



Commission on Independent Schools

Visiting Committee Handbook for Chairs, Assistant Chairs and Members

New England Association of Schools and Colleges
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Commission on Independent Schools

Mission Statement

To assure the positive and equitable development of all students, inspire creativity, foster excellence and promote institutional well-being, NEASC Accreditation engages schools in aspirational, mission-driven self-study and peer review.

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The Accreditation Process

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges is a voluntary peer accreditation association. It accredits institutions through three Commissions representing various segments of the educational community. The accreditation process is only as strong as its peer participation. The work of a Chair, an Assistant Chair, and the Visiting Committee is one part of the peer process; decision making by the Commission on Independent Schools is another. The Commission on Independent Schools (CIS) is appreciative of the voluntary participation of the Chair, the Assistant Chair, and the Visiting Committee.

The Self-Study Process Every ten years a school begins the cycle of multi-faceted and comprehensive self-evaluation, following defined procedures, which is the core of the accreditation process and provides the focus for the subsequent visits. The Foundation Standards are designed to help the school understand and reflect on the trends and organizational functions of the school. The Program Standards focus on teaching and learning and its impact on the students, faculty and community at large. In both sets of Standards, the school is asked to generate clearly articulated and achievable steps leading to school improvement. Standard 14: Commitment to Long-Term Viability and Innovation Guides Planning focuses on the school's vision and planning.

1. **The Initial Contact:** Following receipt of the Foundation Self-Study Report there will be a meeting (either in person or electronically) between the Chair, the Assistant Chair and the Head of School. The purpose of the meeting is to establish priorities for the upcoming Foundation Visit, and to discuss the school's reflections and vision for the future.
2. **The Foundation Visit:** The Chair, the Assistant Chair, and other members determined by the CIS staff will spend time at the school to affirm and validate the Foundation Standards section of the Self-Study. The visit will highlight the school's strengths and relative weaknesses and assist the school in making recommendations for school improvement. The Foundation Visiting Committee will submit their Report in the portal. Additionally, the Foundation Visiting Committee is expected to assess the school's alignment with the Foundation Standards and make a recommendation to the Commission as to whether they should proceed with the Program Standards Visit or remediate any major weaknesses with the school's alignment with the Foundation Standards before proceeding (Appendix G)
3. **The Program Visit:** The Program Visiting Committee, composed of the Chair, the Assistant Chair, and peers from other member schools, validates the Program Standards portion of the Self-Study and provides the school and the Commission with the observations and recommendations of experienced outside educators. In a collegial manner, the Program Visiting Committee comments on a school's self-assessment, highlights the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school, and reviews its planning for continued improvement. The Committee is also expected to assess the school's alignment with the Program Standards. Finally, this Visiting Committee is charged with making all major commendations and recommendations.
4. **Follow-Up:** The school's process of follow-up, with the Commission's oversight, assures effective implementation of all recommendations from the Visiting Committee and the Commission and subsequent plans made by the school. While adherence to Standards

provides some measure of quality, the best long-term assurance of quality is the commitment to ongoing school improvement to which accreditation attests. A Five-Year Interim Report with a staff visit will occur in the normal course of events. Special Progress Reports and/or Focused Visits will be assigned at the discretion of the Commission.

The Role and Responsibilities of the Chair

The Chair is the chief liaison, representing the Commission, to the school throughout both the Foundation Visit and the Program Visit and is responsible for setting a positive tone for the visit.

- Before the Foundation Visit: The Head of School should initiate contact with the Chair to discuss the progress of the school in completing the Self-Study, the logistics of the Initial Contact call, the visits and the expectations of the school. The Chair of the Visiting Teams should contact the Visiting Team members to introduce him/herself and gather pertinent information regarding the experience of each individual Visiting Committee member. It is important that the Chair, and hopefully the Assistant Chair, attend a Chair's workshop to become familiar with the new accreditation process.
- The Initial Contact: Once the Foundation portion of the Self-Study is complete and submitted, a call (in person or electronically) should take place with the Head of School, the Chair, and the Assistant Chair. The purpose of this call is to narrow the focus of the Foundation Visit to include those items that the school and the Chair determine are priorities and/or need more input or discussion (Appendix B – Suggested Topics for Discussion During the Initial Contact Call with the School Prior to the Foundation Visit). After this conversation, the Chair will establish the schedule for the Foundation Visit identifying individuals and meetings which should take place. The school is responsible for providing meals and a private workroom at the school as well as transportation costs. If it is necessary for the Chair and/or Assistant Chair to stay overnight, the school is responsible for obtaining accommodations.
- The Foundation Visit: During the Foundation Visit, the Chair is responsible for organizing the team to assess the school's compliance with the Foundation Standards, write a brief report on each of the Standards and identify key commendations and recommendations, as needed. This team will also make an overall recommendation as to whether the school should proceed with the Program visit or remediate those major issues found regarding the school's compliance with the Foundation Standards (Appendix G).
- The Program Visit: The Chair is responsible for organizing the Program Visiting Committee so that each Program Standard is thoroughly reviewed and assessed. An initial discussion of the school's mission and the purpose of not only the visit but the accreditation process should take place at the first meeting of the team on Sunday afternoon. At this meeting, initial impressions of the Self-Study and, in some cases, the conclusions of the Foundation Visit Report, will help focus the Visiting Committee for the entire visit. To help ensure that the visit proceeds smoothly, the Chair should organize the interview schedule and classroom visits ahead of the initial meeting at the hotel. Keeping the Visiting Committee on task while constantly monitoring the pulse of the school during the visit is equally important. The Committee must be sensitive to the

school and exhibit a high degree of professionalism. Nudging the Visiting Committee to thoughtful, collaborative reflection and translating that reflection into a written response for each of the Standards should set the tone of the Visiting Committee's work. In some cases, the Program Visiting Team will be asked to follow up on recommendations made by the Foundation Visiting Team.

- After the Foundation Visit: The Chair should edit the Foundation Visiting Committee Report, have the Committee members review it, and email the draft to the Head of School for their factual edits. Within a month of the Foundation Visit, the Chair should submit the Foundation Visiting Committee Report in the portal.
- After the Program Visit: The Chair is responsible for finalizing both the Foundation Visit Report and the Program Visit Report. The Chair is the final editor of both Reports and will submit a final combined report within one month of the Program Visit. Upon completion of the Report, the Chair is responsible for communicating a recommendation to the Commission regarding the future accreditation status of the school (Appendix P).
- Exit Interviews for Each Visit: The Chair and the Assistant Chair should meet with the Head of School and key school personnel designated by the Head. This is a time for the Chair to thank the school and provide some feedback regarding the overall findings, emphasizing that the Commission is the final decision maker in the accreditation process. During the course of either the Foundation Visit or the Program Visit, if it appears that a school will not meet a particular Standard the Chair should notify the Head of School as well as the NEASC staff liaison.
- After Each Visit: The Chair should edit each of the Reports, have the respective committee members review it, and email the draft to the Head for a check on factual accuracy. Within a month of each visit, the Chair should submit the final Report. Once received, the Commission will send the final Report to the school with a request for their response. All accompanying documents (provided as appendices) should be sent to the Commission at the same time as the Report is being submitted.

The Chair is responsible for providing feedback to NEASC staff about committee members (Appendix Q).

The Role and Responsibilities of the Assistant Chair

The Assistant Chair plays a key role in the accreditation process with responsibilities to the school, the Committee, and the Chair of the Visiting Committee. The Assistant Chair is generally the most experienced member on the team, other than the Chair, and, as such, is a resource and support for less experienced team members. The Assistant Chair, along with the Chair, sets the tone for the visit.

The role of the Assistant Chair is not as clearly defined as that of Chair. Responsibilities vary depending on the needs of the Chair and the complexity of the hosting school. The following information may be helpful in considering the role of an Assistant Chair.

- The Chair will ask the Assistant Chair to participate in the Initial Contact Meeting and to accompany him/her on the Foundation Visit to the host school.
- During the Program Visit, the Assistant Chair should provide support and encouragement to less experienced team members.
- The Assistant Chair will likely be asked to be the lead writer on the larger and more complex Standards.
- The Assistant Chair may be asked to sit in on interviews with less experienced team members as they develop a positive approach to interviewing.
- Assistant Chairs should model the writing style of a Visiting Committee Report for any colleagues struggling with the written expectations.
- The Assistant Chair serves as a sounding board for the Chair when sensitive issues arise.
- In the absence of the Chair, it is likely that the Assistant Chair will lead the team.
- The Assistant Chair joins the Chair for the exit interview with the Head of School.

The Role and Responsibilities of the Foundation Visiting Committee

The Chair and the Assistant Chair will be the primary members of the Foundation Visiting Committee. The Foundation Committee's focus is on the operational aspects of the school. At the conclusion of the visit, the Committee makes a recommendation to the Commission regarding the school's compliance with each of the Foundation Standards 1-6 and the school's readiness to move forward with a Program Visit which will likely take place within four months.

- Before the Visit: Respond appropriately to all communications from the Commission and the Chair. Thoroughly read the Foundation Standards Self-Study to understand the school on its own terms, given its mission.
- During the Foundation Visit: Gather data through interviews, supplementary materials, and observations. Collaborate with your fellow committee members to write the formal Foundation Visiting Committee Report. Consider major commendations and recommendations which will support overall school improvement. The Foundation Visiting Committee will take a vote at the conclusion of their visit regarding the successful completion of the Foundation Report and compliance with the Standards. One of the following recommendations will be made:
 - The school has met all the expectations of the Foundation Visit and should move forward to host a Program Visit without reservation.
 - The school has completed the Foundation Visit and should move forward to host the Program Visit while also taking specific action(s) recommended by the Committee.
 - The Program Visit should be tabled pending specific action(s) determined by the Commission.
- After the Visit: Read the draft of the Report as prepared by the Chair of the Visiting Committee and respond to the Chair with any comments, if needed. All materials provided by the school are confidential and should be destroyed after the visit.

NOTE: All members of the Committee are expected to sign the Confidentiality Form (Appendix A).

The Role and Responsibilities of the Program Visiting Committee

Members of a Program Visiting Committee are faculty and administrators representing various academic and professional positions from institutions similar in size and complexity to the school being visited. The Visiting Committee's primary purpose is to understand the school, validate the Standards, write a Report, rate the school's compliance with the Standards and make commendations and recommendations that will help further the school's improvement. Finally, the Visiting Committee makes a recommendation to the Commission on Independent Schools regarding the accreditation status of the school.

- Before the Visit: Respond appropriately to all communications from the Commission and the Chair. Thoroughly read the Self-Study and Foundation Visiting Committee Report and the Program Standards Self-Study to understand the school on its own terms, given its mission. Take notes, compile questions, and create a list of potential school personnel to be interviewed.
- During the Program Visit: Immerse oneself in the life of the school by gathering data through interviews, supplementary materials, observations and classroom visits. Gauge the degree to which the mission guides decisions and defines the school life. Collaborate with your fellow committee members and write the formal Visiting Committee Report. Make a recommendation to the Commission regarding the school's accreditation status. All Reports must be completed and submitted to the Chair by the end of the visit. Submit your expense vouchers to the Chair prior to leaving the school.
- After the Visit: Read the draft of the Report as finalized by the Chair of the Visiting Committee and respond to the Chair with any comments, if needed. All materials provided by the school are confidential and should be destroyed after the visit.

NOTE: All members of the Committee are expected to sign the Confidentiality Form (Appendix A).

Writing the Visiting Committee Reports

Visiting Committee members must remind themselves that data gathering has the primary purpose of providing information to write both the Foundation Visit Report and the Program Visit Report. Each committee member is responsible for writing one or more sections of the Report in the portal. The Chair is the final editor and will ensure that the two Reports speak with one voice.

There are two primary audiences for these Reports. The most important audience is the school community for whom the Reports are a validation of months of self-study work. Also, the committee represents the Commission on Independent Schools and is writing the Report to assist the Commission in making decisions regarding the accreditation of the institution. It is important to be aware of these audiences since it affects the style of writing. For the Commission, the Reports must be comprehensive and self-contained since it is likely the only source of information available to the members. For the school, the Reports provide support and assistance to their efforts at improvement. To be effective in this latter function, the Reports must communicate clear understanding and appreciation of the school, be sensitive to issues the school is grappling with, and offer recommendations designed to help guide the school in the years ahead. The Reports should be written in a professional manner which recognizes that the text will receive wide distribution within the school community and in some cases may even become public. It is essential that the Reports be concise and clear and that there is ample explanation and evidence provided to support the ratings and recommendations.

Each Visiting Committee Report is structured in the same fashion as the school's Self-Study Report with sections on each Standard. All major recommendations, Unmet Standards, or changed ratings in either direction must be clearly explained (Appendix M). This clarification prevents the need for a phone call from the school, after the visit, in which the school does not understand a recommendation or why the recommendation has been made. The Commission on Independent Schools cannot interpret a recommendation made by a Visiting Committee that has not been explained. Remember that conclusions flow from observations and recommendations flow from the conclusions.

The writing of the Visiting Committee Report is an art that is developed over time. Veteran Committee members can be a tremendous resource. Please keep in mind the following when writing the various sections of the Report:

- Specific names of school personnel are never used in the Report. References should only be used such as “the principal”, “the secretary”, “the Music teacher” etc. Try not to single out any one individual.
- Follow the direction of the Chair for capitalization and abbreviations.
- In the body of the Report and the writing of the recommendations, the language must not be prescriptive. The committee's recommendations are written with language that “recommends” but does not dictate. Use words such as “review”, “consider”, “explore”, “investigate”.
- Major recommendations are numbered based on importance, with #1 being the most urgent with highest priority.

- Before any recommendations can be written for any of the sections, an explanation or evidence must be contained in the body of the Report.
- The writing of commendations and recommendations begin with the following: “*The Visiting Committee recommends*”, “*The Visiting Committee supports the school’s recommendation to...*”, or “*The Visiting Committee commends*”.

If the Committee changes the rating (up or down) for any Standards, make sure to substantiate the reasons why the rating was changed. The reader must have ample information to understand why and how the committee arrived at each rating. If the Visiting Committee is lowering the rating on a Standard, the reasons for that change must be reflected in the Standard-specific recommendations and, in some cases, in a major recommendation. The final pages of the Report will contain the Ratings Table for all applicable Standards and the Major Commendations and Recommendations (Appendix M).

Everyone’s writing style is different. If unsure of language to be used or simply need an assist with phrasing, ask the Chair or any veteran team member. The Chair has the task of editing the final Report to ensure that it reads in one voice and is consistent in its messaging. The entire Report must be completed in draft form before the committee disperses at the end of the visit. From time to time during the visit, the committee will conduct a review to determine the status of each section and what needs to be done to complete the writing. As a cohesive team, everyone should assist in the completion of the Report and the review of all sections. Note: this precludes any team member leaving early without the Chair’s approval.

The Foundation Visiting Committee focuses on Standards 1-6. The Program Visiting Committee will address and document both the Program Standards 7-13, and the Strategic Planning Standard 14. Each individual Standard will be documented following the same format as the Foundation Visit.

The Program Visiting Team will determine the Major Commendations and Recommendations after a thorough review and discussion of the Key Foundation Recommendations *as well as* the insights gained from their own visit. These Major Commendations and Recommendations should reflect the totality of the accreditation process.

Sample Visiting Committee Report Template (For both the Foundation and Program Visits)

- **Standard**

SM1: Standard Met: evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

SM2: Standard Met: evidences understanding, evolving implementation and planning for improvement.

SU1: Standard Unmet: evidences inadequate understanding, implementation and planning for remediation that may foreseeably compromise student experience.
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SU2: Standard Unmet: lacks understanding, implementation and planning for remediation, thereby compromising student experience.

- **School's Rating:** _____
- **Visiting Committee's Rating:** _____
- **Explanation of Rating:** In this section, the Visiting Committee offers conclusions, based on the Observations and Conclusions section, that provide background for the commendations and recommendations which follow. There should be a specific explanation for any Unmet Standard, or for any Standard where the rating of the school differs from the rating of the Visiting Committee.
- **Observations and Conclusions:** Based on observations and interviews conducted on site as well as the reading of the Self-Study Reports this narrative provides the necessary evidence for ratings, commendations and recommendations.
- **Commendations:** This is an opportunity to commend the school for exemplary activities or accomplishments as well as demonstrate that the Committee has recognized and appreciated the distinctive strengths of the school. Commendations are typically numbered, listed, and should not exceed five. There need not be a priority listing, but care should be taken to assure that commendations are significant. Insignificant or frivolous commendations reduce the credibility of the Report.
- **Recommendations:** The school has included recommendations for itself in each section of the Self-Study Report. The Visiting Committee may endorse the school's recommendations and/or make additional recommendations in areas where the Visiting Committee feels that change or improvement is needed. The Committee will make Standard specific recommendations as well as a limited number of major recommendations. All recommendations must flow from the observations and conclusions and should refer to carrying out the school's mission and fully meeting the Standards for Accreditation. At times, members of a committee might wish to recommend something that refers to a commonly accepted educational practice, but care must be taken not to impose any specific framework or educational philosophy on the school. All recommendations should identify issues that warrant attention and should not be prescriptive. The Foundation Visit should generate no more than three major recommendations and the Program Visit no more than five major recommendations.

Recommendations should be listed in order of priority:

1. A recommendation which the school has made for itself in its Self-Study Report.
2. A Standard which is not fully met, for which the school has not made a recommendation.
3. A discrepancy between the school's mission and/or stated policy and its practice.
4. A Standard for which the school has not demonstrated thoughtful improvement plans.
5. A recommendation which strengthens a met Standard.

Assessment of the Standards and Accreditation Status

One purpose of a Visiting Committee is to assure that the school meets the Standards for Accreditation. Committees often conduct straw votes on Standards early in their visits to identify areas requiring focus; however, the formal vote on Standards usually does not take place until after all sections of the Report are substantially complete, probably on the last day of the visit. The Chair will document the committee's rating for each Standard.

Standards should be assessed through the lens of student experience. When a Standard is "Met," student experience is reasonably whole, positive and creative. When it is "Unmet," students are – or are likely to be – adversely affected.

The Foundation Visiting Committee will take a vote at the conclusion of their visit regarding the successful completion of the Foundation Report and compliance with the Standards. One of the following recommendations will be made:

- The school has met all the expectations of the Foundation Visit and should move forward to host a Program Visit without reservation
- The school has completed the Foundation Visit and should move forward to host a Program Visit while also taking specific action(s) recommended by the Committee. Please note that the Program Visiting Committee can further address the Foundation Visit recommendations if appropriate
- The Program Visit should be tabled pending specific action(s) determined by the Commission

The Program Visiting Committee will also vote on the accreditation status to be recommended to the Commission on Independent Schools. The following types of recommendations are possible:

For a school seeking Initial Accreditation recommend:

- Accreditation (if all Standards are met)
- Accreditation and some specific stipulation (if all Standards are met)
- Tabling of action pending completion of a specific response from the school (action will be tabled if a school has a rating of SU1 or SU2 on any Standard)

For a school seeking Continued Accreditation, recommend:

- Continued Accreditation (if all Standards are met)
- Continued Accreditation and some specific stipulation (if all Standards are met)
- Continued Accreditation with Unmet Standard(s) rating of SU1 or SU2 (the school will have no more than one year to correct and the Commission will work with the school to address these unmet Standards)

Continued Accreditation with stipulations suggests to the Commission that some follow-up activity beyond the regular Interim Reports is warranted. Most frequently a stipulation is the strongest action recommended by a Visiting Committee. It gives the school an opportunity to address a deficiency. Note that the Visiting Committee makes recommendations to the Commission, but the Commission has the final decision on accreditation status and follow-up requirements for the school.

The Role of the Commission on Independent Schools

The work of the Visiting Committees, including the Visiting Committee Reports for both the Foundation Standards and the Program Standards, the school's Self-Study Reports and supporting documents, and the school's response to the Visiting Committee Reports (if applicable) are presented to the Commission by a member of the Commission who has become familiar with the school and its evaluation. The presenter makes a recommendation for accreditation status and the Commission votes on that recommendation.

The school, when it is informed of the decision of the Commission, is also informed when its next Report is due. In some cases, actions such as a Special Progress or a Focused Visit may be specified.

Confidentiality

The Visiting Committee Reports will become the property of the school. Committee members will not receive a copy of the completed Report from the Commission or the Chair. If a member wishes to receive a copy of the Report, he or she should request it from the school. Remember that accreditation work is confidential. Notes and draft copies of the Report should be destroyed, and committee members should not discuss specific committee findings or information about the school with others (Appendix A).

Conflict of Interest

In carrying out its accreditation responsibilities, the Commission on Independent Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges seeks to ensure that its decisions are based solely on the application of professional judgment to the information resulting from its processes. Therefore, it seeks to avoid both the reality and the appearance of conflict of interest. For purposes of this policy statement, conflict of interest is defined as: A circumstance in which an individual's capacity to make an impartial or unbiased accreditation decision may be affected because of a prior, current, or anticipated institutional affiliation(s), other significant relationship(s), or association(s) with the institution under review. The following examples are meant to be illustrative: Affiliation: employee, Governing Body and/or Board Member, appointee, consultant, or graduate. Other Significant Relationships: affiliation with another institution in the same educational system; having a close relative affiliated with the institution under review; sought or seeking a position at the institution under review; knowledge or personal interest concerning the institution under review which might prejudice decision making.

Expense Vouchers

Each member will be emailed an expense voucher. Members should calculate and complete their expense voucher and hand it to the Chair before departure. The Chair will submit the vouchers to the school for processing and payment. The IRS mileage rate will be noted on individual vouchers.

Appendix

A. CONFIDENTIALITY FORM – Required by all Visiting Committee Members

For the Foundation Visit:

- B. Suggested topics for discussion during the Initial Contact
- C. Assessment of the Standards
- D. Sample schedule for Foundation Visit interviews
- E. Email from Chair to Foundation Visiting Committee Members after the Visit
- F. Chair’s Letter template for Regulatory Compliance documents
- G. Chair’s Letter template to be sent to CIS with recommendation
- H. Sample Foundation Visit Report template

For the Program Visit:

- I. Sample email from Chair to Visiting Committee Members re: Program Visit with questionnaire for Chair to send to Program Visiting Committee Members
- J. Sample email from Chair to Program Visiting Committee Members re: assignments
- K. Sample schedule for the Program Visit
- L. Sample schedule for Program Visit interviews
- M. Sample Ratings Table
- N. Sample email from Chair to Program Visiting Committee Members re: Report edits
- O. Sample email to Head of School requesting factual edits to Visiting Committee Report
- P. Letter from Chair with recommendation of action – for the Commission
- Q. Evaluation form for Visiting Committee Member



NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.

Commission on Independent Schools

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

I understand that all information and documents I acquire or view, whether in hard copy or electronic version, regarding a school seeking accreditation by NEASC, except to the extent the information and documents are a matter of public record, are confidential and not to be forwarded, copied, or disclosed in any matter to any person outside of the Visiting Committee and NEASC staff. In addition, all discussions among Visiting Committee members and Reports to or discussions with the NEASC staff regarding a school are likewise confidential and not to be disclosed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

I understand that I am expected to disclose any possible conflict of interest that I might have with the school being visited, thereby preventing me from making impartial considerations. Should a conflict of interest be made evident during a visit, it is expected that I will recuse myself from voting on Standards.

Name _____

School Being Visited _____

Season of Visit _____

Signature

Date

Please read, sign and return this form before beginning your work on this visit. Thank you.

**Please return signed form to:
NEASC
cis@neasc.org**

Appendix B

Suggested Topics for Discussion during the Initial Contact with the School Prior to the Foundation Visit

Introductions, makeup of the team

Decide whether there will be an overnight stay for the Foundation Visit

Standard 1. Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission

- a) The mission is reviewed annually
- b) The school tracks enrollment trends
- c) The school has a value proposition to foster interest in enrollment

Standard 2. The Governing Body/Board Assures the School Remains Sustainable and True to its Mission

- a) The Governing Body/Board is effective in its role
- b) The Governing Body/Board is involved in strategic planning through the expertise of its members
- c) Governing Body/Board membership is diverse and reflects the school community

Standard 3. The School's Resources Sufficiently Support Present and Prospective Operation

- a) The school monitors the school budget monthly
- b) The facilities plan is monitored and maintained in a timely fashion

Standard 4. The School Assures that the Adult Community is Qualified and Organized to Implement the Mission

- a) The school keeps records of all background checks for each employee
- b) The school has an intentional process for the hiring of personnel

Standard 5. Culture of Health and Safety Permeates the School

- a) The school reviews the Health and Safety Guidelines on an annual basis
- b) All drills (fire, lockdown, shelter in place) are known and practiced on a regular basis

Standard 6. Proprietary Schools Ensure Effective Leadership, Clear Organizational Structure, and the Necessary Resources to Successfully Execute the Mission of the School for the Foreseeable Future

- a) The school has an organizational structure in place clearly outlining the roles of each of the stakeholders involved
- b) The Governing Body/Board is representative of the school community and present no conflict of interest

Appendix C

Assessment of the Standards

Standards should be assessed through the lens of student experience. The fundamental test is whether or not students are supported. When a Standard is “Met,” student experience is reasonably whole, positive and creative. When it is “Unmet,” students are – or may be – adversely affected. While some Standards have more direct or immediate student effects, every Standard ultimately makes itself felt in the lives of a school’s students.

SM1: Standard Met: evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

SM2: Standard Met: evidences understanding, evolving implementation and planning for improvement.

SU1: Standard Unmet: evidences inadequate understanding, implementation and planning for remediation that may foreseeably compromise student experience.

SU2: Standard Unmet: lacks understanding, implementation and planning for remediation, thereby compromising student experience.

During the Self-Study, schools rate themselves on every Standard.

During both the Foundation and Program Visits, Visiting Committees also rate the school on every Standard. When the Committee ratings differ from the school’s rating, the Committees will explain their conclusions.

Appendix D

Sample Schedule for Foundation Visit Interviews

It is the responsibility of the Chair, in collaboration with the Head of School and/or Self-Study Chairs or designated staff member, to create a meeting schedule for the Foundation Visiting Committee. Thoughtful and careful planning in advance allows for the most efficient and effective use of time for both the Visiting Committee and the school community.

During the Initial Contact meeting, the Chair discussed with the Head of School how to best schedule any group meetings needed by the Foundation Visiting Committee.

Time	Interviews	Visiting Committee Member(s)	Location
8:00-9:00	Tour of the school		
9:00-9:40	Representatives from the Board of Trustees		
	Admissions Coordinator		
	Director of Facilities		
9:40-10:20	Finance Director/CFO		
	Dean of the Faculty		
	Nurse		

Appendix E

Email from Chair to Foundation Visiting Committee Members after the Visit

To: Visiting Committee Members

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee

Subject: Edits to the Foundation Visiting Committee Report

Thank you for your participation on this visit. After we parted company, I checked through all our sections of the Foundation Visiting Committee Report and I have attached a complete PDF draft copy of the Foundation Visit document.

Please review this and get back to me either by phone or email with any comments you have regarding any additions, deletions, changes, corrections of fact, even nuances. Please do not assume that I will catch all typographical errors, so call my attention to those as well. If I have not heard from you within one week, I will assume the Report meets your approval in substance as a committee member.

Please remember that Foundation Visiting Committee Reports are privileged communications and become the property of the school visited. If you would like a final copy, you may request that from the school.

Appendix F

Letter sent as attachment to CIS confirming evidence of Legal and Regulatory Documentation for Foundation Visit

Chair's Letterhead to be inserted here

Mr. Daniel J. Ferris
Director for Accreditation and School Improvement
Commission on Independent Schools
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.
1115 Westford Street
Lowell, MA 01851

Dear Dan:

As Chair of the Visiting Committee I have examined and can attest to the existence of the following documentation:

- Corporate status as a tax-exempt institution, if applicable
- Non-discriminatory admissions and employment policies
- Information regarding the financial responsibilities of parents and students
- Fire Marshal's inspection certificate or letter stating that at the time of the last inspection, all requirements were met
- Health inspection certificates for food services
- Statement from the Head of School that the school's Emergency Plan is complete and has been submitted to the local police department
- Documentation attesting that those sections of the early childhood program that serve children under the age of three meet state health and safety regulations/guidelines for childcare facilities

Appendix G

Letter sent as attachment to CIS containing recommendation for Foundation Visit

Mr. Daniel J. Ferris
Director for Accreditation and School Improvement
Commission on Independent Schools
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.
1115 Westford Street
Lowell, MA 01851

Dear Dan:

As Chair of the Foundation Visiting Committee for **{Evaluated School}**, the Committee recommends that (choose one of the following):

- The school has met all the expectations of the Foundation Visit and should move forward to host a Program Visit without reservation
- The school has completed the Foundation Visit and should move forward to host the Program Visit while also taking specific action(s) recommended by the Committee
- The Program Visit should be tabled pending specific action(s) determined by the Commission

Sample Foundation Visiting Committee Report Template

Foundation Standard 1:

Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission

- 1.a. The Mission is demonstrably appropriate for each student in the school.
- 1.b. The enrollment process aligns with the Mission and values of the school.
- 1.c. The school identifies and addresses current enrollment trends and challenges.
- 1.d. The school articulates its “value proposition” in light of enrollment, mission and societal trends.
- 1.e. If applicable, the school understands and addresses boarding/homestay trends.
- 1.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

SM1: Standard Met: evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

SM2: Standard Met: evidences understanding, evolving implementation and planning for improvement.

SU1: Standard Unmet: evidences inadequate understanding, implementation and planning for remediation that may foreseeably compromise student experience.

SU2: Standard Unmet: lacks understanding, implementation and planning for remediation, thereby compromising student experience.

School's Rating _____

Visiting Committee's Rating _____

Explanation of Rating

Observations and Conclusions

Commendations

Recommendations

Appendix H (Page 2)

The final page of the Foundation Visit Report will be completed with the following:

Foundation Visit Key Recommendations

Ratings Table

	School's Self-Study Rating	Visiting Committee Rating	Unmet Rating?	Differing Rating?	Evidence Provided for Unmet/Differing Rating? (Page number)
Standard 1: Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission					
Standard 2: The Governing Body/Board Assures the School Remains Sustainable and True to its Mission					
Standard 3: The School's Resources Sufficiently Support Present and Prospective Operation					
Standard 4: The School Assures that the Adult Community is Qualified and Organized to Implement the Mission					
Standard 5: A Proactive Culture of Health and Safety Permeates the School					
Standard 6: Proprietary Schools Ensure Effective Leadership, Clear Organizational Structure, and the Necessary Resources to Successfully Execute the Mission of the School for the Foreseeable Future					

Appendix I (Page 1)

Email from Chair to Visiting Committee Members regarding the Program Visit

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee
Sent To: Visiting Committee Members for Program Visit
Subject: Our School Visit

Welcome!

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Program Visiting Committee for the decennial review of **{Evaluated School}** on **{dates of visit}**. Once our team is complete, you will receive a list of the visiting team members from the NEASC office.

I ask you to find some time to familiarize yourself with the CIS Program Standards (see: <http://cis.neasc.org/standards-policies/standards-indicators>). Technology is a substantial aid in reducing the busy work of any visit, so I ask that you bring a laptop with you. We will write our Program Report in the CIS portal, and share and edit it collectively. It would be a good idea for you to access the portal, and familiarize yourself with it, prior to our visit. If you encounter any problems, you should email our office at: CIS@neasc.org

Included with this email is a questionnaire which you should complete and send back to me as soon as possible. Your responses will help me develop preliminary assignments for our visit. We are all “generalists” for this visit, and we will divide responsibility for writing the several sections of our Report. I want to be sure that each area is covered and that, insofar as possible, each member of the Committee is working in an area of his/her competence and interest.

You will receive information regarding lodging from the school about four weeks prior to the visit.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions in advance of the visit. I can be reached at **{home phone}** or **{cell phone}**.

If you have any suggestions or need any special arrangements, please let me know.

I look forward to working with you on our upcoming visit!

Program Standards Assignment Questionnaire

Please check any of the Standards below that would be your preferences, and return the information to me as soon as possible, but no later than **{date}**.

- Standard 7: Commitment to Mission and Core Beliefs Determines Decisions, Guides Initiatives and Aligns with the Students' Needs and Aspirations
- Standard 8: Commitment to Inspiration and Support Characterizes the Approach to Each Student
- Standard 9: Commitment to Excellence Distinguishes the Program
- Standard 10: Commitment to Continuous Professional Development Permeates the Adult Culture
- Standard 11: Commitment to Engaging with the Greater Community Enhances Student Experience
- Standard 12: Commitment to Meeting the Needs of Each Student Drives the Residential Program
- Standard 13: Commitment to the Health and Well-Being of Each Student Guides the School's Homestay Program
- Standard 14: Commitment to Long-Term Viability and Innovation Guides Planning

To provide information that will help with committee assignments and organization, please complete the following:

Current positions and responsibilities:

Other skills helpful for this Committee (e.g.; IT, writing, editing, other):

Prior experience on a Visiting Committee:

You will need to bring a laptop (iPads and tablets do not work as effectively). Please notify me if you will need to borrow one.

Emergency contact information:

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Please indicate any special dietary requirements or physical restrictions:

Appendix J

Email from Chair to Program Visiting Committee Members regarding Assignments

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee

To: Visiting Committee Members

Subject: Confirmation of Assignments

Hello friends,

By now you should have received information from the NEASC office regarding accessing the Foundation and Program Self-Study Reports. If you have not received this yet, please contact the NEASC office. Please read through the whole Self-Study Report and make note of any data you find missing, any information lacking, or other concerns. Please email me with any major concerns you discover. This will help to inform me about what to schedule during the visit.

It is also worth noting the unique strengths and programs of the school. The Self-Study Report(s) should clearly and completely convey the scope and mission of the school.

Here are the Standards that are assigned to you, based on the questionnaires returned to me. Though we will all cooperate in writing the Report, you will take the lead in drafting the Report sections dealing with the assigned Standards.

Program Standard	Lead Writer	Assistant Editor
7. Commitment to Mission		
8. Commitment to Students		
9. Commitment to Program		
10. Commitment to Professional Development		
11. Commitment to Community		
12. Commitment to the Residential Program		
13. Commitment to the Homestay Program		
Strategic Planning Standard		
14. Commitment to Long-Term Viability		

Writing an effective Visiting Committee Report is as important as writing a good Self-Study.

Please take the time to master the assigned Standard, as well as the school's Self-Study Report on the Standard, and then become comfortable with the writing sample for a Visiting Committee Report. Samples can be found on the NEASC website at: [Visiting Team Resources - 20/20 Process | NEASC-CIS Independent Schools](#)

Consistency, clarity, and conciseness are the best virtues to practice in writing a meaningful Visiting Committee Report. The NEASC process is always oriented toward school improvement and the Visiting Committee Report should provide validation and support for the school's improvement plans.

On Sunday {**date**} our first meeting as a team will be at {**time**} at the hotel. I will have a schedule of meeting times available, at that time. We will then travel to the school for a tour of the facility and dinner with key members of the school community.

Have the best weekend.

Appendix K

Sample Schedule for the Program Visit

Sunday	
2:00 p.m.	Committee members arrive at the hotel
3:00 p.m.	Organizational meeting at the hotel
3:45 p.m.	Transfer to the school
5:00 p.m.	Campus Tour
6:00 p.m.	Reception and dinner hosted by the school for the full committee and appropriate members of the school community
8:00 p.m.	Visiting Committee reconvenes. Follow-up to campus visit. Extended discussion of first draft of the Standards, in particular, Standard 7 Mission
Monday	
7:00 a.m.	Breakfast/observe student arrival routines
8:00 a.m.	All school meeting (optional)
8:15 – 11:30 a.m.	Interviews with faculty, students, and service personnel. Details will be worked out at the organizational meeting. Classroom visits
11:30 – 12:15 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Continued interviews/meetings/classroom visits (Appendix L)
4:00 – 5:30 p.m.	Visiting Committee reconvenes
5:30 – 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 p.m.	Visiting Committee reconvenes at the hotel. Brief reports on most of the Program Standards and suggested ratings.
Tuesday	
7:00 a.m.	Breakfast
8:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Continued interviews/meetings/classroom visits
11:30 – 12:15 p.m.	Luncheon with representatives of parents and alumni/ae
1:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Continued interviews/meetings/classroom visits
4:00 – 5:30 p.m.	Visiting Committee reconvenes
5:30 – 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 p.m.	Visiting Committee reconvenes. Updates on all Program Standards. Extended discussion of commendations and recommendations
Tuesday or Wednesday if needed	
7:30 a.m.	Breakfast
8:15 a.m.	Visiting Committee completes drafts of all sections of the Report, identifies major commendations and recommendations, and conducts final vote on Standards. Draft Report is approved by the committee and submitted to the Chair for final editing.
NOON	Committee members depart
1:00 p.m.	Exit interview by Chair and Assistant Chair with Head of School

Appendix L

Sample Schedule for Program Visit Interviews

It is the responsibility of the Chair, in collaboration with the Head of School and/or Self-Study Coordinators or designated staff member, to create a meeting schedule for the Visiting Committee. Thoughtful and careful planning in advance allows for the most efficient and effective use of time for both the Visiting Committee and the school community. Once the Chair has received team members questionnaires regarding areas of interest, a schedule can begin to be created.

During the Foundation Visit, the Chair discussed with the Head of School how to best schedule any group meetings needed by the Program Visiting Committee. It is neither necessary nor practical for all Visiting Committee Members to attend every meeting. At least two members should be present for group meetings. The Chair and the School Head may decide on additional group meetings, as appropriate. Some Chairs or Heads of School may request an All School Meeting to introduce the visiting team. To the extent possible given the size of the school, Visiting Committee Members should try to meet with all members of the faculty and staff.

Considering the limited time frame of the visit, Monday should be scheduled with as many meetings as possible. Below is a snapshot of a potential Monday morning schedule. The Head of School should provide the Chair with information regarding both teacher and space availability.

Time	Interviews	Visiting Committee Member(s)	Location
8:00-8:40	Parent Group	Alan, Bob, Carol	Cafeteria
	Mrs. Jones, Title I Teacher	Diana	Room 121
	Mr. Ki, History Dept Chair	Ellen	Room 12
	Classroom Aides	Gail, Helen	Library
8:40-9:20	Parent Group Continues	Alan, Bob, Fran	Cafeteria
	Mrs. Smith, Grade 5	Diana	Room 212
	Science Dept.	Helen, Carol	Room 145
	Ms. Kay, Admin. Assist	Ellen	Business Office
	Mr. Ole, Spanish Teacher	Gail	Room 123

Appendix M

Ratings Table Template from the Portal

	School's Self-Study Rating	Visiting Committee Rating	Unmet Rating	Differing Rating	Evidence Provided for Unmet/Differing Rating (Page Number)
Foundation Standard 1: Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission					
Foundation Standard 2: The Governing Body/Board Assures the School Remains Sustainable and True to its Mission					
Foundation Standard 3: The School's Resources Sufficiently Support Present and Prospective Operation					
Foundation Standard 4: The School Assures that the Adult Community is Qualified and Organized to Implement the Mission					
Foundation Standard 5: A Proactive Culture of Health and Safety Permeates the School					
Foundation Standard 6: Proprietary Schools Ensure Effective Leadership, Clear Organizational Structure, and the Necessary Resources to Successfully Execute the Mission of the School for the Foreseeable Future					
Program Standard 7: Commitment to Mission and Core Beliefs Informs Decisions, Guides Initiatives and Aligns with the Students' Needs and Aspirations					
Program Standard 8: Commitment to Inspiration and Support Characterizes the Approach to Each Student					
Program Standard 9: Commitment to Excellence Distinguishes the Program					
Program Standard 10: Commitment to Continuous Professional Development Permeates the Adult Culture					
Program Standard 11: Commitment to Engaging with the Greater Community Enhances Student Experience					
Program Standard 12: Commitment to Meeting the Needs of Each Student Drives the Residential Program					
Program Standard 13: Commitment to the Health and Well-Being of Each Student Guides the School's Homestay Program					
Strategic Planning Standard 14: Commitment to Long-Term Viability and Innovation Guides Planning					

Appendix N

Email from Chair to Program Visiting Committee Members regarding final edits to the Report

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee
To: Visiting Committee Members
Subject: The Visiting Committee Report

Thank you, again, for serving on this Committee. After we parted company, I checked through all our sections of the Visiting Committee Report and I have attached a complete PDF draft copy of that document.

Please review this and get back to me either by phone or email with any comments you have regarding additions, deletions, changes, corrections of fact, even nuances. Please do not assume that I will catch all typographical errors, so call my attention to those as well. If I have not heard from you within one week, I will assume the Report meets your approval in substance as a committee member.

Please remember that Visiting Committee Reports are privileged communications and become the property of the school visited. If you would like a final copy, you may request that from the school.

I enjoyed working with you and hope you found the experience rewarding, both personally and professionally.

Warm regards,

Chair of the Visiting Committee

cc: Director for Accreditation and School Improvement CIS/NEASC

Appendix O

Email from Chair to Head of School requesting factual edits to the Visiting Committee Report

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee

To: Head of School

Subject: Request for Visiting Committee Report factual accuracy check

I would like to express my personal appreciation and that of the Committee for the hospitality shown during our visit and I hope that our work will prove to be beneficial for the future of your fine school.

I have attached a draft PDF of the complete Visiting Committee Report. Before putting it in final form, I would ask that you, or a designated assistant, review it for factual accuracy. Please get back to me with any comments or corrections you have. If I have not heard from you within one week, I will assume that you have not found any errors and I will proceed with submitting the Report to NEASC-CIS.

You will have an opportunity to address any differences of opinion regarding the conclusions of the Visiting Committee after I submit the final Report. Prior to the Commission meeting, you will receive a copy of the final Visiting Committee Report from the Commission office. At that time, you will be asked for your response to the Report and any comments you may wish to make about the work of the Visiting Committee.

Warm regards,

Chair of the Visiting Committee

cc: Director for Accreditation and School Improvement CIS/NEASC

Appendix P

Letter of recommendation to be emailed to CIS

Chair's Letterhead

Date

Mr. Daniel J. Ferris
Director for Accreditation and School Improvement
Commission on Independent Schools
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.
1115 Westford Street
Lowell, MA 01851

Dear Dan:

The Visiting Committee that conducted the Program visit to {school, city, state} for purposes of {initial membership} or {continued membership} in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. hereby recommends that the school be (choose one of the following):

For a school seeking Initial Accreditation (Choose one of the following)

- Granted accreditation
- Granted accreditation with some specific stipulation
- Tabled pending completion of specific response from the school
- Denied accreditation

For a school seeking Continued Accreditation (Choose one of the following)

- Granted continued accreditation
- Granted continued accreditation and specific stipulations
- Granted continued accreditation and placed on warning
- Placed on probation

If there are any questions regarding this recommendation, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Appendix Q

**New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on
Independent Schools**

**Evaluation of Visiting Committee Member to:
(Evaluated School, City, State)**

Chair Name: _____

Committee Member's Name and School: _____

General Assessment:

Please circle one: **Excellent**
 Good
 Fair

Excellent – would definitely invite again

What would you say were his/her outstanding characteristics as a member of a Visiting Committee?

Good – should be given another opportunity

What areas of concern should be addressed?

Fair – questionable whether he/she should be invited to serve again

Areas of concern to address if invited again:

Would you recommend this person to act as Assistant Chair of a Visiting Committee?

If this member is the Head of School, would you recommend him/her to Chair or Assistant Chair a Visiting Committee?