



NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.

What Is Accreditation?

Accreditation has two purposes: School Improvement and Quality Assurance
 Accreditation has two audiences: The School’s Staff and Other Interested Parties

<p><i>School Improvement:</i> <i>This was the primary interest of the school principals and college presidents who founded NEASC in 1885 – and it is still the focus today.</i></p>	<p><i>Quality Assurance:</i> <i>This emphasis was added in the mid-twentieth century to qualify prospective members of NEASC and provide assurance of quality to the general public.</i></p>
<p><u>Assumptions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools appropriately differ from one another in mission, student profile, program, and pedagogy; however, there are standards of quality common to all schools that can guide a school’s self-assessment and plans for improvement. • Change initiatives are most likely to be effective if they are designed and implemented by the school community. • Schools may learn and benefit from the perspectives and recommendations of visitors from outside the school. 	<p><u>Assumptions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools benefit from being held accountable to standards of quality established by the larger educational community. • Standards of quality should be comprehensive in their focus on overall institutional strength and integrity, respect the diversity of schools’ missions, and require assessment of student outcomes. • Visitors from other schools can bring a fresh perspective and can evaluate a school’s compliance with the standards.
<p><u>Actions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school begins a ten-year accreditation cycle by completing a comprehensive self-study with broad participation of the professional staff and others in the school community. • The school assesses its status with regard to the NEASC standards and formulates plans for improvement. • The school hosts a visiting team of educators from other schools who validate the self-study and add their own recommendations. • The Commission follows up with regular interim reports and special reports to monitor steps taken by the school in pursuit of its plans for improvement. 	<p><u>Actions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In its self-study, the school assesses and documents its status with regard to the NEASC standards. • A visiting committee of educators from other schools independently assesses compliance with the standards. • The Commission requires schools to meet all NEASC standards to become accredited and gives an accredited school only a limited time to remedy the situation if it falls out of compliance with one or more standards. • The Commission follows up through the ten-year cycle with regular interim reports and special reports to monitor continuing compliance with NEASC standards.

What Accreditation Can and Cannot Do?

<p><i>For School Improvement: The initiative lies with the school to make the most of the accreditation process in this regard.</i></p> <p>Accreditation is an effective vehicle for school improvement for all variety of schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even the strongest school benefits from engaging its faculty in a structured, comprehensive assessment of all aspects of school life that leads to plans for improvement. • Less well-established schools often report that they have been transformed by the accreditation experience. • Faculties value accreditation for affording them a voice, as professionals, in shaping the future of their school. • A school community is strengthened when each member has an awareness of and appreciation for the contribution of all members, gained during the self-study process. • The self-study and visiting committee reports guide institutional planning. • Follow-up by the Commission through regularly scheduled and special reports and visits assures that goals are achieved and the momentum for change is maintained. <p><u>However</u>, it should be noted that accreditation is premised on the voluntary commitment of a school to ongoing improvement efforts. When, for whatever reason, a school seeks to do only the minimum to satisfy the requirements of NEASC, school improvement efforts may be undermined and achievements minimized.</p>	<p><i>For Quality Assurance: The Standards that schools must meet define the terms of this assurance – accreditation does not rank.</i></p> <p>Accreditation’s claim to quality assurance is based on holding a school accountable for meeting all the Standards for Accreditation. An accredited school is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so.</p> <p><u>However</u>, it should be noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation speaks about the overall school and does not guarantee the experience of an individual student or the quality of a specific class or program. • Evaluation of a school for accreditation takes place at a specific time and cannot anticipate changes that may occur subsequently. • The decennial review – with self-study and visiting committee – affords the greatest scrutiny. • Special reports and focused visits, along with regular interim reports, are employed in the intervening years to provide significant continuing oversight between comprehensive evaluations. <p><u>Note</u>, complaints that schools are not meeting one or more standards are inquired into by the Commission which will direct a school to take corrective action, if warranted.</p>
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NOTE:

- NEASC has six commissions, each of which maintains its own Standards and employs a somewhat different accreditation process. While the outline above applies generally to all of the commissions, it is based on the specific policies and practices of the Commission on Independent Schools.
- The U.S. Department of Education, which oversees the accreditation of institutions of higher education, emphasizes the importance of quality assurance. People invest in schools (as taxpayers, tuition-payers, employers, donors, etc.) and they should get information on how successful a school is, primarily in terms of student learning and student success.