

**Writing Sample for a
Visiting Committee Report**

**Webster Academy
Webster, NH**

This is a sample comprised of the section on Standard 4 only. It is provided as an illustration of one visiting committee's approach. It is not intended as a model that other visiting committees must follow.

NOTE: *Text in italics has been copied verbatim from the school's self-study.*

Standard 4 (Program): The school provides a comprehensive program of intellectual, aesthetic, and physical activities that stems from the school's beliefs about teaching and learning, is appropriate to support its mission and core values, and is consistent with the needs of the range of students admitted.

School's Self-Rating: (2) PASSED: Fully in compliance

Visiting Committee's Rating: (3) PASSED: Acceptable but needs attention

Brief narrative summary of the school's position with regard to this Standard
(This summary was copied/abridged/adapted from the school's self-study.)

Webster Academy offers a full program of intellectual, aesthetic, and physical activities for all students. It is a college preparatory school with a student body of above average ability. The curriculum for grades seven through twelve includes three languages, A.P courses in all disciplines, three years of required arts and two additional years of electives. The school believes students learn best when they are responsible for guiding their own studies. The sciences are built around extensive laboratory experiences; language classes are all conducted in the target language and use the internet and partner schools to provide realistic interaction with another culture; the study of history builds on research and primary sources; English classes in the 11th and 12th grades are conducted in seminar format; mathematics is taught in a more traditional manner, but does emphasize real world applications. All classes are grouped heterogeneously except for high school math and writing sections (meeting two times a week) in 8th and 9th grade English. Study skills classes are provided for students in grades 7 and 8 who need help structuring their work.

Webster Academy requires all students to participate on sports teams (intramural or interscholastic) at least two seasons a year. The school's policy is that all students on a team will have significant playing time. Physical education classes for students in grades 7 through 9 focus on health, safety, nutrition, and life-long recreational activities.

Webster Academy also offers a full range of activities during and after school and on vacations. These include a major service program in which all students participate, in-school for grades 7-9 and in the community for grades 10-12; an international travel opportunity in grade 11 that is coordinated with language study and for which funds are raised so that all students can participate; student government; and a host of clubs, student publications, and other activities. These activities are organized to encourage student initiative and leadership.

Observations

The visiting committee observed that although Webster Academy often speaks of itself as a seamless 7-12 program, there are distinct – and appropriate – differences between middle and high schools. The self-study process prompted discussion by faculty across levels that appears to have engendered a new level of appreciation of the strengths of different emphases in the curriculum and different approaches in pedagogy between the divisions. Some of the contrast relates to the maturity of the students in middle and high schools, but faculty at all levels indicated an interest in continuing the dialog and creating ongoing opportunities to learn from one another.

Conclusions and Explanation of Rating:

The visiting committee found the school passed standard 4 and rated the school at “(3),” one point lower than the school’s self-rating of “(2).” The visiting committee concurs generally with the school’s summary statement, but felt that two factors warranted more urgent attention and prompted the lower rating:

1. The school noted in its review of indicators that there is much to be done in the area of technology. The school has no technology plan; there is little integration of technology in the curriculum; there has been no effective professional development program to prepare faculty to make good use of the technology resources that are available. According to its mission, Webster Academy aspires to prepare students for the most challenging and competitive colleges. To accomplish this goal, the school must equip its graduates with advanced skills in applying technology to different disciplines, as well as extensive experience in using the internet for research.
2. The visiting committee found in interviews with students, parents, and faculty great pride and confidence in the intellectual preparation of the Academy’s strongest students. At the same time, some concern was expressed that more average students were less well served in their junior and senior years. In reviewing a table of AP scores for the past five years, the committee noted that an equal or greater number of students received a “4” or “5” as received a “1” or “2.” In some cases, it appeared that students were enrolled in the AP section because there was no choice of a more appropriate elective course in the discipline. This was confirmed in interviews with both faculty (who said that they were asked to include less qualified students in their AP courses) and students (who said that they found that there were no non-AP elective courses in the department or that alternatives did not fit into their schedule).

Taken together, the visiting committee feels that while Webster Academy has a strong and comprehensive program and passes this standard, it also has a responsibility and need to strengthen aspects of its program for the entire range of the student spectrum.

Commendations:

1. The visiting committee commends Webster Academy for a comprehensive and candid self-study regarding Standard 4 and for the well organized supplementary materials available in the committee’s workroom.
2. The visiting committee commends Webster Academy for providing opportunities for students to enrich their learning with experiences in the community, interacting with partner schools over the internet, and through international travel accessible to all students in the eleventh grade.
3. The visiting committee commends the Webster Academy middle school faculty for their commitment to creating and maintaining a lively and engaging classroom learning environment.

4. The visiting committee commends Webster Academy for the commitment to intellectual challenge found throughout the curriculum.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee concurs with the two recommendations in the school's self-study:

1. *We recommend that a faculty task force be formed to examine the school schedule, the requirements in the current course of study, and the demands on students' time. The task force should be charged with bringing forth recommendations to allow for more flexibility in instituting new courses and in students' choice of program.*
2. *We recommend that a faculty task force be formed to establish guidelines for integrating technology into the curriculum. This should include goals for every department, plans for professional development offerings, and a timetable against which to measure progress.*

The visiting committee adds two additional recommendations:

3. The visiting committee recommends Webster Academy establish a forum to ensure continuing conversation and exchange of perspectives between middle and high school faculty on questions of curriculum, pedagogy, and student behavior.
4. The visiting committee recommends that Webster Academy examine its curriculum offerings in grades 11 and 12 with a view to assessing the options available in all departments for the full range of abilities of students enrolled.