



***The Handbook  
for  
Visiting Committee Chairs***

**Commission on Independent Schools**

New England Association of Schools and Colleges

2017 Edition

## **Commission on Independent Schools**

### **Mission Statement**

CIS engages member schools in a comprehensive peer review accreditation process that provides assurance of quality and serves as a catalyst for innovation, improvement and excellence.

We support the efforts of schools, with their diverse missions, to meet the current and emerging needs of their students and to achieve long term institutional health.

As world leaders in accreditation with our partners at NEASC (founded in 1885), we promote an understanding of the changing educational landscape, and generate relevant discourse and action in the global educational community.

### **Core Principles**

Our schools benefit from our continuous and systematic peer review accreditation process, one that integrates both internal voice and external perspective. We hold our schools responsible for improving and transforming themselves, through self-study and reflection. The ultimate objective is for our schools to design a sustainable future, which is consistent with their respective missions in serving their students, and responsive to a rapidly changing environment.

*Approved by the Commission on Independent Schools, November 2013*

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## **The Purpose of Accreditation**

Accreditation has two interrelated purposes, school improvement and quality assurance, which are addressed in a three-phase process.

1. The Self-Study. Every ten years a school undertakes a comprehensive self-evaluation, following defined procedures, that is the foundation of the accreditation process and provides the focus for the subsequent visit. The *Manual for School Evaluation* integrates mandated Standards into a Self-Study protocol that is designed to demonstrate that the Standards for Accreditation are met and to generate plans for school improvement.
2. The Visiting Committee. The Visiting Committee, composed of peers from other member schools, validates the Self-Study and provides the school and the Commission with the observations and recommendations of experienced outside educators. It determines the school's compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, and assists the school in setting direction for future improvement. The Visiting Committee follows a methodology in its work, the objective of which is reliability in the results.
3. Follow-up. The school's process of follow-up, with the Commission's oversight, assures effective action on recommendations and plans formulated during the Self-Study and Visiting Committee phases. While adherence to Standards provides a significant measure of quality, the best long-term assurance of quality is the commitment to ongoing school improvement to which accreditation attests.

## **The Visiting Committee**

The Visiting Committee undertakes a four-day visit after reading the school's Self-Study Report. The committee's immediate task is to understand the school on its own terms and to validate the Self-Study. It must then, working within the context of the school and the framework of NEASC policy, write a report which will comment on the Self-Study and include recommendations designed to further school improvement.

The Visiting Committee Report, described more fully below, must first establish the credibility of the visiting team as knowledgeable observers and careful listeners. It will make recommendations drawn from three sources: endorsement of recommendations the school has made for itself, Standards which are not met or which could be improved upon, and discrepancies between mission, policies and practices. The report is addressed to the Commission as well as the school and should assist the Commission in setting requirements for follow-up and the school in establishing a clear plan of action.

## **The Role of the Chair of the Visiting Committee**

The Chair of the Visiting Committee plays a pivotal role in the accreditation process with responsibilities to the school, the committee and the Commission at each stage. For the sake of clarity, each will be examined separately.

Responsibility to the School. The Chair is the chief liaison, representing the Commission to the school in the accreditation process. By seeking accreditation, the school commits itself to voluntary adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and willing participation in improvement initiatives. The Chair can do much to establish a positive and receptive attitude at the school.

**A. Before the Visit.** At least a few months before the scheduled visit, the Head of School at the school being evaluated should contact the Chair of the Visiting Committee to arrange for a pre-visit. The pre-visit is an occasion to get information and make plans for the visit, and is an opportunity to reassure the school community concerning the professionalism of the accreditation process. The Chair should take the initiative to contact the school to arrange the pre-visit, if he or she has not heard from the Head of School within two months of the scheduled visit.

During the pre-visit, the Chair should confirm the readiness of the school for the full visit by inquiring into the status of the Self-Study, verifying that the school has secured documentation for all health and safety regulatory requirements (as listed in Appendix Q), and ensuring that the financial audit will be ready for review by the time of the full visit. The Chair should invite the Head of School to share any concerns and/or identify areas for committee focus. It is helpful to tour the school and meet with key people to answer any questions they may have. This is the time to set the tentative schedule for the visit and to make sure that arrangements for housing accommodations, meeting rooms, and computers for use by the committee are satisfactory. Expectations concerning classroom visits should be clarified. Arrangements should be made for visitors to come and go from classrooms with as little interruption of class activities as possible. The Head should be asked to inform faculty that these class visits are not to evaluate teachers. In setting the schedule, the Chair should protect the committee's working time and keep social events to a minimum, usually confined to a reception or dinner on Sunday evening. A suggested schedule is included (Appendix L).

**B. During the Visit.** The Chair should be prepared to make introductions and say a few words to set the tone for the visit at the opening reception and at any school assembly. During the visit the Chair should monitor reactions to the committee, being alert to misunderstandings and asking for feedback as to whether people in the school feel listened to by the committee. A list of school personnel should be posted in the committee's work room and checked frequently to be sure that everyone is contacted personally before the committee departs. Similarly, the Chair should be sure that enough classes are visited to be representative and that all constituencies have been interviewed.

The school is hosting the team at the end of an arduous process of self-study. The Chair must be sensitive to the school and project a high degree of professionalism during the visit. The school is hosting evaluators – almost always a cause for some anxiety and possible defensiveness. The school has invested great effort in the Self-Study. It has tried to communicate about itself and wants to be heard.

Keep reminding the team to be sensitive to the feelings of the school. Invite them to try to imagine themselves in the others' shoes. Stress to the team how important it is at the end of the visit for the school to feel that the team has listened and has understood. Also, be sure insofar as possible that everyone at the school has at least had an opportunity to talk with a member of the team. The way the team comports itself will determine much of the eventual response of the school to the team's recommendations. Be alert to any discomfort team members may be generating at the school and intervene if necessary. The sections of the draft report should be written directly into the portal, and reviewed and edited with an ear as to how they might sound to the school.

- C. Exit Interview.** No matter how prepared the school is, the visit causes a level of tension and resultant defensiveness. Wednesday afternoon is not the best time to communicate conclusions. The Chair should ask the Assistant Chair or a member of the committee to join in an exit interview with the Head of School and key people chosen by the Head, not the entire faculty. This is a time for the Chair to thank the school, to outline general areas of focus for the committee's report, and to bring closure. Chairs should not discuss specific recommendations, votes on Standards for Accreditation or the recommendation to the Commission concerning accreditation status. This would be inappropriate since the report has not been finalized and the decision on accreditation status and the final major recommendations will be made by the Commission. Do stress that a draft report will be emailed to the school quickly.
- D. After the Visit.** The Chair should block out a day in his/her schedule immediately after the visit to edit the report in the portal. All committee members must edit their sections of the report before leaving on Wednesday. The Chair needs to complete the Visiting Committee Report, have the Visiting Committee Members review it in the portal, and email it to the Head of School for a check on factual accuracy within one week and then make any final edits. Once this process is concluded he/she should click the 'Submit for Final Review' button in the portal. As a result, the CIS office will automatically receive notification that the report is complete. The CIS staff will then send the final report, including the Report on Standards for Accreditation, to the school and invite comment prior to Commission action. The preferred timetable is to complete all of this within one month so that the school is in a position to begin its follow-up while the process is still fresh in everyone's mind. The accompanying documents to the report (Appendices P, Q, and R) should be emailed to CIS at the same time as the report is submitted. It is not necessary to mail a hard copy of either the report or the documents. This now concludes the Chair's responsibility to the school.

Responsibility to the Visiting Committee. The Visiting Committee is composed of strangers who gather for four days of intensive work and then disperse. It is the Chair's job to provide strong leadership to allow this group to work productively together and to learn from the experience. Throughout the visit, the Chair should be vigilant in balancing work with time to relax (don't meet late into the night).

**A. Before the Visit.** The members of the committee are volunteers with varying amounts of experience with the accreditation process. The visit will proceed much more smoothly if the Chair takes steps early to make committee members feel comfortable. A letter of introduction and welcome should be sent (by mail or email) once the membership of the committee is confirmed. This letter will solicit information to help the Chair make assignments. It should stress that all members of the committee are generalists, although each will have a specific responsibility for drafting one or more sections of the report. A sample email is included, along with a questionnaire used to determine each member's particular area of interest (Appendices G and H). Committee members should read the entire Self-Study Report and make notes prior to the visit, as there will not be time once the committee arrives at the school. The Chair may want to assign responsibility for writing about specific Standards to all committee members to prepare preliminary drafts of parts of the report – subject, of course, to revision based on observations during the visit.

**B. During the Visit.** The Chair should arrive at the hotel early in order to be present to welcome committee members and make sure they find their accommodations in order. It is important at the meeting on Sunday afternoon to take time for introductions. Two of the major agenda items of this initial meeting are to discuss and begin to understand the mission of the school as well as orient the committee to the purpose of the visit. In addition, the Chair will confirm assignments for writing sections of the report and review the schedule.

Be directive in providing clear organization for the committee. The Chair can do much to reassure team members that they are fitting into a well thought out plan and help them to focus their energies on observing and interacting with the school.

Orient the team to the task of accreditation. Even though most will have some background, it is wise to come to a common understanding. Stress:

- Everyone is first a generalist even though each has assignments to draft sections of the report.
- All members of the committee are responsible for the entire report and all commendations and recommendations.
- The focus of accreditation is on encouraging school improvement.
- The text for the visit is the school's Self-Study and it is important to understand the school on its own terms.

- Narrative sections of the Self-Study Report will be copied and pasted into the Visiting Committee Report within the portal.
- The team should listen actively. Hear what the school says; don't try to advise/consult.
- Take time to gain an understanding of how the school functions before narrowing the focus to specific sections of the report.
- Talk to faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni/ae, administrators, trustees, and other members of the school community as available.
- Talk to those who prepared the sections of the Self-Study Report which you are reviewing.
- Class visits are important to give a flavor of the program, but avoid investing too much time in this activity.
- Students, especially in elementary schools, expect to see visitors in their classrooms and would be disappointed if this did not happen.
- Take notes, compile notes, and begin writing early.
- Each section will be shared in draft form, via the portal. Be prepared to offer observations on sections other than your own.
- The school has spent over a year preparing for the visit; be sensitive to their expectations.
- The committee needs to gain the school's confidence if it wants the school to listen to its recommendations.
- Remind the committee members that they are not there to suggest solutions to problems based on their own personal beliefs or experience.
- Remind the committee members that recommendations come from three sources: endorsing recommendations the school has made for itself, Standards which are not met or which could be improved upon, and inconsistencies between mission, policies and practices.
- Recommendations should define issues and may suggest directions in which the school may proceed, but they should not be prescriptive.
- Findings (observations) resulting in recommendations should be confirmed with evidence from more than one source.

It is important to take time at the first meeting to allow members to discuss impressions from the Self-Study and questions it has raised for them. Help the committee members plan what they will do first on Monday morning.

Each committee member will usually be responsible for at least two Standards, one of which may be a Program Standard. Everyone will be expected to contribute to the discussion of all sections, especially the three Program Standards (4-6) and Part II, when drafts are presented to the committee. It is often helpful to pair members to draft two or more sections, perhaps putting together experienced and inexperienced evaluators.

Usually the Chair will write the introduction and mission sections of the Visiting Committee Report, often preparing a draft for the Monday evening committee meeting, to give an example to the members. The Chair is also the only one to receive confidential financial information. The Chair should delegate most other work in order to remain free to monitor the visit and pick up on issues which emerge unexpectedly.

It is important for the Chair to keep a set schedule, in order to complete all work with time for the entire committee to hear all sections of the report and approve all recommendations. (During the visit, let the committee explore, but keep everyone to the schedule, arrange for sharing of observations, and be sure that the job is completed thoroughly.) The Chair must also be vigilant in maintaining the appropriate tone. Keep the big picture in the foreground in committee discussions. Watch for swings to narrow or judgmental perspectives and refocus the team back to its larger purpose.

Check frequently on who remains to be visited; post a list of all school personnel and ask members to initial the list when they interview someone. Remind the committee that the final report is the work of the entire committee and that everyone should be comfortable with all the recommendations.

The visit might proceed as follows:

**Monday.** The committee should be encouraged to devote Monday morning to listening and observing in an open-ended fashion, seeking to gain an understanding of how the school operates and an appreciation of its distinctive culture. The committee should reconvene at noon or in the early afternoon to share perceptions, identify issues, and test preliminary conclusions. The Chair should encourage full participation in the discussion, stressing that the entire report must convey the conclusions of the entire committee. The committee should have free time between the close of school and dinner to organize their notes, make any edits to descriptive sections of the Self-Study Report they had copied into their reports, and begin drafting the rest of their report including commendations and recommendations. Keep the Standards in sight – conduct a straw vote Monday evening to identify where attention is needed; assign members to research Standards in question and to bring back proposed language for recommendations. It is not too early to begin hearing draft reports on each Standard. The Chair should reserve time for the committee as a whole to hear and discuss the draft reports on the Program Standards (see Appendix L).

**Tuesday.** The committee should begin Tuesday with a clear agenda of people to see and issues to research. The Chair should check to make sure that a representative

number of classes are visited. The committee should reconvene at noon or early afternoon to share observations and have a preliminary discussion of the school's Self-Study Part II: Reflection, Recommendations, and Issues for Further Discussion. The committee should have free time between the close of school and dinner to organize their notes and begin drafting their remaining sections of the report. Members should be aware that the committee will share first drafts of all sections of the report no later than Tuesday evening, leaving time for final revisions overnight. The Chair should reserve time for the committee as a whole to hear and discuss the draft report on Part II, to reflect on the most salient issues that have been identified, and to identify possible major commendations and recommendations.

**Wednesday.** The committee will visit the school on Wednesday only to check on specific items which were missed. Otherwise, the morning is spent finalizing the sections of the report including recommendations, voting on Standards, agreeing on major commendations and recommendations, and determining the overall recommendation on accreditation status to be made to the Commission.

Again, the committee members must be reminded that:

- The report as a whole comes from the entire committee.
- The committee should vote on the “spirit” of the Standards and not lower the rating score of a school on a narrow, technical interpretation.
- The test for meeting a Standard is: “the experience of the students is supported.” The test for not meeting a Standard is: “the experience of the students is compromised.”
- A school cannot receive Initial Accreditation unless it meets all Standards with a rating of SM1 or SM2.
- All recommendations must be clearly documented in the narrative and receive the concurrence of the full committee.
- The language and findings of the report should reflect the judgment of the full committee.

Once the Chair has reviewed the draft of all sections of the report in the portal, the committee may be excused with appreciation for their efforts and with a final reminder of the confidentiality of the work. The committee should be told that they will be invited to review the draft of the report for their comment, but that the Chair will exercise final editorial judgment.

**C. After the Visit.** The Chair should check the whole report and make any necessary corrections and edits. As soon as this is finished the Chair should request that the committee members revisit the portal to review the entire report, and respond back to him/her. This should be completed within a week. The Chair should then save the report as a PDF and email it to the Head of School, giving them an additional week to point out factual inaccuracies. Once the Chair has incorporated the requested edits from both the committee members *and* the Head of School in the portal and the report is complete, the Chair should ‘Submit for Final Review’.

Responsibility to the Commission. The Chair is the agent of the Commission, representing the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in the accreditation process.

- A. The Chair is responsible for preparing the Visiting Committee Report and for clearly communicating a recommendation concerning accreditation status. Preparation of the report will be discussed below.
- B. It is important that the Chair complete the report and submit a final copy to the Commission within one month of the conclusion of the visit.
- C. The Chair has a responsibility to evaluate committee members. The Commission relies upon the Chair to assess the suitability of members to serve on future committees. Please complete an Evaluation Form (Appendix R) for every member, and email them to the Commission office with your final report.

### **The Visiting Committee Report**

The Visiting Committee Report is written for two audiences: the school and the Commission.

**The School.** The most important audience is the school community for whom the report validates months of self-study. The report should be written in a fashion which recognizes that it will receive wide distribution within the school community and may even come into the possession of the press. It is an occasion to affirm the school for what it does well and should provide support and assistance to the school's efforts at improvement. To be effective in this latter function, the report must convey understanding and appreciation of the distinctive mission and qualities 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 Commission.** The Visiting 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. The report is the primary source of information the Commission relies upon when taking action. Ultimately, one member of the Commission will present this report to the Commission as a whole. Another member will be assigned as a reader, and the report will also be made available to all Commission members. For these reasons, the report should be comprehensive and self-contained, so that it includes all information necessary for the Commission to make an informed decision. It is essential that recommendations and votes on Standards be clear and well supported by observations, conclusions and explanation of ratings in the body of the report.

## Writing the Report

**Assignments.** At the Sunday orientation meeting, the Chair should confirm the assignments for committee members. Each committee member is responsible for writing one or more sections of the report, including Part II, using the report template (located in our portal at <https://www.accportal.org>). The Chair should remind the committee members that they do not evaluate individual faculty, staff, or administrators; and cannot comment on the performance of individuals or identify anyone by name in the Visiting Committee Report.

The Chair is responsible for completing Standard 1 and often presents this to the committee as a model. Additionally, the Chair of the committee is responsible for combining the drafts from all the members of the committee into one document that speaks with one voice. The Chair will do this after the committee leaves the school.

**Format.** *The Manual for School Evaluation* is intended to provide the structure for both the Self-Study Report and the Visiting Committee Report. As you will see in the portal PDF, the latter report begins with an introduction from NEASC, followed by information obtained from the School Data Sheet of the Self-Study Report which includes the mission statement, history and culture, process followed by the school, and the school findings. After this there is a section for the Visiting Committee to thank the school for its hospitality and give a brief description of the school as the committee experienced it. The Visiting Committee Report should then proceed in the same order as the Self-Study Report, with a chapter for each Standard, and section on Part II, and major commendations and recommendations.

A. **Standards Sections:** There are 15 Standards sections. Each Standards section in the Visiting Committee Report begins with an explanation of each Standard. This is followed by the **Visiting Team's Assessment**. After these two sections there is a section on **Narrative Summary**. This is a brief summary of the school's position with regard to the Standard and may be taken verbatim (in whole or in part), abridged, or adapted from the school's Self-Study Report. Any text copied from the Self-Study Report should be pasted in *italics* in the Visiting Committee Report. Next are **Observations**, which comment on the Visiting Committee's findings based on observations and interviews. **Conclusions and Explanation of Rating** 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. **Commendations** refer to truly outstanding practices or aspects of the school, and are an excellent way to affirm the school and to demonstrate the committee's understanding and appreciation. **Recommendations** identify issues that warrant attention and should not be prescriptive. All unmet Standards must have a related recommendation which identifies the Standard by number and must be addressed by the school within one year. The condition to be addressed, necessary to bring the school into full compliance

with the Standard, should be clearly spelled out in a recommendation and the school should have no difficulty understanding the reason for the decision of the committee.

Recommendations should come from one of three sources:

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.

- B. Section on Self-Study Part II: Reflection, Recommendations, and Issues for Further Discussion: This section follows the last Standards section and begins with an **Overview** that summarizes the school's most significant concerns, hopes, and dreams for the future as explained in its Self-Study Report. Next, **Observations** comment on the areas included in Part II of the Self-Study, the correspondence to priorities perceived by the Visiting Committee, the sufficiency of resources to accomplish plans and intentions, and the process in place to monitor progress. Overarching **Conclusions** are presented next and validate Part II of the Self-Study. (Keep in mind that failure to complete an acceptable Part II may lead to an unmet rating for the school on Standard 15.) **Commendations** and **Recommendations** complete the section on Part II.
- C. Major commendations and recommendations: Major commendations and recommendations appear at the end of the Visiting Committee Report. These are drawn from within the body of the report. The committee should identify up to, but no more than, five major commendations and five major recommendations for which it feels the school should be held accountable at the time of the Interim Evaluation Reports. Schools will often highlight the major commendations and recommendations in public announcements concerning accreditation, so be sure to word them appropriately.

Major recommendations may often tie together several individual recommendations. If the Self-Study Report is done well, these issues will already have been drawn together by the school in its Part II. In this situation, the Visiting Committee will assess the priorities of Part II and whether they correspond to the issues facing the school. If so, the major recommendations of the Visiting Committee may well parallel or endorse the school's own recommendations in Part II. Upon writing the final version of the Visiting Committee Report, the Chair should list the page reference in parentheses after each major recommendation to indicate where the issue is addressed in the body of its report.

**Style.** The Visiting Committee Report should be concise and to the point. The most important stylistic consideration should be attention to the two primary audiences: the school and the Commission. In writing the report, the Visiting Committee should not hesitate to draw on the words of the Self-Study Report, reproducing sections verbatim, as appropriate. The report should be suitable for publication by the school to its constituency,

so careful attention to appearance, grammar and spelling is called for in this regard. In the editing process, it is important to read the report from the perspective of the school and to be sensitive to the choice of words and the phrasing of recommendations. The purpose of the report is to encourage and support action by the school; therefore, the report should be cast in a fashion which will facilitate acceptance by the school community. The second audience is the Commission. In this regard, clarity of description and full explanation of recommendations are the most important qualities.

### **Voting on Standards and Accreditation Status**

The committee must formally rate the school on a 4-point scale on all Standards. The Chair should record these ratings on the **Ratings Table** located under the section **Requested Information Tables** in the portal. Additionally, any Standard with an unmet rating (SU1 or SU2) or any Standard with a difference between the school's self-rating and the committee's rating should be noted on the same form with a page reference to the explanation within the report.

Remind the committee to vote on the "spirit" of the Standards and not penalize a school on a narrow technical interpretation of a Standard if the purpose is being met. The test to be applied for judgment as to whether a Standard is met or unmet is to ask, "Is student experience supported (Standard is met) or compromised (Standard is unmet) by the school's position with regard to this Standard?" The Chair should recognize that one issue may impact multiple Standards, and should approach this circumstance thoughtfully.

The 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:

- 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)
- Denial of Accreditation (this is an adverse recommendation subject to the appeal process of the Association)

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)
- Continued Accreditation on Warning (this is a non-public action which entails a Special Progress Report and Focused Visit)
- Continued Accreditation on Probation (this is a public action which is usually taken only after a period on Warning, and is an adverse recommendation subject to the appeal process of the Association)

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. Warning status is used if a school does not respond adequately to requirements set by the Commission. It indicates that there are serious concerns and there is need for close monitoring by the Commission. This is a private matter between the Commission and the school. Probation status is more serious and it means that there will be a public announcement that the accreditation of the school is probationary. Normally, a school is not put on Probation unless it is already on Warning. In the case of Probation the school is also closely monitored. There is an appeals system available to the school in the case of a recommendation for Probation. Note that the Visiting Committee makes recommendations to the Commission, but the Commission makes the final decision on accreditation status and follow-up requirements for the school.

### **Indemnification and Appeals**

Members of Visiting Committees, in the performance of their duties with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc., are indemnified to the extent legally permissible in the event of any action resulting from this work.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges has a carefully designed “due process” procedure. “Adverse recommendations are defined as, and limited to, denial of candidacy for accreditation, termination of candidacy for accreditation, denial of accreditation, placement on probation, and termination of accreditation. The Board of Trustees shall appoint an Appeals Committee for each Commission whose function shall be to review an adverse recommendation which has been appealed, and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees regarding its disposition.”

The best safeguards against such complications are reports that are meticulously accurate in all facts, are well documented in support of recommendations, and avoid all reference to personalities and comments about individuals. As has been stated previously, names of individuals should not appear in the report.

## Visiting Committee Chair's Checklist

### Prior to the Visit

- Accept invitation to chair committee and confirm with CIS staff any requests for committee make-up
- Register for Chairs' Workshop, unless recently attended
- Receive Chair Kit
- Contact school to arrange for pre-evaluation visit and include Assistant Chair if possible
- Following pre-visit, confirm arrangements with Head of School and Self-Study Coordinator
- Receive final list of committee members
- Survey committee members regarding backgrounds, interests, and computer use
- Send questionnaire, schedule of visit, and other advance information to committee members
- Check in with school three weeks prior to visit
- Plan Sunday afternoon and evening meetings with Visiting Committee
- Plan comments for any Sunday reception and/or Monday assembly at the school
- Arrive early at hotel to greet committee members as they arrive

### During the Visit

- Hold Sunday afternoon/evening introductory meetings; provide final assignments and schedule to Visiting Committee
- Orient Committee to the task of accreditation (see page 4)
- Manage visit, keeping in close touch with Visiting Committee Members and the Head of School
- Set aside time for reflection/discussion on Program Standards and Part II
- Conduct final vote on Standards
- Determine major commendations and recommendations
- Confirm all final drafts have been entered in the portal before members leave on Wednesday, and that each Standard has been 'Marked Complete'
- Collect all expense vouchers (including your own) and turn in to school for processing
- Schedule and plan exit interview with Head of School, other key people chosen by the Head, and one other member of the Visiting Committee

### After the Visit

- Edit report and invite committee members to review the report in the portal within one week
- Email draft report, as a PDF, to Head of School for factual corrections
- Complete final editing of report, based on input from Committee and Head of School
- Click on the 'Submit for Final Review' button in the portal
- Complete documents (Appendices P, Q, and R) and email to CIS office:
  - Letter specifying accreditation recommendation
  - Letter attesting to compliance with health and safety regulations
  - Evaluation forms for Visiting Committee Members



# Commission on Independent Schools

## *The Handbook for Visiting Committee Chairs*

# APPENDIX

The documents listed below include *sample* emails and letters from Chairs of Visiting Committees as well as sample letters sent from/to CIS. Templates for these documents are contained on the USB drive that is included in the Visiting Committee Chair's packet and are also available on our website at <http://cis.neasc.org>

- A..... Email from Chair to Head of School confirming pre-visit date
- B ..... Welcome email from Chair to committee members
- C ..... Email from Chair to Head of School for pre-visit follow-up
- D..... Email from Chair to committee members for pre-visit follow-up
- E ..... Email from CIS to Head of School with complete list of Visiting Committee Members
- F..... Email from CIS to committee members with team list
- G..... Email from Chair to committee members with questionnaire
- H..... Visiting Committee Member Questionnaire
- I..... Email from Chair to committee members with visit details
- J ..... Email from Chair to committee members confirming assignments
- K..... Email from Chair to committee members with schedule for visit
- L ..... Sample schedule for Visiting Committee
- M ..... Evaluated School sample meeting schedule
- N..... Email from Chair to committee members requesting final review of draft report
- O..... Email from Chair to Head of School requesting review of draft report
- P..... Letter from Chair to CIS recommending accreditation action
- Q..... Letter from Chair to CIS re legal and regulatory compliance
- R..... Evaluation Form for Visiting Committee Member (include with final documents)
- S..... Sample Visiting Committee Report Template Pages

## **Appendix A**

Email Confirming Pre-Visit Date

SAMPLE

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee

Sent:

To: Head of School

Cc: Director of the Commission on Independent Schools

Subject: Confirmation of Pre-Visit Date

Thank you for your call. I am looking forward to working with you in the accreditation process, and I have requested that my Assistant Chair will choose to join me.

As agreed, I will be at your school at 10:00 a.m., Monday, {**date**}. Before the day is over I hope we can have a tour of the school grounds, meet with your Self-Study Steering Committee, secure all documentation regarding health and safety requirements, and plan the schedule for the visit.

In the meantime I hope your school year ends on a good note and that the pace of activity will slow down a bit for us all.

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

Welcome!

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Visiting Committee for the decennial review of {**Evaluated School**} on {**dates of visit**}.

Soon you will receive a list of the visiting team members from the NEASC office. The Commission is seeking two more members for the team, but it seems time to say hello and begin to focus some attention on our upcoming visit. I will send along a detailed schedule after our Assistant Chair and I meet with the Principal, on {**date**}.

Meanwhile, I ask you to find some time to familiarize yourself with the CIS Standards as they may be new to you (see: <http://cis.neasc.org/standards-policies/standards-indicators>). As you review the Standards, it will be helpful if you will note and alert me to the particular areas you feel most comfortable covering.

I have spoken to the Principal and they feel the Self-Study Report is near final form. You will receive an email with instructions on how to access the report in the CIS portal as soon as it becomes available. A successful visit depends upon both a good Self-Study and the team's familiarity with it.

Technology is a substantial aid in reducing the busy work of any visit, so we ask that you bring a laptop with you. We will write our reports in the CIS portal, and share and edit them 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 let the office at CIS know before the visit takes place.

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!

## **Appendix C**

Pre-Visit Follow-Up Email to School

SAMPLE

From: Chair of Visiting Committee

Sent:

To: Head of School

Cc: Director of the Commission on Independent Schools

Attached: Tentative Schedule

Subject: Schedule

That was an informative and pleasant meeting we had together this past week. Many thanks for your hospitality and the chance to meet you and your staff under relaxed circumstances.

I believe we made considerable progress in planning the visit and I am attaching a copy of the tentative schedule we worked out. I shall look forward to seeing the completed Self-Study Report and the related documents, including the confidential information. You indicated I would be able to see this material at least one month before the date set for our arrival on campus. I feel after talking to you and your colleagues, I already have a very good picture of the evolution of the school and the direction it is taking.

The evaluation should be an interesting one and a good experience for the school. If there is anything further I should know or receive before my arrival with the Visiting Committee, I hope you will let me know.

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee  
Sent:  
To: Visiting Committee Members  
Subject: Pre-Visit to our school

Our Assistant Chair and I spent yesterday at {**Evaluated School**}, and met with the Principal, the Steering Committee, and the Standards' Chairs. We reviewed the NEASC expectations, set the schedule, and discussed the uniqueness of this school's model. Students took us on a tour of the facility, and we stopped off to check the meeting room at {**Hotel**} where we will be staying.

You will be able to access the completed Self-Study Report once it becomes available on the portal about a month prior to our visit. At this time you will also receive directions to the school and hotel.

You will enjoy meeting this school community.

## Appendix E

Email from CIS to School with Committee List

**Note:** Chairs should not send this email

From: Commission on Independent Schools

Sent:

To: Head of School

Cc: Members of the Visiting Committee

Attachment: List of Visiting Committee Members

Subject: Visiting Committee Complete

I am pleased to inform you that the Visiting Committee for {**Evaluated School**} is complete and I have attached a list of the members with school addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses.

The dates for the evaluation are {**dates**}. I trust that you have discussed the schedule for the visit with the Visiting Committee Chair or plan to do so shortly.

Members of the Visiting Committee will be sent materials from this office. The Chair and team members will have access to the Self-Study Report in the portal prior to the visit. The same confidential and financial information that is given to the Chair of the Visiting Committee (as outlined in the Required Self-Study Documents and Materials of the *Manual for School Evaluation*) should be mailed to the CIS office in hard copy.

If there are any aspects of this evaluation that you feel need to be resolved, or any questions you need to ask, please feel free to contact me.

## Appendix F

Email from CIS to Committee with Team List

**Note:** Chairs should not send this email

From: Commission on Independent Schools  
Sent:  
To: Visiting Committee Members  
Cc: Chair, Visiting Committee  
Subject: Evaluation Visit to {Evaluated School} - Additional Information

Thank you again for agreeing to participate on this visit. Attached is an expense voucher and the current team list. I will be mailing you today, the *Self-Study Overview* and *The Handbook for Visiting Committee Members*. We feel you should have these documents in print, but they can also be found on our website at <http://cis.neasc.org>.

As you know, you will be writing the Visiting Committee Report in a web-based portal. You will receive login information and instructions from our office when the Self-Study Report is finalized in the portal.

Please remember to hand in your expense voucher to the Chair of the team before leaving on Wednesday in order for the school to process your reimbursement. Following the visit, you will receive an online survey about your experience on the team.

Thank you for being a part of this important process.

## Appendix G

Email to Committee with Questionnaire

SAMPLE

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee

Sent:

To: Visiting Committee Members

Cc: Commission on Independent Schools

Attachment: Questionnaire

Subject: Evaluation Visit to {**Evaluated School**} – {**Dates of Visit**}

I am looking forward to working with you on the {**Evaluated School**} evaluation on {**dates of visit**}. Our organizational meeting will be at {**time**} Sunday, {**date**} at the {**hotel**}. At that time there will be a detailed schedule with specific assignments.

Attached is a questionnaire which will help me develop preliminary assignments for our visit. Please send the completed questionnaire back to me as soon as possible. While we are all “generalists” for this visit, 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 Visiting Committee is working in an area of his/her competence and interest.

As soon as the school has submitted their Self-Study Report in the NEASC portal we will all receive an email with information on accessing it. Please read the Self-Study Report carefully and make note of any issues and concerns. We will have a very busy schedule once we arrive at {**Evaluated School**} and we should not still be reading this material for the first time.

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**}.

I look forward to working with you on this important assignment.

**Visiting Committee Member Questionnaire**

**Please return this completed form to me as soon as possible, but not later than {DATE}.**

Please rate each of the areas below as to preference for committee assignment on a 1-5 scale (1-being most desirable; 5-the least desirable).

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| _____ Standard 1 (Mission)                          | _____ Standard 8 (Residential Program and/or Homestay Program) |
| _____ Standard 2 (Governance)                       | _____ Standard 9 (Faculty)                                     |
| _____ Standard 3 (Enrollment)                       | _____ Standard 10 (Administration)                             |
| _____ Standard 4 (Program)                          | _____ Standard 11 (Evaluation and Assessment)                  |
| _____ Standard 5 (Experience of the Students)       | _____ Standard 12 (Health and Safety)                          |
| _____ Standard 6 (Resources to Support the Program) | _____ Standard 13 (Communication)                              |
| _____ Standard 7 (Early Childhood Program)          | _____ Standard 14 (Infrastructure)                             |
|   | _____ Standard 15 (The Accreditation Process)                  |

\_\_\_\_\_ Drafting the report on Part II (The entire Visiting Committee will participate in discussions assessing the plan.)

***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 (eg; IT, Writing, Editing, Other):

Prior Experience on a Visiting Committee:

You will need to bring a laptop (IPads and tablets are harder to type on). 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 I

Email to Committee with Visit Details

SAMPLE

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee  
Sent:  
To: Visiting Committee Members  
Subject: Visit Clarification/Request for Interests

Greetings!

By now you should have received information from the NEASC office regarding the visit, and instructions on accessing the portal. If you have not received this yet, please let me know.

In the portal, read through the Self-Study and report any data you find missing, any information lacking, or other concerns. It is essential that the document clearly and completely convey the scope and mission of the school.

Again, I ask you to review the CIS Standards and let me know which areas you wish to take the lead on. I will allocate the areas in a week or so, and will ask you to become especially familiar with the Self-Study Report and the indicators in certain areas.

Sunday **{date}**. Generally, we expect to arrive approximately one hour prior to our team meeting which is at **{time}** at the hotel. We will arrive at the school for introductions and orientation at **{time}**. This is generally a “meet and greet” gathering to become familiar with the school community.

To economize our time, as soon as we have the team assignments identified, we will schedule meeting times with Department Heads, Curriculum Director, Development, Athletics, Administrative Team, Guidance, Business Office, Facilities, Corporate Liaisons, Activities Coordinators, Student Council, Campus Ministry, Technology, and Accreditation Chairs. Any others come to mind?

A laptop is required to access the portal. Please bring your own or let me know if you would like to borrow one.

Have a great weekend.

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee  
Sent:  
To: Visiting Committee Members  
Subject: Confirmation of Assignments

Hello friends,

Here are the Standards that are assigned to you. Though we will all cooperate in writing the report, you will take the lead in drafting the report sections dealing with the assigned Standards.

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Lead Writer</b>	<b>Assistant Editor</b>
1. Mission		
2. Governance		
3. Enrollment		
4. Program		
5. Experience of the Students		
6. Resources to Support the Program		
7. Early Childhood Program		
8. Residential / Homestay Program		
9. Faculty		
10. Administration		
11. Evaluation / Assessment		
12. Health / Safety		
13. Communication		
14. Infrastructure		
15. Accreditation Process		

Writing an effective 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 particular Standard, and then become comfortable with the writing sample for a Visiting Committee Report. Samples can be found on the NEASC website at <https://cis.neasc.org/resources-evaluators/chairs>.

Consistency, clarity, and conciseness are the best virtues to practice in writing a meaningful Visiting Committee Report. I have found the writing samples very helpful in structuring and formatting the report.

Have the best weekend.

## Appendix K

Email to Committee with Visit Schedule

SAMPLE

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee

Sent:

To: Visiting Committee Members

Subject: Gearing Up

Attachment: Schedule for the Visit

Okay team, it's time to pack up the car for our visit.

Attached is the schedule for the visit. Experience tells us that this will get adjusted as we move through our visit, but it serves as a good place to start. At our request, the Head of School has done a great job in pre-scheduling meetings for you with the appropriate personnel on Monday and Tuesday.

Please, read through those Standards again for which you will take the lead on and think about how the report on that section might appear. Remember, the team is responding to what our school says about itself. The NEASC process is always oriented toward school improvement, and our primary task is to help the school achieve its mission. When writing your sections, you will directly copy the text from their report (in *italics* when quoting directly; and/or note places that you will have truncated), and then give the team's reflection below that. Concise reports are always appreciated.

Thanks so much for your willingness to participate in the peer evaluation process. It is always a profitable experience. I look forward to meeting you Sunday at **{hotel, address and phone.}** Our first meeting will be at **{time}**.

Safe travels.

**Sample Schedule for Visiting Committee  
{Evaluated School}**

<b>Sunday</b>	
2:00 p.m.	Committee members arrive at the hotel
3:00 p.m.	Organizational meeting at the hotel. Please be prompt!
5:00 p.m.	Orientation meeting at school: Presentation / Discussion of Mission / Campus Tour
6:00 p.m.	Reception hosted by the school for the full committee and members of faculty, administrative team, trustees, and some parents and students.
7:00 p.m.	Dinner for full committee and members of the school community to be determined by the Head of School and the Visiting Committee Chair.
8:30 p.m.	Visiting Committee reconvenes. Follow-up to campus visit. Extended discussion of first draft of the Standards, in particular, Standard 1: Mission.
<b>Monday</b>	
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.	Luncheon in the school dining hall
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 at the hotel. Brief reports on all Standards and suggested ratings. Extended discussion of Program Standards (4-6).
<b>Tuesday</b>	
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 Standards. Extended discussion of Part II and any recommendations for additions/revisions to it.
<b>Wednesday</b>	
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 M**  
Sample Meeting Schedule

**Evaluated School Sample Meeting Schedule**

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 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 pre-visit, the Chair should discuss with the Head of School how to best schedule the large group meetings: Board Members, Parents, and Alumni. 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, ideally those with responsibility for the Standards impacted by the school constituencies present. 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 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 will need to provide the Chair with information regarding both teacher availability and space availability.

<b>Time</b>	<b>School Group</b>	<b>Visiting Committee</b>	<b>Location</b>
8:00-8:40	Parent Group	Alan, Bob, Carol	Cafeteria
	Mrs. Jones, School Nurse	Diana	Nurse's Office
	Mr. Ki, Business Manager	Ellen, Fran	Business Office
	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

Some Chairs post in the on-site workroom a roster of all school personnel. Visiting team members can then indicate when they have met with a teacher or staff member. Some Chairs also ask visiting team members to notate which classrooms have been observed.

From: Chair of the Visiting Committee  
Sent:  
To: Visiting Committee Members  
Subject: Final Review of Draft Report

Please go back into the portal to read the Visiting Committee draft report for accuracy. It is important that you review the report and get back to me either by phone or email with any comments you have — 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. It will also be sent to the school for an accuracy review.

Please remember that Visiting Committee Reports are privileged communications and become the property of the school visited.

## **Appendix O**

Email to Head of School with Draft Report

SAMPLE

From: Chair of Visiting Committee

Sent:

To: Head of School

Cc: Director of Commission on Independent Schools

Subject: Draft Report

I have attached a draft PDF of the Visiting Committee Report and, before putting it in final form, I would ask that you review it for factual accuracy. Please get back to me with any comments you have. If I have not heard from you within one week, I will assume that you have not found any errors.

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 reaction to the report and any comments you may wish to make about the work of the Visiting Committee.

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.

***Chair's Letterhead***

Date

Mr. Jay S. Stroud  
Director of the Commission  
Commission on Independent Schools  
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.  
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100  
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Jay:

The Visiting Committee that conducted the evaluation of {school, city, state} for purposes of {initial membership} {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 recommendations)

- Granted Accreditation
- Granted Accreditation and some specific stipulation
- Tabled pending completion of a specific response from the school
- Denied Accreditation  
(This is an adverse recommendation and is subject to the appeal process of the Association.)

(For a school seeking Continued Accreditation, choose one of the following recommendations)

- Granted Continued Accreditation
- Granted Continued Accreditation and some specific stipulation
- Granted Continued Accreditation and placed on Warning  
(This is a non-public action which entails a Special Progress Report and Focused Visit.)
- Placed on Probation  
(This is a public action which is usually taken only after a period on Warning. This is an adverse recommendation and is subject to the appeal process of the Association.)

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

Respectfully submitted,

Chair of the Visiting Committee

## Appendix Q

Letter to CIS for Regulatory Compliance

### *Chair's Letterhead*

Date

Mr. Jay S. Stroud  
Director of the Commission  
Commission on Independent Schools  
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.  
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100  
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Jay:

As Chair of the Visiting Committee for {**Evaluated School**}, 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 at 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 child care facilities
- For Vermont Schools only: Additional Regulatory Compliance Documents for Vermont Schools

Sincerely,

Chair of the Visiting Committee

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?**

## Appendix S

Sample Visiting Committee Report Template Pages – Page 1

### Visiting Committee Report Template Sample Standard Page

**Standard 1 (Mission):** There is congruence between the school’s stated mission and core values and its actual program, policies, planning, and decision-making at both the operational and governance levels.

Assessment of Standard	
Met <i>(The students’ experience is supported.)</i>	Unmet <i>(The students’ experience is compromised.)</i>
SM1. Standard Met: evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.	SU1. Standard Unmet: evidences inadequate understanding, implementation and planning for remediation that may foreseeably compromise student experience.
SM2. Standard Met: evidences understanding, evolving implementation and planning for improvement.	SU2. Standard Unmet: lacks understanding, implementation and planning for remediation, thereby compromising student experience.

School’s Self-Assessment \_\_\_\_\_

Visiting Team’s Assessment \_\_\_\_\_

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 Report.)

Observations

Conclusions and Explanation of Rating

Commendations

1.

Recommendations

1. To endorse a recommendation of the school
2. To more fully meet the Standard
3. To resolve discrepancy between policy and practice

**Visiting Committee Report Template**  
**Sample Self-Study Part II:**  
**Reflection, Recommendations, and Issues for Further Discussion**

Overview (Part II asks the school to draw together what it has learned from its self-study and prioritize these ideas into a thoughtful, reflective, creative summary of the school’s most significant concerns, hopes, and dreams for the future. This may include both action items and discussion items. You may take descriptive paragraphs directly from the Self-Study Report if they accurately describe the school’s findings.)

Observations (Include comments on the areas included in Part II, the correspondence to priorities perceived by the Visiting Committee, the sufficiency of resources to accomplish plans and intentions, and the process in place to monitor progress.)

Conclusions

Commendations

1.

Recommendations

1.

**Appendix S**

Sample Visiting Committee Report Template Pages – Page 3

**Visiting Committee Report Template  
Sample Ratings Table for Assessment of Standards**

The Visiting Committee must rate the school by placing an X in the appropriate rating box for all applicable Standards. For unmet ratings (SU1 or SU2), please also note page references from your report in the *Unmet Ratings* column. For any Visiting Committee's ratings that differ from the school's self-rating, please use the *Differing Ratings* column to note page references.

Standard	Rating				Unmet Ratings (List page number)	Differing Ratings (List page number)
	SM1	SM2	SU1	SU2		
1 – Mission						
2 – Governance						
3 – Enrollment						
4 – Program						
5 – Experience of the Students						
6 – Resources to Support the Program						
7 – Early Childhood Program						
8 – Residential Program and/or Homestay Program						
9 – Faculty						
10 – Administration						
11 – Evaluation and Assessment						
12 – Health and Safety						
13 – Communication						
14 – Infrastructure						
15 – The Accreditation Process						

## Dos and Don'ts for Visiting Committee Chairs

### Do

Be organized and prepared

Read *The Handbook for Visiting Committee Chairs*

Make initial contact with the school and the Visiting Committee

Explain the post-visit process to the school's Head

Check in with the hotel a few days before arriving

Use the templates provided in the appendices

Appropriately assign sections of the report to committee members

Dress professionally

Find a leadership role for your Assistant Chair

Keep socializing with the school and among committee members to a minimum

Give the committee some down time – remember balance

Thoroughly explain committee duties

Be open and personable

Pay attention to the tenor of the relationship between the committee and school

Offer constructive feedback

Practice the leadership qualities that made you successful

Block out time after the visit to finish the draft

Remember the purpose of accreditation is for school improvement

Take the mission section yourself

Have fun!

### Don't

Delegate to a secretary

Procrastinate – people are waiting for your call/email

Wing it – even if you've chaired before

Assume you'll remember everything that must be done

Recreate the "wheel"

Assume that you'll have time later

Take more than the mission section yourself – you'll need the time to help the committee members and solve problems

Lose track of the committee's progress

Give the committee members too much to do or work them to death

Assume they understand everything they're responsible for

Hide in the workroom

Be surprised upon arriving

Ignore how important a positive visit is for the school and your committee

Think this is vacation

Take it all on yourself

Assume all team members are good writers

Ignore the impact of good leadership

Discuss votes with school staff or make promises of accreditation

Forget that it's ultimately about the students

Hesitate to call Commission staff with any questions

# **New England Association of Schools and Colleges**

## **Commission on Independent Schools**

3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100  
Burlington, MA 01803-4514  
781-425-7700  
Fax 781-425-1001  
<http://cis.neasc.org>

**Individual contact information for Commission staff is on our website:**

<http://cis.neasc.org/about/staff>

