

Guidelines for the Self-Study

The Self-Study is an exercise in thoughtful reflection, analysis and strategic planning. It presupposes work done in advance that provides background information. The Self-Study should be inclusive of all faculty and should engage others as the school deems appropriate. The Self-Study Report consists of two parts: (1) review and documentation of compliance with the NEASC Standards and (2) reflection, formulation of recommendations, and identifying issues for further discussion in response to the findings of the Self-Study Committees.

Preparation for the Self-Study

Prior to beginning the Self-Study the school must gather background information that will inform the work of the committees, as follows:

1. **The Mission.** The school should review the existing mission statement through an inclusive process and revise as needed.
2. **The Curriculum.** The school must have in place a description of the curriculum in a format appropriate to the school. At the minimum, the curriculum needs to address issues of continuity and coherence, serve as a basis for curriculum discussion and development, provide guidance for new teachers, and present information for prospective families.
3. **Reflection on Major Programs.** Committees, including a range of perspectives, should be formed to examine each major program area (subject areas, departments, and core non-academic programs) and write a brief report commenting on:
 - a. The contribution to the mission of the school
 - b. The consistency of activities with the school's beliefs about teaching and learning
 - c. Planned continuity across grade levels
 - d. Coordination with the school's stated curriculum plan
 - e. Appropriateness of offerings for the full range of the student body
 - f. Pedagogical methods used
 - g. Contribution of the area to achieving the school's goals for students and students' goals for themselves
 - h. Adequacy of available resources
 - i. Professional development opportunities provided
 - j. Strengths/weaknesses and areas in need of improvement

These reports will be uploaded to the portal as part of Standard 4. They will provide the basis for the school's overall response to Standards 4, 5, and 6 in the Self-Study Report.

4. **Surveys.** Schools will survey parents, faculty, and students. Secondary grades will also survey alumni/ae. The school may design its own surveys, but should include questions based on the survey questions suggested by NEASC. The results should be summarized, given to all Self-Study Committees, and included in the supplementary materials for the Visiting Committee.

5. Statistics. The school will compile statistics on admissions and on student performance.
6. Documents. The school will gather together existing policy documents, plans, and handbooks.
7. Finances. The school will prepare historical information (for at least two prior years) on school finances and will schedule a financial review or audit by an independent accountant or arrange for an approved alternative report on finances.

Self-Study School Data Sheet

The school must complete the School Data Sheet, which includes writing a brief introduction to the Self-Study that provides a narrative description of the history, mission, and culture of the school. This is intended to give an introduction to the school to the Visiting Committee, and the Commission when they review the Self-Study Report. Parts of it may be copied and included in the Visiting Committee Report.

Self-Study Part I: Reviewing the Standards

Each Standard must be addressed separately in the Self-Study Report (see *Manual for School Evaluation* for a Part I sample template page). The school should appoint a number of Self-Study Committees, each responsible for one or more Standards. The Self-Study Committee(s) for the overall Program Standards (4, 5, and 6) will include representatives from all major program areas. The committees should proceed as follows:

1. Gather and review relevant information from program committee reports, surveys, handbooks, policy manuals, compilations of data, etc.
2. Discuss the Standard and suggested indicators, identify other possible indicators relevant to the school, assess compliance with the Standard, and identify questions to be asked and people to be interviewed.
3. Interview individuals and convene groups to discuss the school's compliance with the Standard and to explore further actions that the school might take in this regard.
4. Draft the section of the Self-Study Report for the Standard. It should include five elements:
 - a. A narrative description of the school's position with regard to the Standard
 - b. A description of the process followed by the committee in inquiring into the Standard, committee membership, and meeting dates
 - c. Documentation that the Standard is met or a detailed explanation of proposed steps to bring the school into compliance, the resources available, and the timetable for this to be accomplished
 - d. Rating of the school on the degree to which it meets the Standard
 - e. Recommendations for ways in which the school might strengthen itself in regard to the Standard

Self-Study Part II: Reflection, Recommendations, and Issues for Further Discussion

An assignment as comprehensive and self-reflective as the preparation of Part I of the Self-Study will generate a variety of future oriented questions, concerns, ideas, recommendations, and commitments from those who participate in drafting it and those who review it before submission to NEASC. Part II of the Self-Study (see *Manual for School Evaluation* for the template sample) asks the school to draw together and prioritize these ideas into a thoughtful, reflective, creative summary of the school's most significant concerns, hopes and dreams for the future.

Part II of the Self-Study is intended to be a macro-look at major findings, presented in a one to three page report. The school may present its findings in any of several formats:

- As recommendations that are *self-identified* and are action-oriented
- As issues for further discussion in which the goal is to extend important conversations generated by the Self-Study
- As a combination of both action items and discussion items

Key elements to discuss within the report are:

- Report of major findings and conclusions
- Prioritization of the findings with explanation
- Specific action items for any Standard(s) on which the school rates itself as SU1 or SU2 (see note below)
- Overview of implementation strategies to address the conclusions, including:
 - Part II committee membership
 - Meeting schedule
 - Timeline
 - Any specific procedures

Part II of the Self-Study, once completed, becomes a central resource for future planning at the school. Quite often, it will evolve nicely into the school's next Multi-Year Strategic Plan. In the short run, it is a vital resource to the school's advancement team.

Note on unmet Standards: Specific action items must be presented in Part II for any Standard on which the school rates itself as SU1 or SU2. A Special Progress Report followed by a staff visit will be assigned to be due within one year.

Assessment of 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 its visit, the Visiting Committee also rates the school on every Standard. When the Committee's ratings differ from the school's rating, the Committee will explain its conclusions.

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.

Review and Edit

The school might consider asking an outside reader (an alumnus/a, trustee, retired teacher, parent or other knowledgeable person who was not actively involved in the Self-Study) to review the final draft for clarity and completeness.

Letter from Head of School & Completion of Self-Study 4-6 Weeks Prior to the Visit Date

At least one month before the visit, the school will complete the Self-Study Report in the portal. Documents such as the staff list, daily program schedule (including teacher assignments to tentatively schedule classroom visits and interviews) and directions to the school and hotel may be attached in the portal. The Head of School's welcome letter to the team may be emailed and copied to the Commission at cis@neasc.org. An *optional* hard copy confidential letter to the Chair, with financial or sensitive information, should **only** be sent to the Chair and the Commission office.