meetings 1. Parents 2. Support staff
12:00-1:00 p.m.	Break/lunch/writing
1:00-1:45 p.m.	Students (two groups of 4-6 students)
2:00 p.m.	Daily debrief with principal (Chair)
3:00-5:00 p.m.	Team debrief, begin developing findings and writing

Day 2

8:00-8:30 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:30-9:15 a.m.	Central office administrators
9:30-10:30 a.m.	Representative groups of teachers (two groups of 4-6)
10:45-11:30 a.m.	Department heads/other school leaders (could be in two groups)
11:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.	Break/lunch/writing
1:45 p.m.	Daily debrief with principal (Chair)
2:00-2:45 p.m.	Building administrators
2:40-3:15 p.m.	Team debrief and check-in/plan for evening meeting
6:00-9:00 p.m.	Team debrief, findings, writing

Day 3 (Chair and assistant chair only)

12:30-2:00 p.m.	Prepare for debrief
2:00-2:45 p.m.	Debrief with principal and any others

Note:

NEASC recommends limiting the number of participants in Zoom meetings to no more than 6, not including visiting team members, so that everyone has a chance to participate.

Sample Virtual Decennial Accreditation Visit Schedule

Sunday afternoon, evening, or another day prior to the visit

3:00-5:00 p.m.	Team orientation
5:00-5:45 p.m.	Meeting with the board of education/superintendent (could be scheduled for Monday or Tuesday afternoon)

Monday

7:30-8:00 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:00-8:40 a.m.	School tour (pre-recorded)
8:50-9:20 a.m.	Overview presentation by the Steering Committee
9:30-10:30 a.m.	Priority Area meetings and classroom observations
10:30-10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45-11:45 a.m.	Priority Area meetings and classroom observations
11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Lunch
12:30-3:30 p.m.	Team debrief and discussion (could be scheduled late afternoon or in the evening)

Tuesday

7:30-8:00 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:00-10:00 a.m.	Priority Area meetings, classroom observations, student meetings
10:15-10:30 a.m.	Break
10:30-11:30 a.m.	Priority Area meetings, looking at student work session
11:30-12:00 p.m.	Lunch
12:00-12:45 p.m.	Meeting with superintendent (chair, asst)
12:45-3:30 p.m.	Team discussion and writing time or any other meetings
6:30 p.m.	Team discussion and writing time

Wednesday

8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Team discussion and writing time Finish/review report Prepare for debrief
12:00-12:30 p.m.	Lunch
12:30-1:30 p.m.	Debrief with the principal and leadership team
2:15 p.m.	Closing remarks to the faculty (could be another day depending upon what works for the school)

Notes:

NEASC recommends limiting the number of participants in Zoom meetings to no more than 6, not including visiting team members, so that everyone has a chance to participate.

The majority of meetings and activities with the school will take place before noon on Monday and Tuesday. The intent is to limit Zoom fatigue and give the visiting team time in the afternoon and evening for discussion, group meetings, and individual writing time. The afternoon and evening meeting times are at the discretion of the chair and the team. The chair should work with the team to determine the best time to hold these meetings.