



Commission on Independent Schools

Manual for School Improvement

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Commission on Independent Schools

Mission Statement

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

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Introduction

Accredited schools commit themselves, above all, to their students. Their entire reason for being is the healthy development of children and young people. Adults in NEASC schools should constantly seek the most effective ways to achieve this goal.

The Accreditation process, therefore, begins with internal conversations about the school's work with students and expands to discussion of the school and its future. How do our students learn most effectively? How do we know? Do we reach all of our kids equally well? Is our faculty really engaged with the most up-to-date scholarship in their field? Do they understand how students are motivated? Do both adults and students understand how to set goals and measure progress? Does our faculty understand how to balance rigor and compassion? Is our school as safe and secure as it can possibly be? Is our school sustainable? Are our students reaching their hopes and achieving their potential?

By agreeing to common standards and undertaking peer review, CIS Member Schools aim to ask the most important educational questions, constantly review their current responses and seek objective perspective. Accreditation begins with informal conversation around these questions and ends with formally reviewed documentation of current practice and strategic plans.

While school improvement should be constant, achieving accreditation requires a beginning, a middle and an end. Careful organization, comprehensive evidence and thoughtful discussion demonstrate the achievement of NEASC Standards. The early conversations evolve, through the work of accreditation, into a vision and then a Strategic Plan. This *Manual for School Improvement* distinguishes the perpetual goals of Accreditation from the specific requirements of its achievement and intends to guide schools through the questions to stimulate sustainable, constant advancement.

CIS Standards intend both to set a bar for genuine achievement and, simultaneously, to encourage aspirational intention. Schools meeting the objectives of the Standards understand the importance of both achievement and aspiration. An accredited school is a safe place always striving to be safer. An accredited school provides professional development for faculty and staff and endlessly seeks to improve. An accredited school is sustainable while constantly searching to widen its scope and strengthen its foundation.

CIS Standards are phrased in general terms like "sufficient," "appropriate," "comprehensive" and "adequate," and the reality of these terms should be read in the context of the school's mission and practice. Schools working with children with special needs, for instance, will have high staff levels (or low student-to-faculty ratios). Schools offering outdoor leadership programs require specific faculty training that might be entirely unnecessary in other schools. "Sufficient" for one school or activity may mean very different things in another context. The importance of mission cannot be over-emphasized when interpreting the meaning of the Standards' language and the capacity of a school to meet the Standards.

CIS Standards require schools both to demonstrate clear adherence to the Standards' intentions and to recognize and respect the diversity of independent approaches to education. Accredited CIS schools adhere to differing philosophies and their missions encompass a variety of approaches to helping students achieve a thorough and thoughtful education.

CIS Standards require schools to understand the essential nature of education: the absolute necessity for adherence to the highest objective standards of safety, knowledge, understanding and requirement and an indispensable respect for the distinct individuality of each student. Objectivity without understanding can be cruel; understanding without objectivity can be careless. One hallmark of an excellent teacher is his or her capacity to maintain this balance.

Reliance on good judgment and reflective experience remains a strength of CIS Accreditation. It is, however, challenging to "standardize" good judgment and reflection. Evidence to support the Standards is derived from observation, analysis and data-driven surveys. "Safety," for instance, is measured both objectively – completion of required health and fire inspections – and descriptively in a thoughtful, thorough and practiced crisis management plan. The Self-Study, in this regard, is both a quantitative and a qualitative project. No formula dictates the percentage of any Self-Study that should contain a particular kind of proof or confirmation; the intent should be to present the most helpful and most accurate evidence. While individual opinions have value, the Self-Study should seek the "preponderance of the evidence."

Few days pass in any school when the faculty and administration are not confronting novel or unusual circumstances. "Standards" in an accredited school should demonstrate its characteristic approaches to analyzing and working through challenges and opportunities. Accreditation is as much about how a school manages unique events and personalities as it is about the carefully planned and thoroughly documented programs.

NEASC Accreditation documentation is divided into "Standards" and "Indicators." The Standards state the over-all goal. The Indicators are key components of each Standard. The term "indicator" is chosen deliberately to point out essential elements of a larger concept. In some schools, alternative indicators may be required to demonstrate a Standard has been met. In some schools, certain indicators may not be relevant. In either case, the school should clearly discuss the reasons for including or excluding a particular indicator as part of the narrative.

Sometimes, schools choose to work one by one through the Indicators, making appropriate responses to each. However, it will be far more helpful in the long run to synthesize the collected information and write a comprehensive, succinct and holistic response to each of the Standards.

In this context, schools should aim to build their Self-Study responses around the most telling details and specific examples rather than attempting to bludgeon the Standard into submission with extensive narration.

**Foundation, Program and Strategic Planning
Standards and Indicators**

Foundation Standards and Indicators

1. Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission

- 1.a. The enrollment process aligns with the Mission and values of the school.
- 1.b. The school identifies and addresses current enrollment trends and challenges.
- 1.c. The school articulates its “value proposition” in light of enrollment, Mission and societal trends.
- 1.d. Enrollment decisions create tuition revenue adequate to sustain the school’s financial viability.
- 1.e. If applicable, the school understands and addresses boarding/homestay trends.
- 1.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Marketing/Enrollment Plan
- B. Current printed admissions materials and/or link to online site
- C. Student/parent contract(s)
- D. Statement of Financial Aid policies and procedures
- E. Non-discrimination Policy (may be included in other materials)
- F. Parent and Student Handbooks

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

- 2.a. With consideration of ‘best practices,’ the Governing Body/Board understands and carries out its responsibilities including overseeing:
- Mission
 - Value Proposition/Educational quality
 - Fiscal integrity
 - Appropriate support for the Head of School
 - Continuous Planning, always with a three-to-five-year horizon
- 2.b. The Governing Body/Board effectively assesses its governance practices.
- 2.c. The Governing Body/Board manages its own leadership transition effectively.
- 2.d. The Governing Body/Board uses effective policies and procedures to identify, select and mentor new members.
- 2.e. The Governing Body/Board seeks balanced membership representing the diversity of the community and key areas of expertise, interest and abilities.
- 2.f. The Governing Body/Board accurately identifies and addresses significant issues affecting the school’s future.
- 2.g. The Governing Body/Board appropriately and effectively communicates decisions and actions to the school community.
- 2.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Governing Body/Board roster indicating length of service
- B. Current By-Laws
- C. Minutes of two recent meetings
- D. Governing Body/Board Self-Evaluation Instrument
- E. Head Evaluation Process/Instrument
- F. Corporate Status as a tax-exempt institution, if applicable
- G. Conflict of Interest Policy for Board members

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

- 3.a. The school preserves, manages and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support and advance its Mission.
- 3.b. Based on Annual Report Data and/or other reliable studies, the school accurately identifies current and long-term financial realities and challenges and has a capacity to respond to fiscal emergencies or unforeseen circumstances.
- 3.c. The school's facilities appropriately support the students and programs.
- 3.d. The school undertakes appropriate and effective facilities planning to address needed, intended and/or desired improvements and maintenance.
- 3.e. Technology infrastructure adequately supports both the educational program and institutional operation.
- 3.f. The school's development/advancement program identifies short and long-term goals and strives to achieve them.
- 3.g. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

(These financial documents are confidential and, as such, should be sent separately to the Chair of the visit and to the NEASC office prior to the Foundation Visit.)

- A. The school must provide ONE of the following at the time of the Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report and at the Foundation Visit (presented in order of preference and dependent upon the school's resources):
 - Opinion Audit
 - Reviewed Financial Statements with Management Letter
 - If a Catholic School, a Diocesan Review of School Finances
- B. Annual Budget for most recently completed year (prior to Foundation Visit)
- C. Written Financial Plan including Three to Five-Year Projection
- D. Report summarizing annual giving/voluntary support for most recently completed year
- E. Insurance Safety Audit/Risk Management Report
- F. Insurance policies/plans
- G. Salary table for full-time faculty listing only the low, median and high salary
- H. List of Benefits

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

- 4.a. Personnel and hiring policies and procedures effectively and ethically ensure that all employees can support the school's Mission and culture.
- 4.b. The school has specific, inviolable procedures to check the legal and professional background of all employees and of the other adults who may come into regular contact with students.
- 4.c. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current employee roster, including roles and responsibilities, length of service and professional qualifications
- B. Organizational chart(s) and/or protocols setting out lines of communication and areas of responsibility
- C. Examples of each type of faculty/staff/administrative contract
- D. For the Chair of the Visiting Team and NEASC Staff only: Confidential Salary Documentation
- E. Faculty Handbook(s)
- F. Faculty Code of Conduct or similar document (if separate from E above)
- G. List of materials consistently maintained in personnel files

5. A Proactive Culture of Health and Safety Permeates the School

- 5.a. The school's culture of health and safety reflects the intentions of the *NEASC/CIS Health and Safety Considerations*.
- 5.b. In its annual review of the *NEASC/CIS Health and Safety Considerations*, the school has a process in place to accurately and regularly identify and address any area(s) warranting immediate and/or long-term attention.
- 5.c. School leadership clearly and specifically cultivates a culture of health and safety within the entire school community.
- 5.d. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Crisis Management Plan/Protocols including up-to-date communications and contact information.
- B. Compliance Documentation including:
 - Current fire inspections for each facility
 - Food Service certification (i.e. cleanliness, safe-handling, health inspection)
 - Medical facility inspection as required (state and local requirements vary)
 - As required by state or locale, any additional necessary testing (i.e. water at tap, radon, asbestos, carbon monoxide)
 - Schedule of fire drills and lockdown/campus emergency and safety activity – both completed for the most recent year and planned for the current one
 - Documentation around individual activities where specialized health and safety considerations are necessary (i.e. waterfront and pool areas, sports practices and games, field trips and off-campus trips, international travel and immunizations)
 - Policy on acquisition of current student health records
 - Statement from the Head of School that the school's Emergency Plan is complete and has been submitted to the appropriate local officials
 - State compliance documentation for programs serving students under the age of three (if applicable)

Note: To determine compliance with local, state and federal health and safety requirements, schools must consult legal counsel. NEASC Accreditation does NOT provide indemnification nor explicit or implied approval for any school activity, program or facility. The Visiting Committee or NEASC Staff Visit and Report are peer reviews only and not legal documentation. NEASC written or verbal communication never substitutes for or replaces local, state or federal legal requirements.

6. Proprietary Schools Ensure Effective Leadership, Clear Organizational Structure, and the Necessary Resources to Successfully Execute the Mission of the School for the Foreseeable Future. *(This Standard applies to for-profit schools only. Not-for-profit schools need not respond.)*

- 6.a. The owner and governing body share the values and Mission of the school and are committed to long-term growth.
- 6.b. The owner/governing body establishes and maintains policy-making processes with provisions for the participation of all stakeholders, as appropriate.
- 6.c. The school establishes and follows policies applicable to ownership that address conflicts of interest and provide protection against malfeasance by persons exercising control over the school.
- 6.d. There is a clear description for legal and tax purposes of the school's form of organization, and a clear organizational chart that defines the roles and responsibilities of the school's owner/governing body, administration, faculty and staff.
- 6.e. One person is designated as the chief administrator (Head, Principal, President, etc.) of the school; this person may be the owner.
- 6.f. The designated chief administrator is evaluated on an annual basis.
- 6.g. The Governing Body/Board includes members who represent the public interest, who have no contractual, employment or personal financial interest in the institution. Public representatives should be free from present or potential conflict of interest.
- 6.h. The school has a provision for thoughtful, deliberate and transparent leadership transition. This is particularly important when the school leader and school owner are the same person.

Required Materials:

(These financial documents are confidential and, as such, should be sent separately to the Chair of the visit and to the NEASC office prior to the Foundation Visit.)

The school should have an outside third party (auditor) write a letter speaking specifically to the following two aspects of the school:

- 1. Reasonable assurance that the school has the assets available to sustain operation of the school for the foreseeable future (which include a current asset-to-liability ratio).
- 2. Assurances that the school has the systems in place to manage its finances appropriately.

This could include:

- Tax Returns for the organization, or its parent company or owner, for the most recent fiscal year
- Internal Trial Balance for most recently closed fiscal year

An annual audit (see below) is the best way to secure information in both areas.

- Should this involve a Parent Corporation, this corporation can give the school a copy of its annual audited statement for the corporation, and then separate financial documents (budget, P&L, etc.) for the school itself. Occasionally, schools are audited independent of the Parent Corporation.
- Should the Parent Corporation refuse to submit an audit, it must provide a letter from its auditor assuring that the school appropriately addresses the concerns noted above about the school.

Accreditation through the Commission on Independent Schools is granted expressly to a particular institution with clearly defined and identified ownership and/or control. A change in ownership or control automatically results in a self-executing, immediate discontinuance of accreditation unless the new owner or controlling authority provides adequate written assurance and evidence that the standards of the Commission will be maintained. Such assurances will be validated by a Focused Review Committee appointed by the Commission to visit the institution at a time designated by the Commission.

Program Standards and Indicators

As schools undergo the accreditation process, the NEASC standards should be considered within the context of all students, prekindergarten through graduation. We recognize that the governance, infrastructure, culture and climate support and facilitate the growth of all students regardless of age. There is no specific standard for preschool programs, defined for NEASC purposes of accreditation as programs meeting the needs of three-year and four-year-old children.

7. Commitment to Mission and Core Beliefs Informs Decisions, Guides Initiatives and Aligns with the Students' Needs and Aspirations

- 7.a. Mission permeates the school's culture and climate.
- 7.b. The school annually assesses the Mission's relevance.
- 7.c. The school effectively communicates the Mission to faculty, students, families and the larger community.
- 7.d. Internal and external communications genuinely reflect the Mission and Core Values.
- 7.e. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Mission Statement
- B. Other guiding documents if applicable:
 - Statement of Core Values/Beliefs/Philosophy
 - Statement of Vision
 - Value Proposition

8. Commitment to Inspiration and Support Characterizes the Approach to Each Student

- 8.a. Students learn the personal qualities necessary to achieve independence and develop confidence.
- 8.b. The school recognizes, values and nurtures the unique reality of every student at each stage of his/her development.
- 8.c. School culture promotes and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.
- 8.d. The faculty regularly monitors each student's social and emotional development.
- 8.e. Students' perspectives and opinions are appropriately heard and addressed.
- 8.f. Students and parents as necessary can access support to address their respective needs.
- 8.g. Students are encouraged to engage actively in the life of the school.
- 8.h. The school strives to understand and respond to the realities of students' social and emotional experiences within and outside the school.
- 8.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. School Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Survey (if appropriate and/or completed)
- B. Documentation describing specific services, programs or activities such as:
 - Learning Support services
 - Language Support services
 - Counseling and guidance support services
 - Testing and placement – courses, programs, college application
 - Other programs specific to the school

9. Commitment to Excellence Distinguishes the Program

- 9.a. The school's culture nurtures and promotes program excellence, in particular the academic program.
- 9.b. The program consistently reflects the Mission.
- 9.c. Curriculum planning supports the school's core beliefs and the needs of the students.
- 9.d. Written curriculum aligns horizontally and vertically, and faculty have time to discuss curriculum alignment.
- 9.e. Current research about subject matter and pedagogy informs the program and instructional practices.
- 9.f. Media and technology resource services support the program and meet the needs of the students and faculty.
- 9.g. Faculty use effective assessment to promote learning and monitor growth.
- 9.h. The program supports a range of learning styles and developmental levels.
- 9.i. Every aspect of the program reflects awareness of and commitment to equity, justice and inclusion.
- 9.j. The school's international programs or partnerships (if applicable) are aligned with the school's Mission and meet the needs of all engaged in or affected by them.
- 9.k. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current written curriculum/curriculum guide
- B. List/examples of assessment tools/methods demonstrating student progress
- C. Documentation detailing any specific provisions for international students

10. Commitment to Continuous Professional Development Permeates the Adult Culture

- 10.a. The school values and encourages research, reflection and innovation.
- 10.b. The school fosters positive relationships and thoughtful professional collaboration.
- 10.c. Successful professional development planning aligns the needs of the school and the individual teachers at all career stages.
- 10.d. The school's leadership and faculty participate in NEASC peer review and visits.
- 10.e. The school's professional evaluation and assessment of all personnel assures effective implementation of their responsibilities.
- 10.f. School personnel understand their decision-making roles and responsibilities.
- 10.g. Lines of authority and communication are clear and effective.
- 10.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. List of effective and completed professional development opportunities provided to faculty and staff for the past three years
- B. List of current faculty, administration and staff who have participated in NEASC Visiting Teams in the past five years
- C. Evaluation/assessment documents/protocols for faculty, administration and staff

11. Commitment to Engaging with the Greater Community Enhances Student Experience

- 11.a. The school effectively communicates and collaborates with families around their children's development.
- 11.b. The school and the local community interact to their mutual benefit.
- 11.c. The school effectively engages with its alumni and friends.
- 11.d. The school is committed to broadening students' perspectives.
- 11.e. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Examples of communication with alums and parents

12. Commitment to Meeting the Needs of Each Student Drives the Residential Program

- 12.a. The Residential Program is consistent with the Mission of the school.
- 12.b. Residential staff are appropriately qualified and assigned to meet the needs of students under their care and supervision.
- 12.c. The Residential Program, including evening, weekend and vacation activities is integrated into the total life of the school, especially regarding the interaction with day students.
- 12.d. The school provides for the needs of a wide range of students.
- 12.e. The residential spaces have technology infrastructure and support, with a process to ensure that policies and procedures are consistent with the school's overall technology plan and acceptable use policy.
- 12.f. There are clearly stated, written, and understood expectations for residential students and staff.
- 12.g. Students are included periodically in planning and developing policies, expectations and programs.
- 12.h. Residential staff are appropriately housed in ways which enhance the experience of the students, faculty and families.
- 12.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Residential Student Handbook (if separate from Student Handbook)
- B. Faculty or staff materials specific to the Residential Program
- C. Copy of weekend activities calendar

13. Commitment to the Health and Well-Being of Each Student Guides the School's Homestay Program

- 13.a. The school is ultimately responsible for the health and well-being of each homestay student and assigns appropriate school personnel to assure this.
- 13.b. The Homestay Program is consistent with the Mission of the school.
- 13.c. The school has a formal understanding with homestay families if there is a direct placement or with an agency that provides homestay placements. This understanding should detail the ethical and legal responsibilities of the school, the host families and the students.
- 13.d. The school can assure that homestay facilities are safe and clean and provide sufficient and appropriate living space.
- 13.e. There is a clearly defined process in place to assure appropriate screening of host families including background checks, and a process for matching student and family interests.
- 13.f. The school has clearly stated, written, and understood expectations for the school, host families, and students regarding the student academic program and experiences both during the school week and on weekends and vacations, and these expectations and responsibilities are published and disseminated in a school handbook.
- 13.g. The school has a well-defined process to include students, host families and appropriate school personnel to regularly review the Homestay Program and the experience of the students.
- 13.h. The school has procedures in place to integrate international and other students living in homestay situations into the school's social and academic fabric.
- 13.i. Students are included periodically in planning and developing policies, expectations, and programs.
- 13.j. The school ensures that homestay students have a family experience and their social and personal lives outside of school are both safe and rewarding.
- 13.k. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Agency contract
- B. International Student Handbook

Strategic Planning Standard and Indicators

14. Commitment to Long-Term Viability and Innovation Guides Planning

- 14.a. The school engages in thoughtful, realistic, thorough and continuous planning.
- 14.b. The school conducts research and collects data that informs planning.
- 14.c. Goals and plans are appropriately adjusted in light of actual experience and unanticipated realities.
- 14.d. The school clearly identifies challenges that must be addressed to insure sustainability.
- 14.e. The school possesses the capacity, competence and commitment to effect its goals.
- 14.f. The school considers issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in its planning.
- 14.g. The school celebrates accomplishments and programs contributing to identity and legacy.
- 14.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Strategic Plan

Guide to Assessing the Standards

Given that we are all teachers and administrators, it is difficult not to think of the Assessment of Standards as something of a “report card” for the school. This is truly not its purpose. We urge schools and Visiting Committees to look at its actual intent: distinctly formative not summative. It is intended to focus the school and the Visiting Committee on each Standard in ways indicating both achievement and aspiration – the twin goals for accreditation.

NEASC experience indicates that discussions around the Assessment for each Standard are often among the most interesting and valuable in the process. The rating (SM1, SM2, or SU1 or SU2) is intended to create a certain “finality” about the current state of the Standard in a school – and, thus, most importantly, to help the school see clearly what it is achieving and where it needs to strengthen its approaches. It is impossible to give equal attention to every element of school practice at once. The Assessment of Standards is intended to help a school focus its effort and planning on key areas.

The four levels of Assessment are deliberately phrased as gradations of the same three qualities: understanding, implementation and planning. As is said repeatedly, the final measure of each of these is the experience of the students. Where students are – or may be – compromised, then the school and the Visiting Committee should consider rating the Standard “Unmet.”

Discussion and debate about the level of a school’s meeting – or not – a Standard should be based, first, on a clear understanding of the language of the Standard in the context of the school’s Mission. And, equally importantly, this should always be supported by concrete evidence, observation and reflection.

During these discussions, parties should be sure competing points of view are heard. Importantly, too, these discussions should not be endless and must come to conclusion. Knowing when to “call the question” is as much art as science – but it is an essential art for schools writing their Self-Studies and Visiting Committees writing their Reports to practice. It is not necessary for Self-Study or Visiting Committees to come to a unanimous conclusion. If there are minority voices, it is perfectly reasonable to include them in the Reports while indicating the range of the discussion.

Schools seem, themselves, to view the Assessment from a range of perspectives. Some schools apparently would like to be seen as meeting all Standards at the SM1 level for fear that any lower level will be perceived as “weakness” rather than “candor.” Some schools apparently possess a level of humility preventing them from saying they do anything at the “SM1” level. Schools, like all of us, have blind spots and sometimes schools genuinely do not see issues that a Visiting Team may note fairly clearly.

It is not unusual for Visiting Committees either to “raise” or to “lower” a School’s own Assessments. NEASC has observed as many as six or seven such changes one way or the other in a single Visiting Committee Report.

NEASC strongly advises schools and Visiting Committees to use the Assessment as a springboard to worthwhile discussion and as a way to help clarify and focus key questions and, also, to celebrate distinct strength. An accredited school will, by definition, achieve each Standard. Some schools may take longer than others and some Standards – Health and Safety, for instance – may require immediate remediation. For the purposes and intent of NEASC Accreditation, the value of the Assessment Rubric is the focus it brings to the discussion and the changes it may inspire when necessary. And the recognition of achievement it may emphasize.

The Assessment is a key component of the over-all process and, as with all the other components, its intention is school improvement.

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 applicable 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.

Guide to the Standards

The Foundation Standards and Indicators

Foundation Standard 1. Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission

This Standard asks the school to demonstrate that the mission is appropriate for the students who are currently enrolled. In preparing this Standard, the faculty, leadership and admissions/enrollment department should examine the realities of the student body – maturity, various abilities and capacities, intentions and aspirations – in the context of the school’s mission. This Standard asks the school to reflect candidly on the realities of its admitted students and the mission it intends for them. It is essential for an accredited school both to accept students who are appropriate for the mission and to reject students who are not. Schools should be sure enrolled students are offered a program that promotes their development. Schools should also have reliable procedures that monitor student progress and should be prepared to modify programs that may not be meeting students’ needs and/or help students and families find other schools that would be more appropriate.

No question is more important than “can we responsibly serve the students who are here?”

Schools should recognize, too, that decisions about appropriate enrollment are often complex and may well involve balanced assessment. Many such decisions are, indeed, “on balance.” The goal is that such assessments be thorough, candid and that the only criteria is a collective best judgment about the students’ best interests.

1.a. The enrollment process aligns with the Mission and values of the school.

This indicator asks the school to examine the full process of admission from inquiry to acceptance to retention. A school might consider some of the following questions (this is not intended as an exhaustive list of possible considerations):

- How are various inquiries treated?
- What happens to online inquiries?
- How are school visits managed?
- Do students give tours?
- Conduct interviews?
- Who trains them?
- Who gives out information?
- Is the information consistent?
- How is financial aid information communicated?
- How are various tests/screening processes handled? (Schools use a variety of admissions instruments.)
- Who reads folders?
- What role do faculty play in admissions decisions?
- Are acceptance criteria consistent?

- How does the school follow up after a visit?
- If the school has “revisit days,” how are they managed?
- If the school accepts applications from international students, how is their English and their general level of preparation accurately and truthfully assessed?
- Does the school do SKYPE/Zoom interviews?
- Does the school use agencies?
- What role do agencies play?

The purpose of this indicator is to allow the school to examine all the literature (printed and online), procedures and, most importantly, the range of personal exchanges that go into the admission of students to the school. The process should reflect the school’s mission and should clearly give prospective students (age appropriately) and their families a clear understanding of what the school does and the way the school does things. If, for example, a school’s mission is to provide “close, personal and individual attention to each student,” then the entire admissions process should amply evidence that philosophy.

1.b. The school identifies and addresses current enrollment trends and challenges.

This indicator asks the school to examine admissions trends and, importantly, to plan accordingly. Some questions to consider:

- What specific enrollment trends (over the past three to five years) do we see?
- If enrollment is declining, what are the annual changes in applications and/or attendance?
- What key factors influence enrollment?
- What essential program changes do enrollment trends indicate as necessary? (i.e. beginning or modifying an important (new) program; initiating or carrying out a recruitment program; modifying the size of the staff, etc.)
- What enrollment projections for the next two to four years do we see?
- What is the basis for these projections?
- Does the faculty and the Board understand the realities of enrollment?
- Are there any steps we could/should take to understand current enrollment trends (surveys? statistical analysis of applications? demographic study of constituency?)
- Based on enrollment trends and projections, what are the most essential plans the school must make?

The more specific the school can be in its analysis of trends, the more helpful the following information will be:

- Grade/age and gender trends
- Locations/towns within the school’s enrollment area
- Competition (i.e. charter schools, improved local public schools, another independent school)
- Changes within the school (i.e. leadership, specific programs, facilities)
- Events that have affected the school’s reputation one way or the other

- Changes – one way or the other – in the school’s financial position that may affect scholarship aid

What specific plans, programs and personnel is the school applying to address the challenges and trends identified?

1.c. The school articulates its “value proposition” in light of enrollment, Mission and societal trends.

This indicator asks the school to articulate the specific reasons student would attend. What makes the school unique, special, exceptional and, most importantly, why will the school meet the needs, interests and goals of the students – and their families. An independent school needs to make this “value proposition” as clear as possible in its literature, its website, its contacts and work with families during the admissions process and, most importantly, in the reality of its engagement with students and their families. “Word of mouth” is the most potent marketing program in a school and, in truth, everything else is secondary.

1.d. Enrollment decisions create tuition revenue adequate to sustain the school’s financial viability.

This indicator asks the school to analyze and present specific figures indicating the role of tuition revenue in the school’s total financial picture. A graph of total expenses and the various components of revenue to meet those expenses would be one way – along with the numbers – to present this information. There is no “measure” for the percentage of total revenue tuition should provide because schools differ so widely (ranging from tuition providing nearly 100% of total revenue to much less than 50%); however, schools must be clear about the role tuition plays in the revenue of the school and should articulate the trends observed and predicted in the upcoming three to five years. This information may be presented in Standard 9 – Resources to Support Operations – and, if so, that should be noted in this Standard’s narrative.

1.e. If applicable, the school understands and addresses boarding/homestay trends.

Applicable only to schools with boarding and/or homestay students, this indicator asks schools to note trends in its boarding and homestay applications and enrollment. The questions considered in 1.b. are also helpful here. Of note in analyzing boarding and homestay enrollment trends, the school needs to be aware of international student trends and adopt a position about the various geo-political forces that may affect them. This is one of the most difficult and changeable realities with which schools must contend, but schools need to be as realistic as possible about the dependence of the school on international students. NEASC notes that the “average” percentage of international students in boarding schools is currently (2019) around 30%, with some schools considerably lower or higher. Again, there is no “measure” for a healthy or reasonable percentage of such students but schools should be clear about the trends and projections they are making.

1.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Marketing/Enrollment Plan
- B. Current printed admissions materials and/or link to online site
- C. Student/parent contract(s)
- D. Statement of Financial Aid policies and procedures
- E. Non-discrimination Policy (may be included in other materials)
- F. Parent and Student Handbooks

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

The Governing Body/Board understands its essential role and demonstrates that understanding through programs, decision-making, self-reflection and observable behaviors and documentation (i.e. board minutes, long-range plans, head evaluation system, self-evaluation documents).

Accredited schools are governed by a spectrum of organizations ranging from boards of trustees to advisory boards to policy bodies and other structures. This Standard refers to that body or board that bears essential responsibilities for mission and viability. If these duties are carried out or shared by more than one group, this Standard refers to their collective perceptions and behaviors.

Schools governed/advised by more than one entity should ensure that communication and lines of authority are effective, clearly stated in the Self-Study and consistently followed in practice.

The terms “board” or “governing body” are used interchangeably in this Manual.

2.a. With consideration of ‘best practices,’ the Governing Body/Board understands and carries out its responsibilities including overseeing:

- Mission
- Value Proposition/Educational quality
- Fiscal integrity
- Appropriate support for the Head of School
- Continuous Planning, always with a three to five-year horizon

The key to “best practice” on a Board is a strong focus on the fundamental Board responsibilities listed above. Boards should understand their goals for the school and what behaviors best support those goals. And they should understand the parameters of effective governance. Boards support the Head of School, for instance, in his or her leadership of the school. Boards should not engage in the day-to-day operation of the school and should not create “back channels” for parent or faculty communication. A healthy Board clearly understands the importance of transparency and the necessity of confidentiality. A Board focused on supporting the Head of School, fiscal integrity, mission, planning and that is willing to examine regularly its own policies, procedures and effectiveness can serve the school well.

Specifically, the Board should document its discussion of the school’s mission, should create a clear statement of the school’s value proposition and the ways the educational program supports and develops that value.

The Board should understand the school’s finances and should have appropriate procedures such as an annual audit or third-party independent review of operations to assure itself and the community that effective procedures for financial understanding and monitoring are in place and followed.

The Board should work closely with the Head of School, provide a thorough, regular and mutually understood assessment of the Head's goals, progress and relationships within the community. The Board of an independent school should understand that the Head of School is their only employee and that all other members of the administration, faculty and staff report to the Head.

In some for-profit schools (i.e. where the owner is also the Head of School) and in many religious schools, the Board does not employ the Head of School. These Boards need to articulate their relationship with the Head of School and be sure the lines of authority within the school are transparent and well-understood.

Being part of a good and helpful Board always requires good judgment and will involve thoughtful balance. A Board too disengaged risks losing sight of essential goals; a Board too engaged weakens the Head of School and can demoralize the community. There is definitely a "Goldilocks Zone" of effective Board work and good Boards understand that assessing and rebalancing their level of engagement with the school is an ongoing and unending responsibility.

2.b. The Governing Body/Board effectively assesses its governance practices.

The Board should perform an annual Board Assessment that includes questions directed to both individual Board Members and, also, to the Board's collective work. This Assessment can be accomplished with a single instrument and NEASC provides a variety of templates to perform this work. We note there are a number of approaches to this work and Boards may find others they feel more congenial. Key to this indicator is a regular – at least annual – time devoted to examining and discussing governance practices such as:

- Does the Board state clear annual and long-term goals?
- Does the Board establish specific measures of progress?
- Are Board meetings well organized and is time used productively?
- Is there adequate preparation for each meeting?
- Are Board meetings enjoyable and do members look forward to them?
- Do Board members know one another?
- Is the current Board committee structure effective?
- Does the Board fully understand the financial reality of the school?
- Is the Board maintaining healthy relationships among its members? How is it doing this?
- Does the Board devote time to issues in the community of the school that may affect its future?
- Is the relationship between the Governing Body and/or Chair of the Board and the Head of School effective and cordial?
- If the Board is working with a new Head of School, does the Board have clear goals and expectations for itself in the transition?
- Is the Board fulfilling its responsibilities to and communicating effectively with the community of the school – parents, alumni and the "wider" community?

- Is there – as there should be – an individual or Trusteeship/Governance Committee or Executive Committee responsible for addressing the composition and functions of the Board?

2.c. The Governing Body/Board manages its own leadership transition effectively.

The Chair’s role, like that of the Head of School, is key to the success of the Board. The Chair sets the tone, helps the Board understand its role and manages the many discussions and often challenging work that builds an effective Board. In some schools, Board Chairs serve many years – sometimes decades – and, in others, there is a definite term in office. At some point, all schools undergo a change in Board leadership, and it is best practice to anticipate this event long before it happens and to understand how the transition will be managed.

Candidly, this is a topic of some angst in many schools because, again like the Head of School, matters of personality, ability, sense of humor, interpersonal skill and history with the school will come into play. Boards are very human organizations and are quite dependent on the mutual respect, understanding and humane perspective of those who manage the transition. Well managed, a leadership transition can be seamless, positive and creative for the entire school. But it needs to be acknowledged that, at times, feelings can be hurt and some sense of injustice can linger when a transition is not as smooth as one might hope.

Boards are composed of volunteers who come together willingly to offer their talent, treasure and time to the health and future of the school. No standard exists that could possibly lay out all that needs to happen in an individual Board when a transition is on the horizon or actually occurring. In terms of accreditation, NEASC can only observe the importance of leadership and note where such transitions seem to be unfolding reasonably or where additional attention needs to be paid.

It is entirely possible that this particular indicator may not be relevant at the time of a school’s visit. But it will be relevant at some point.

2.d. The Governing Body/Board uses effective policies and procedures to identify, select and mentor new members.

Maintaining the wisdom, creativity and commitment of a Board depends on a reasonably steady influx of new members. Identifying the needs of the Board, generating a “pool” of candidates, deciding who among them and how these individuals should be vetted and finally invited on to the Board and ensuring they are thoughtfully mentored remains a fundamental Board responsibility. While a few schools may be able to select from a large number of potential Board members, most schools find the group of those who are qualified, able and willing to serve will be relatively small. Whatever the size or depth of this “pool,” thoughtful discussion and clear processes are essential.

NEASC strongly recommends that Boards have a written protocol for each step in this process:

1. Identifying potential candidates
2. Deciding who should be vetted with the goal of understanding their capacity and potential commitment to the school
3. Deciding when to invite them on the Board, who should ask them and how this invitation is to be presented
4. Establishing a clear and mutually understood mentoring system

What is essential in this process is that the Board regularly and specifically discuss Board membership, ensure new members are always under consideration and actively engage with potential new members prior to inviting them.

Constructing and maintaining an effective and committed Board of Trustees usually results from a close partnership with the Head of School and from the work of a vigorous Committee on Trustees (or Trusteeship) who meet regularly and who take visible and effective action. The role of the Head, particularly for an experienced individual, is central to the on-going health of the Board.

2.e. The Governing Body/Board seeks balanced membership representing the diversity of the community and key areas of expertise, interest and abilities.

NEASC recommends that Boards establish specific guidelines for diversity, expertise, interest and ability of the Board members. Establishing this structure can be very helpful when openings occur by creating priorities for vetting and invitations. There are some obvious general responsibilities and professional and personal experience or connection to the school a Board should consider. Discussing the “balance” of these categories in the context of actual individuals who might serve will remain a continuing obligation of the full Board. The school may wish to consider individuals who are:

- Past parents
- Alumni
- Individuals of notable achievement
- Individuals from the local community and/or from other constituencies important to the school
- Individuals with an ability and interest in financially supporting the school
- Individuals with particular professional experience: finance, the law, medicine, facilities, education, skills emphasized in the school’s program such as performing or visual arts, specific athletics, international travel or relations, government service, volunteer not-for-profit activities, etc.
- Current parents
- Individuals whose personal qualities and perspectives are likely to contribute to the positive and creative energy of the Board
- Students, where applicable

NEASC recommends that a diverse Board can provide essential leadership to the school and that schools should be wary of creating a Board heavily weighted toward one or two general categories i.e. parents, alumni, “wealthy donors,” or “just people we know.”

2.f. The Governing Body/Board accurately identifies and addresses significant issues affecting the school’s future.

While no one expects a Board to be master prognosticators, a Board has a fundamental responsibility to use appropriate data and analysis to look toward the future. A Board should aim to:

- Understand enrollment trends and directions
- See evolving issues likely to confront young people
- Project the school’s financial future
- Discuss broader national and international events
- Imagine where the school and its social context are headed

This indicator asks that Boards consciously and frequently reserve time to discuss what lies ahead in both the most local and the broadest ways. Foreign policy may result in significant changes in the international student market. Local politics may dictate whether or not a school can develop a parcel of land. Technology initiatives may carry major implications for school programs.

This indicator does not ask that schools know which tech company or app will revolutionize social media. It does ask that Boards demonstrate that larger questions about the future always be part of the Board’s deliberations and play an appropriate role in policy.

2.g. The Governing Body/Board appropriately and effectively communicates decisions and actions to the school community.

The “school community” includes current parents and families, the local and broader community in which the school exists, faculty, staff and administration and, where appropriate, students. Deciding to whom, how and how often to communicate with various constituencies will always be a matter of judgment and wisdom for the Board. Many internal Board decisions, (i.e. how to rebalance an investment portfolio, whether or not to hold a Board retreat, what new members are under active consideration) would not and, in some cases, should not be communicated beyond the Board.

Other decisions – the search for a new Head of School, the Board’s investigation of a serious complaint or breach by a current or past faculty member, the construction of a new facility, progress on a strategic plan – should be actively communicated.

NEASC recommends that Boards talk openly and regularly about their own communication with constituencies beyond the Board room and that all communications from the Board be coordinated with the Head of School.

Effective communication is an on-going Board responsibility and remains a key responsibility. In general, any issue that will – or has – affected the public perception of the school, any issue that directly affects students, faculty, staff or families, any issue that bears on the school’s health and future and any issue that speaks to the school identity and character should be communicated.

To fulfill this indicator, the Board should provide specific examples of various kinds of communication and of the decisions that motivated it. Examples, too, of decisions not to communicate are also helpful to establishing the Board’s understanding and action.

2.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Governing Body/Board roster indicating length of service
- B. Current By-Laws
- C. Minutes of two recent meetings
- D. Governing Body/Board Self-Evaluation Instrument
- E. Head Evaluation Process/Instrument
- F. Corporate Status as a tax-exempt institution, if applicable
- G. Conflict of Interest Policy for Board members

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

This Foundation Standard stands at the heart of the school's ability to support its mission and the programs delivering it. The Standard includes finances, facilities and advancement. An accredited school should be able to demonstrate that it has sufficient financial resources and facilities to maintain the school for the foreseeable future, but, at a minimum, the next three to five years.

NEASC Accreditation asks schools to report the totality of their annual budgets clearly enough that their viability is evident. This means, specifically, that total revenue should meet total expenses. NEASC strongly recommends against borrowing next year's tuition or other income (gifts, endowment draw, etc.) to pay this year's bills. If borrowing and/or income from next year's tuition should be required to meet this year's annual expenses, repayment provisions are demonstrably within the school's future capacity and the school should demonstrate it does not plan to continue this practice in future years. Failure to repay such borrowing and continuing to do so annually all too easily results in a school's falling further behind every year. This practice would define "non-sustainable."

Recognizing the often-complex nature of school finances, NEASC Accreditation must be founded on accurate information demonstrating the school's ability to meet financial obligations. Such demonstration includes contingency planning taking into account reasonable scenarios around facilities failure or replacement, enrollment down-turns, investment decline or other factors specific to the school (i.e. a lease that may or may not be terminated; a local ordinance that may restrict future growth; a relationship with a parish or religious order that may be revised, etc.).

The school's leadership may and in many cases must actively consider other indicators of a school's relative financial health. A responsible Board of Trustees will, as appropriate, maintain a detailed understanding of the school's financial strength.

Specifically, NEASC Accreditation is founded on a school's demonstrated ability to meet the totality of its obligations not on the totality of its assets. In this regard, schools should also closely monitor any gifts, loans or other financial arrangements and expenses that are "one-time" events. Schools should plan as specifically as possible for these "unusual" expenses and should never build "one-time gifts" into their operating budgets – as tempting as that sometimes may be.

Note that accreditation requires one of the following every five years:

1. Opinion Audit
2. Review Level Audit with Management Letter
3. For Catholic Schools, the Diocesan Report on School Finances

(Please note that Compilation Audits are not acceptable.)

While many schools perform audits each year of operation – and these are the most reliable way for a non-profit organization to demonstrate financial responsibility and viability – NEASC Accreditation requires these documents at the Five and Ten-Year Reports. Also, schools must complete the Annual Report and include the budget information requested annually.

3.a. The school preserves, manages and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support and advance its Mission.

Simply stated, a school’s budget is one of the clearest practical expressions of its mission. Financial aid, faculty compensation and development, program support and evolution, facilities maintenance and construction – each requires the school to establish priorities and to make decisions. If a school’s mission is the personal development of individual students and the budget supports a staff and faculty capable of responding to each student, then the resources are supporting the mission. If a school’s mission includes students with special or particular needs and the school employs a faculty with the experience and education to support such students, its resources are sufficient to reflect this mission. If a school’s mission includes assertions such the importance of “state of the art facilities” and the facilities are, in fact, obviously magnificent, then the budget supports the mission. If a school’s mission includes “an inclusive community from all walks of life” and financial aid does, in fact, bring these students to campus, then the mission is supported and reflected. And, conversely, notable issues in a particular area would indicate resources are not “sufficient” to support or reflect the mission.

3.b. Based on Annual Report Data and/or other reliable studies, the school accurately identifies current and long-term financial realities and challenges and has a capacity to respond to fiscal emergencies or unforeseen circumstances.

For this indicator, the school should create three to five-year budget projections based on trends and reasonable predictions about enrollment and tuition, financial aid, salaries and expenses, predictable increases in health-care costs and a reasonable plan for contingencies. This indicator is tied to the Board’s planning for the future but requests schools to provide specific planning documentation.

3.c. The school’s facilities appropriately support the students and programs.

This indicator asks the school to document the facility’s capacity to support students and programs. If a school states that it has “small classes and individual attention” but the facility does not contain enough classrooms for this kind of program, then a school must present plans to remedy this situation. If a school has a “highly competitive athletic program” but inadequate field space, cramped locker rooms and few buses to carry students to games, a school should have active plans to improve its facilities. Similarly, if a school’s mission calls for “frequent community gatherings” and has at least one space where different kinds of all-school meetings occur, it may be supporting its students and programs very well. The school might like more of these spaces and have plans to create them, but its current facility may be very appropriate to its mission.

Most schools have a (sometimes very long) list of facilities to construct, improve, renovate, raze or replace. Accreditation asks schools both to assess current realities and to envision the future and facilities are often an important component of planning. This indicator encourages schools to contemplate their facilities as they currently exist in terms of the school's mission and student body and also to speculate and plan future developments.

3.d. The school undertakes appropriate and effective facilities planning to address needed, intended and/or desired improvements and maintenance.

This indicator asks the school to include facilities planning (indicating the schedule and needed actions to maintain or improve the current facility) as a component of strategic planning. Some schools maintain a separate Facilities Plan and some fold this work into a Strategic Plan. This planning can exist in several forms but should refer to elements such as the following (this list is not intended to be all-inclusive):

- State of current electrical, plumbing and heating systems
- Schedule for needed repairs or replacement as necessary
- Roof, siding, windows, etc. and structural elements
- Walks, driveways
- All safety equipment – fire extinguishers and equipment, elevator inspections, etc.; door locking equipment, video safety cameras,
- Furniture and fixtures, theater seating
- Landscaping, fields, ponds or water elements, playgrounds and playground equipment
- Athletic facilities – gym/field house, rink, pool, squash courts, exercise area, training room, waterfront equipment
- Any specific athletic equipment or areas – ski hill, crew facilities and equipment, climbing walls, fencing or gymnastics equipment and areas, etc.
- Visual and performing arts facilities (including music studios, practice rooms and performance spaces, areas and equipment for painting and drawing, sculpture, clay and pottery, kilns, photography labs, drama and dance facilities, lighting equipment, wood and metal shop, printing shops, jewelry-making spaces and equipment, etc.)
- Science facilities and labs, particularly storage for chemicals and lab equipment
- Technology in all its complexity of both software and hardware and infrastructure; communication equipment
- Vehicles and other related equipment – trailers, crew trailers – groundskeeping equipment, mowers, chain saws, etc.
- Maker spaces and “creative areas”
- Fencing and enclosures where needed
- Signage

3.e. Technology infrastructure adequately supports both the educational program and institutional operation.

In the last twenty-five years, most schools have expended enormous amounts of money to create technology infrastructure. If any realm in education defines “changing landscape,” it is this one. “Technology” is a vast, intriguing, expensive and often confounding reality for schools. Used well, many technologies have created stunning advances and staggering possibilities. This indicator asks schools to review technology infrastructure in light of the school’s mission and goals and the realities of its operation.

“Infrastructure” refers to staffing as well as wired and wireless technology and computer equipment. It refers to monitoring, safety and data collection and analysis. The sufficiency of the school’s infrastructure depends on its philosophy, its resources and its particular reality. A boarding school would benefit enormously from an electronic locking system on its dorms. A science department could bring water flow and erosion to life with a graphic simulator. A football or golf coach can use video to help their students really see their actions.

3.f. The school’s development/advancement program identifies short and long-term goals and strives to achieve them.

Independent school development programs span an enormous spectrum from “basically non-existent” to highly professional offices with directors leading dozens and dozens of staff. Many independent schools would feel fortunate to raise \$100,000 in a single year. Others might experience despair if they have failed to raise less than \$10MM.

Accreditation asks that schools evaluate their advancement effort in terms of their mission and goals, their resources, their history and their institutional realities. A capacity to raise resources beyond tuition dollars using techniques from bake sales to massive capital campaigns is one hallmark of a not-for-profit independent school.

NEASC does not establish benchmarks or specific goals for school advancement but the process does ask schools to report their goals, their methods for achieving them and their approaches to assessing success.

Those experienced in the field advocate for thoughtful understanding of the realities of fund-raising and the approaches – and hard-won knowledge – that underlie its practice. Such observations can be both helpful and sobering and NEASC counsels that it is helpful for Boards and Heads without much experience to seek professional advice and to assess the realities of a community openly and realistically. More than one Head and Board have foundered on the shoals of unrealistic expectations and inadequate planning and execution. Effective fund-raising often takes a great deal of stewardship and a long time. It has been said, for instance, that the “effective fundraiser” is standing on the shoulders of an effort that preceded them by decades.

3.g. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

(These financial documents are confidential and, as such, should be sent separately to the Chair of the visit and to the NEASC office prior to the Foundation Visit.)

- A. The School must provide ONE of the following at the time of the Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report and at the Foundation Visit (presented in order of preference and dependent upon the school's resources):
 - Opinion Audit
 - Reviewed Financial Statements with Management Letter
 - If a Catholic School, a Diocesan Review of School Finances
- B. Annual budget for most recently completed year (prior to Foundation Visit)
- C. Written Financial Plan including Three-to-Five-Year Projection
- D. Report summarizing annual giving/voluntary support for most recently completed year
- E. Insurance Safety Audit/Risk Management Report
- F. Insurance policies/plans
- G. Salary table for full-time faculty listing only the low, median and high salary
- H. List of Benefits

Foundation Standard 4. The School Assures that the Adult Community is Qualified and Organized to Implement the Mission.
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This Standard focuses on the policies and procedures around hiring, referencing, evaluating and structuring the faculty and staff. Issues of professional development are included under Standard Four, “Continuous Professional Development.” The two are clearly linked. The purpose of this Standard is to help the school ensure that it is using thoughtful, thorough and responsible approaches to the hiring and organization of the faculty and staff.

4 a. Personnel and hiring policies and procedures effectively and ethically ensure that all employees can support the school’s Mission and culture.

This indicator asks the school to document hiring policies and procedures. The school should consider such questions as:

- How are positions advertised and/or promulgated?
- How are candidates contacted?
- How are arrangements made for a visit to the campus?
- How is that visit organized?
- Who conducts the interview(s)?
- How are these interviews conducted – what kinds of information is sought? How is the school sure that all relevant information/impressions have been gathered?
- After the interview, how are interview notes and impressions gathered and analyzed?
- Are campus visits and interviews always necessary? Does the school use other avenues by which a candidate might be vetted and offered a position?
- How are references sought? Are personal references always required? Who conducts these references and what questions are asked?
- How are background and criminal record checks completed? Are they always done before offering a position? If not, when would these checks be completed? This check should also include verification of the candidates educational and, to the degree possible, experiential background.
- Who makes final decisions?
- Who conducts negotiations with the candidate?
- How is the mission of the school considered when selecting candidates and during and after the interview?

Hiring “the right people” – those capable of meeting the needs, goals and expectations of the students – remains one of the most important responsibilities of school leadership. How does the school leadership – those making hiring decisions – balance the many factors that may go into faculty hiring decisions? What ethical considerations are always taken into account?

4.b. The school has specific, inviolable procedures to check the legal and professional background of all employees and of the other adults who may come into regular contact with students.

Background checks for all adults employed by the school are required for all NEASC schools. This is not an optional activity. While it is surely true that formal background checks may not reveal all that one would like to know about a job applicant, it is one of the foundations for serious consideration. There are many organizations that conduct such reviews and NEASC strongly recommends that schools develop working relationships with one or more of them. NEASC also requires that the school conduct personal background checks through direct conversation and/or correspondence with former employers, school counselors or advisors or faculty and with other individuals who have known the applicant personally and in depth.

NEASC recognizes that many schools will employ numbers of faculty and staff who have worked at the school for a long time. While long-time colleagues have proven themselves responsible and trusted by their behavior and demonstrated commitment, the school should still conduct a criminal background check for every employee prior to the arrival of the Foundation Visit Committee.

The reality of many hiring decisions, of course, will be founded on best judgment. One forms an impression, collects information from a variety of sources and, at some point, an individual offering a job trusts his or her instincts that they have seen and understood a person accurately. It is often as much art as science. This indicator asks that these decisions be based on as solid a foundation of reputation, proven ability and demonstrated qualifications as possible.

4.c. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current employee roster, including roles and responsibilities, length of service and professional qualifications
- B. Organizational chart(s) and/or protocols setting out lines of communication and areas of responsibility
- C. Examples of each type of faculty/staff/administrative contract
- D. For the Chair of the Visiting Team and NEASC Staff only: Confidential Salary Documentation
- E. Faculty Handbook(s)
- F. Faculty Code of Conduct or similar document (if separate from E above)
- G. List of materials consistently maintained in personnel files

Foundation Standard 5. A Proactive Culture of Health and Safety Permeates the School

NEASC provides a detailed document, *NEASC/CIS Health and Safety Considerations*, that schools should review annually. The *Considerations* are intended to help a school establish a culture and climate around health and safety that characterizes – “permeates” is the language of the Standard – every aspect of school life. Given the complexity of schools and the multiplicity of school activities, it would be impossible to write a single document that would cover all contingencies in all situations. And it would, by its length, likely be impractical.

The *NEASC/CIS Health and Safety Considerations* list a plethora of issues, protocols and situations that demand attention. But the document is far from covering every issue where safety is a concern. Every time students are in school – in a classroom, lab, studio or practice field – every time they travel – to and from school, to an away game, to an international service opportunity – every time they go to football or crew practice, saw a board to build a set, climb a ladder to wash a window or simply cross the street on a dark and rainy night, issues of health and safety are raised. Social media can help build a community and creates in every student’s phone – and fingertips – the potential for improper relationships or worse. School can – and should be – enjoyable, spontaneous, enthusiastic and creative. To be so, the adults on campus must think constantly about issues of health and safety. Students must feel secure – both physically and emotionally – and the school should provide evidence of the work to build this kind of trust within the community.

The three indicators here are founded on the principle that schools can consciously and actively create a school culture where students and faculty know that safety is, literally, everyone’s responsibility. While no amount of list-making will cover every possible contingency, schools can do a great deal to create an essential climate and culture where respect, thoughtfulness and care are boldly evident in every room and hallway and field and studio and on every trip.

5.a. The school’s culture of health and safety reflects the intentions of the *NEASC/CIS Health and Safety Considerations*.

NEASC recommends that schools use the *Considerations* in two distinct ways. The first is as a reminder to faculty and staff of the many health and safety issues that exist in a school community. We advise schools to distribute – either electronically or in printed form – the document to all faculty and staff and to spend time annually simply going over the list and the changes and additions that will come in successive editions of this booklet. Just reminding faculty and staff of the paramount importance of health and safety and the reality that it includes planning, preparation, monitoring, training and constant vigilance helps create the climate and the culture in a school where the necessity to keep safety as “job number one” is understood and practiced daily. And hourly.

Secondly, the *Considerations* can help guide the work of the school’s Health and Safety Committee or other groups, meetings or individuals who regularly and persistently focus on health and safety. In every school, the viability of programs and approaches depends on

individuals who demonstrate their care and their commitment. Little ensures the health and safety of a community more surely than a few folks who are reliably persistent on the topic. Humor, skits, drills, new information, questionnaires, thoughtful relationships with local emergency personnel – all these contribute to a sense that the school truly cares about health and safety and individuals with this role can make an enormous difference to the culture and climate of the school. A school “safety officer” – by whatever title the work might be undertaken – is often the key to an effective approach for the entire community.

In the end, individuals must care – and care deeply – that safety is everybody’s responsibility. And these individuals – through force of personality, imagination, knowledge, persistence, fearlessness and commitment – are the heart of building this climate and culture. Individuals charged to look for physical issues – a broken railing, a pothole, a leaky pipe, a dark cross-walk, a loose manhole cover, kids who roam off campus, a loose swing, a missing sign, an icy stairway – and who have the authority to correct them are crucial. Faculty and staff alert to the emotional concerns of young people – tears in the hallway, anger on the field, silence when there was once a bubbly personality, unexpected rudeness – and have the skill and insight to recognize when events need following up – are essential.

Schools with a health-conscious culture know the importance of every individual on campus. And know, too, that often those in a school with responsibilities other than their assigned job are vital to the health of the school. Those who maintain the grounds see kids outside the classroom or dormitory. Those who clean the buildings see kids when faculty may not be around. Those who serve in the food service encounter the kids when their ‘guard’ may be down. The Head’s Assistant hears folks who don’t really want to tell the Head what’s on their mind but want “somebody” to know. The nurse may spend hours with a student who came with a headache or a stomachache that is only a diversion.

Real health and safety is about what people take seriously and how they act among themselves .

5.b. In its annual review of the *NEASC/CIS Health and Safety Considerations*, the school has a process in place to accurately and regularly identify and address any area(s) warranting immediate and/or long-term attention.

One way – and likely the best way – to address this indicator is with some form of “health and safety officer, administrator and/or committee.” The terms “annual” and “accurately, regularly and address” – are key to this indicator. The school should create an approach to health and safety that sees what needs to be seen and a commitment to doing what needs to be done. And understanding that some issues need near instantaneous action and some considered, long-term approaches. It takes perhaps two years to plant and cultivate a healthy grass field. But a field with a sudden, ankle-breaking rut needs somebody with some stone or dirt this moment. It might take a year of planning to put into place a course on the history of racism in America but a student yelling racial epithets needs to be confronted at the time. And how that confrontation may unfold requires a sometimes-subtle understanding of human cause and effect that might have taken years to develop.

We are hardly the first to believe we live in an “age of anxiety.” But without question we do live in one. Heightened sensitivity – sometimes very much for the good and sometimes unnecessarily self-absorbed – is simply a fact of life. Unremitting texting and social media can spread rumor and worse through a six-hundred student school in minutes – perhaps seconds. The agonizing reality of school shootings – regardless of the nearly infinitesimal statistical probability of their occurrence – puts everyone on edge.

Health and safety, too, is helping kids and adults remain calm and develop perspective. The vast majority of events in school are not traumatic or dangerous and most rooms and fields and trips are entirely safe. Fun and light-heartedness remain one of the great strengths of school life. A “culture of health and safety” identifies and fixes what can be fixed, figures out what can wait until tomorrow and what, too, isn’t quite as creepy as it might first appear. Adults have to be adults in a healthy and safe school and part of that responsibility is helping younger folks develop a longer view. Impatience may be the most dangerous emotion on the highway, and it is often less than helpful in school.

5.c. School leadership clearly and specifically cultivates a culture of health and safety within the entire school community.

Most importantly, the Head of School sets a tone and establishes by his or her own words and actions what is and what is not acceptable. If the Head understands the sometimes subtle signs of prejudice or bullying that isn’t overt, if the school Head speaks directly and with the right tone to kids who need understanding – or correction – those actions go a very long way to building – or weakening – the culture of the school. Understanding begets understanding. Civility begets civility. It isn’t magic. But folks who know schools will see the culture and climate of a school community within minutes of walking on campus. Is there a sense of humor and purpose? A sense of dedication and creativity? Are people unafraid and candid but with a sense of fun and school-wide spirit. A healthy school community should be joyful. The Head can create – or inhibit – that spirit every day.

And “school leadership” extends to many throughout the community. Every teacher and coach and activity leader exercises enormous influence on their cohort of students and on their colleagues. Simply stated, leadership in schools – which are, really, simply relatively small groups of people working and living and laughing and creating and building together – create an ambiance that either promotes or inhibits growth and creative endeavor. “Group dynamics” in schools are creations and the more intentional and optimistic they can be, the safer they will be as well.

5.d. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Crisis Management Plan/Protocols including up-to-date communications and contact information.
- B. Compliance Documentation including:
- Current fire inspections for each facility
 - Food Service certification (i.e. cleanliness, safe-handling, health inspection)
 - Medical facility inspection as required (state and local requirements vary)
 - As required by state or locale, any additional necessary testing (i.e. water at tap, radon, asbestos, carbon monoxide)
 - Schedule of fire drills and lockdown/campus emergency and safety activity – both completed for the most recent year and planned for the current one
 - Documentation around individual activities where specialized health and safety considerations are necessary (i.e. waterfront and pool areas, sports practices and games, field trips and off-campus trips, international travel and immunizations)
 - Policy on acquisition of current student health records
 - Statement from the Head of School that the school's Emergency Plan is complete and has been submitted to the appropriate local officials
 - State compliance documentation for programs serving students under the age of three (if applicable)

NOTE: The New England Association of Schools and Colleges does not accredit programs serving students below the age of three. The NEASC Commission on Independent Schools requires schools which serve children below the age of three to demonstrate compliance with state standards and state mandates for early childhood programs. If applicable, this documentation should be provided along with all other compliance documents as part of Foundation Standard Number 5.

NOTE: To determine compliance with local, state and federal health and safety requirements, schools must consult legal counsel. NEASC Accreditation does not provide indemnification nor explicit or implied approval for any school activity, program or facility. The Visiting Committee, NEASC staff visits and all reports are peer reviews only and not legal documentation. NEASC written or verbal communication never substitutes for nor replaces local, state or federal legal requirements.

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

Note: This Standard applies to for-profit schools only. Not-for-profit schools need not respond.

The additional accreditation responsibility for proprietary schools is to provide evidence assuring the school places the welfare of students and the achievement of mission above profit. NEASC does accredit schools which are not organized to comply with the requirements of the 501(c)(3) designation, but such organizations must clearly and unambiguously demonstrate their adherence to every Accreditation Standard and to these expectations and to accommodating the best interests of the students.

6.a. The owner and governing body share the values and Mission of the school and are committed to long-term growth.

The school, in short, is expected to show by description of the owner(s)' demonstrated care for the students and their school that the core values and mission of the school are his/her/their first priority. Provisions for financial aid, support for leadership and faculty, program development, dedication to proper facilities and long-term commitment to the school's growth and evolution are paramount. A proprietary school should have been in existence three to five years, minimally, to apply for accreditation and/or should provide documentation – contracts, written commitments, demonstrated financial responsibilities – giving clear evidence of the long-term investment in the school and commitment to its growth and development.

6.b. The owner/governing body establishes and maintains policy-making processes with provisions for the participation of all stakeholders, as appropriate.

A healthy school requires the engagement of governing/advisory board, administration, faculty, staff, and, where appropriate, students, in decisions, establishing priorities and development of policies, protocols and expectations in the school community. Such participation and engagement are necessary to a positive culture and to the effectiveness of the mutual commitment that builds true learning. Transparency around decisions, clear assessment procedures for administration, faculty and staff and a general understanding of the priorities and direction of the school all contribute to the achievement of the Standard.

6.c. The school establishes and follows policies applicable to ownership that address conflicts of interest and provide protection against malfeasance by persons exercising control over the school.

The school should provide clear guidance and signed "Protection Against Conflict of Interest" statements for all individuals who might potentially use their positions in the school for personal or other gain that would compromise the experience of the students and the fairness of school

decisions. This guidance and these statements should be expected for all members of the Board and each member of the administration with financial management responsibility.

6.d. There is a clear description for legal and tax purposes of the school’s form of organization, and a clear organizational chart that defines the roles and responsibilities of the school’s owner/governing body, administration, faculty and staff.

The school should articulate in writing the administrative and governance structures, expectations, lines of responsibility and communication and clear job descriptions for the adults in the community. This description should be clear and unambiguous about the various responsibilities and lines of authority within the school.

6.e. One person is designated as the chief administrator (Head, Principal, President, etc.) of the school; this person may be the owner.

It is particularly important that the Head of School – by whatever title he or she is known – possesses clear responsibilities and authority that encourage thoughtful decisions and dependable outcomes. No school can afford to have decisions by a Head of School “second guessed” or overridden by ownership or Board of Trustees/Overseers. The rule “he/she who has responsibility must also have authority” should apply. “Muddy” lines of responsibility and decision making undermine trust, confidence, morale and will serve only to create a culture of mistrust.

6.f. The designated chief administrator is evaluated on an annual basis.

There are many effective instruments and processes that may be used for an annual review of the Head of School, but they all share some elements in common:

- A discussion between the Head of School and the Board/Owner about goals and an agreement about processes to reach them
- A mutually understood set of measures for evaluation that are based around behaviors and activities rather than outcomes (i.e. did the Head of School take all appropriate steps to insure the enrollment for the upcoming year rather than “enrollment dipped by ten students...”)
- A mutually understood assessment process (i.e. who will be interviewed and by whom, what observations will be made, how will these observations and statements be reported – by whom and to whom) and what other data or information will be collected?
- A mutually understood – and followed – process for the follow-up to the evaluation process – who is privy to the assessment outcomes and who participates in specific discussion
- What public statements may or may not be made – and to whom and by whom – about the process and its results? (i.e. how will both positive and potentially critical information be shared?)
- An agreement that the process is intended above all for improvement and positive next steps

6.g. The Governing Body/Board includes members who represent the public interest, who have no contractual, employment or personal financial interest in the institution. Public representatives should be free from present or potential conflict of interest.

It is critical to a healthy for-profit/proprietary school Board that individuals with no contractual or personal financial interest be present and that their perspectives be appropriately considered in decisions. Faculty members, for instance, may well serve on such boards but there must be individuals from the public – parents and/or others with valuable perspectives – who contribute to decisions. NEASC requests that at least a third of the membership should come from the public.

6.h. The school has a provision for thoughtful, deliberate and transparent leadership transition. This is particularly important when the school leader and school owner are the same person.

For some proprietary schools, leadership transitions can be difficult. A “founding Head of School” – and the Board who serves this school – should work together thoughtfully and deliberately around issues that may be both difficult and emotional for all. While there are no “hard and fast rules” about such transitions and understanding and it would be impossible to write a comprehensive Standard, NEASC recommends that boards and heads in proprietary schools consider the following:

- What is the mission and culture of the school?
- What leadership characteristics most complement and strengthen the mission?
- What role will the outgoing Head of School play when he or she has “officially stepped down?” Will they be advisory? Continue on the Board? Be available for consultation?
- Does everyone agree?
- Does the Head of School continue to have a financial interest in the school?
- What is that interest?
- How will a search be organized?
- Are there other family members with an interest or authority in the school?
- How will information about the transition be communicated? What is the timing?
- What role will the outgoing head play in the transition and communication?

Required Materials:

(These financial documents are confidential and, as such, should be sent separately to the Chair of the visit and to the NEASC office prior to the Foundation Visit.)

The school should have an outside third party (auditor) write a letter speaking specifically to the following two aspects of the school:

1. Reasonable assurance that the school has the assets available to sustain operation of the school for the foreseeable future (which include a current asset-to-liability ratio)
2. Assurances that the school has the systems in place to manage its finances appropriately

This could include:

- Tax Returns for the organization, or its parent company or owner, for the most recent fiscal year.
- Internal Trial Balance for most recently closed fiscal year.

An annual audit (see below) is the best way to secure information in both areas.

- Should this involve a Parent Corporation, this corporation can give the school a copy of its annual audited statement for the corporation, and then separate financial documents (budget, P&L, etc.) for the school itself. Occasionally, schools are audited independent of the Parent Corporation.
- Should the Parent Corporation refuse to submit an audit, it must provide a letter from its auditor assuring that the school appropriately addresses the concerns noted above about the school.

Accreditation through the Commission on Independent Schools is granted expressly to a particular institution with clearly defined and identified ownership and/or control. A change in ownership or control automatically results in a self-executing, immediate discontinuance of accreditation unless the new owner or controlling authority provides adequate written assurance and evidence that the standards of the Commission will be maintained. Such assurances will be validated by a Focused Review Committee appointed by the Commission to visit the institution at a time designated by the Commission.

The Program Standards and Indicators

Program Standard 7. Commitment to Mission and Core Beliefs Informs Decisions, Guides Initiatives and Aligns with the Students' Needs and Aspirations

7.a. Mission permeates the school's culture and climate.

The essence of an independent school lies in its Mission – its reason for being. Mission distinguishes independent schools. Parents choosing independent schools for their children do so with the clear understanding that the school offers an essential opportunity for their children. It is vital that independent schools make their missions clear, explain them compellingly and ensure their public declarations align with the actual practices in the school and, most importantly, with the students who attend.

A school with a mission to develop creativity in their students must ensure their programs actually promote and cultivate creative endeavor. A school with a mission to serve a religious or philosophical tradition promotes programs and expectations that consistently live out that tradition. A small school with a mission to develop individual talents in a supportive environment decides the parameters of individual strengths and talents their program can truly encompass. A school serving “all who apply” is certain it can accommodate the full range of student abilities. A school with a highly competitive academic program recognizes the enormous range of talents their programs must meet no matter how “competitive” their admissions process.

It is, in fact, relatively simple to write a socially appealing mission including terms like “rigor” and “creativity” and “service learning” and “commitment to others,” etc. etc. The real challenge is creating specific behaviors, approaches and programs that bring these abstractions to life with actual students and faculty.

A school endeavoring to discover whether or not the mission “permeated” the culture and climate of the school might invite a thoughtful person to campus and have them spend a week going to classes, walking the halls, talking with one and all and, after all that, ask them to describe what they observed. The mission is what happens in a school.

A few words on “climate” and “culture” in schools. Here's the essence of what research has demonstrated: “a positive, optimistic, respectful, creative, trusting and energetic climate and culture are essential to effective learning.” This is pretty much the beginning and end of this fundamentally crucial reality.

Accreditation is not a quiz about the distinctions between “climate” and “culture,” though some educators feel a certain clarity about the differences is helpful to leadership. In rough-hewn terms, “climate” is the way the school feels – “happy” and “joyful” and “trusting” and “energetic” are some of the ideal goals. “Culture” is the collective set of behaviors and expectations that create the “climate.”

Here's an example: a high school suffers a disappointing loss in an important tournament. The “culture” of the school expects that the Head of School always addresses the student body after a

big win or loss. The “climate” is the feeling of pride and renewed optimism she somehow rings out of this event.

The “culture” was the history of expectation, experience, belief and practice around the school head’s “fireside chats” with the community. The “climate” was how folks felt coming out of that meeting.

Here’s another example. A school is known for working with kids who have really struggled in school. The culture expects meetings where both teachers and students will be honest and direct – some might think it was “brutally honest.” The culture of the school has, for decades, established a set of expectations around school meetings where people “call it as they see it.” The “culture” is the deep set of expectations around what happens in this school. The “climate” is the feelings these meetings generate. “Sometimes, it takes us a couple of days to process,” a school head said. “But that’s the point. We process and we all get stronger because of that common effort.”

“Culture” is the long-time tradition of “how we do things here” and “climate” is what today feels like. Regardless, though, of whether or not folks in schools are precise in their language about “culture” and “climate,” research and experience clearly establish their central role in a good school. Social-emotional learning – helping young people understand their feelings and their effect on the feelings of others and helping them understand social interactions – the words they choose, the behaviors they demonstrate – or refrain from demonstrating – makes a huge difference. Schools that teach resilience – getting up when lying down seems easier – that communicate often and clearly – that celebrate accomplishment and are deeply positive – that, in short have a vision and a mission to achieve it – are better and more effective schools.

This Standard asks schools to examine the deep effect of a positive Mission and the optimistic vision and values that drive it.

7.b. The school annually assesses the Mission’s relevance.

The Mission Standard asks schools to reflect on their reason for being and, most importantly, on the actual students in the school and the way the mission does – or does not – meet their needs and inspire their aspirations. NEASC advises schools to recognize that missions are complex, usually far more so than the brief and necessarily compact language of a “Mission Statement.” “Mission Statements” summarize a school’s central intentions but may reasonably fall short describing the deeper human contact and invigorating culture the school aims to accomplish. To meet this Standard, schools should give practical evidence that the entire faculty and staff and trustees or advisory body discuss, reflect upon and, when necessary, argue and reason together over the school’s purposes. Looking particularly at students for whom the mission has been clearly “successful” and those for whom it may have been less so is key. The Standard asks schools to gauge how widely and deeply understood the mission is among the faculty, the trustees, the parents and, importantly, where appropriate by age and maturity, the students.

This discussion should take place regularly, and, in one form or another, daily. From time to time but at the very least annually, the Mission Statement should be read aloud for faculty, trustees

and students and its meaning dissected. Schools may find the depth of their mission supports the same statement for years, perhaps decades. Conversely, they may decide that any number of changing circumstances require revision not only of the statement but, also, of the underlying intentions.

A school enrolling a variety of academic abilities may find itself increasingly called upon to meet the needs of children with true learning challenges. A school with a religious tradition may find fewer and fewer traditional students. A school that was once 300 students may find it now has ninety-five and the programs it once offered need to be refocused. A school with enormous resources may find that elements of its history require it to rethink its approach to student independence or faculty assessment.

7.c. The school effectively communicates the Mission to faculty, students, families and the larger community.

An accredited school gives evidence through meeting minutes, videoed discussions and/or survey data that this discussion has taken place regularly and, minimally, annually. And that appropriate actions around this discussion have ensued. While NEASC accredits schools with an enormous range of missions and philosophies, all NEASC Accredited Schools must demonstrate their missions serve the best interests of the students enrolled and foster an open, democratic and inclusive society.

When the Visiting Committee is on campus, they will talk with all constituents – faculty, administration, students, trustees, parents – and ask them, from a variety of perspectives, what the school’s mission truly is and how it manifests in the community. They will be seeking to confirm the Self-Study’s expression of a consistently understood and executed mission. It is not necessary that everyone express the mission in the same precise language but that there is reasonable consistency. And they will listen, too, for frustration, “disconnects,” misperceptions or outright disagreement. These differences of opinion – or knowledge – might be signs of a healthy and vigorous community contending with high aspirations, but they could also range into miscommunication, discontent and dysfunction.

The Visiting Committee intends to hold up a “mirror” and report on their independent observations. Their objective is helping the school re-enforce, create or discover as needed, the harmony around mission that underpins and guides a healthy school.

7.d. Internal and external communications genuinely reflect the Mission and Core Values.

Schools should strive to align all communication with the Mission and Core Values. If the school’s mission calls for “openness and honesty” in all dealings, then the school has a responsibility to demonstrate both qualities in the communication patterns and approaches both within and to the outside world. If a school intends to be reliable, trusted and respected, the quality of communication – diction, tone, examples chosen – truly matter. Schools should provide examples of both internal and external communication – memos from the Dean of Faculty to the faculty, letters by the Head of School or the Board Chair to the parents, fund-

raising brochures, the school's website, the way school meetings are conducted. Particularly in an age of near instant communication, it is sometimes easy to let the desire for immediacy substitute for the more considered approach. This indicator encourages schools to remember that how things are said is often as important – if not more so – than what is said. Kindness or its absence, respect or intolerance for different opinions can, for instance, either enhance or compromise a clear message about what will be acceptable and what will not in a school community.

7.e. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Additional Reflections on Mission

Making Mission the heart of the school's commitment to students requires vigilance and intention. In a student-centered school, virtually every discussion and action with and about students – serious, playful, thoughtful, off-hand, humorous, in the hallways, over the dining table, in faculty meeting, with parents, in classrooms, rehearsal studios and playing fields, on bus trips and in assemblies – is infused with a sense of the mission. School should be serious, fun, exciting, invigorating, creative, challenging, rigorous, playful, honest, open and respectful. Faculty understand, too, the persistent tension in schools, more particularly in middle and high schools, between requirement and personal growth. “We want our students to meet the highest standard” and “we want our students to experience the greatest personal development” require faculty who understand that this achievement is often a delicate balance.

- How do my actions in the school reflect the mission?
- How does our adult community come together around the mission?
- What aspects of the school's mission and current reality inspire the most vigorous discussion among faculty and staff? What happens from these discussions?
- When we admit – or reject – a student, how has the mission played out?
- When we decide to take community action around an event, how is the mission manifest?
- Missions are usually expressed in large abstract terms “ – fairness,” “courage,” “honor,” “respect,” “care,” “spirit,” “rigor,” – but human behaviors are specific, concrete and observable. How skilled am I in “translating” the abstraction into the specific?
- How do our written reports reflect the mission?
- What parameters does the mission establish for my behavior? What do I not do or say because of the mission?
- Accreditation does not usually single out individuals, but schools are all about individuals. How does the school assess individual faculty, staff and trustee understanding and actions in light of the mission?
- List programs in the school on a spectrum from “highly mission-driven” to “reasonably mission-driven” to “somewhat mission-driven” to “perhaps contradictory of the mission.”

Required Materials:

- A. Current Mission Statement
- B. Other guiding documents if applicable:
 - Statement of Core Values/Beliefs/Philosophy
 - Statement of Vision
 - Value Proposition

Program Standard 8. Commitment to Inspiration and Support Characterizes the Approach to Each Student

The purpose of every accredited school is the healthy development of its students. “The kids” as we say colloquially. This Standard speaks directly to the quality of the relationship of the faculty with the students and of the students among themselves. These are complex realities, observable in their full measure only over time and in a variety of contexts.

For instance, teachers can – and often should – be “demanding” of students. How helpful a demand might be – in the short or long-run – should be a continuously contemplated question. How “demands” are made is such a question. How an observer might evaluate demands is another. A “demand” can be made in stentorian tones. It can also be manifested in a relationship where doing less than one’s best just feels unacceptable.

A “demanding” teacher can be engaging, encouraging, enthusiastic and empathetic. A “demanding” teacher can be demeaning, didactic, derogatory and dispiriting. A teacher seen as “demanding” by one student might be “pretty interesting” to another. Student assessment of the quality of “demands” made upon them can be helpful and also problematic. An “unfair” demand when one is twelve may resonate ten years later as the most important lesson one learned in school. An “engaging” teacher for a junior in high school may prove disappointing in the long run when a student discovers the course lacked rigor.

“Inspiration” and “support” – the key terms in this Standard – require considerable discussion to assess fairly and helpfully. “Teaching and learning” is often a balancing act between “rigor” and “relevance.” Sometimes it is said that no one truly “teaches” a student – but that students can and do learn. Figuring out what will be most helpful to students who live upon a very long continuum of interest, ability, motivation and curiosity is the “art” of this balance. A teacher must be engaged equally by the subject and by the student. This constant wondering about the quality of engagement contributes to the fascination of teaching and learning. And to the complexity of assessment.

“Inspiration” and “support” are tools for analysis but not absolute states. They lie at the heart of the on-going purposes of accreditation and, also, at the center of the challenge of accreditation.

Accreditation requires schools to discuss, research, test and implement evolving assessments of the quality of the relationships between teachers and students and among students, themselves. Some of these will be informal – “How was class today?” “How did that field trip really work out?” “What are you planning for our school-wide initiative around social media?”

Some assessments are formal: annual review of faculty by a principal or department chair, written student assessments of courses and teachers, submitted lesson plans. NEASC provides templates for these activities but schools may use their own forms or approaches.

Each accredited school should write a narrative response to this Standard including comment on the indicators. “How do we strive to inspire our kids?” “How do we support them as they

develop appropriately?” Specific examples from the experience of students and faculty should make up the bulk of the narrative.

This standard is not a “check list” but is intended to provide an accredited school the opportunity to discuss the quality of its approaches to its students in light of the goals of “inspiration” and “support.”

8.a. Students learn the personal qualities necessary to achieve independence and develop confidence.

NEASC accredited schools recognize their mandate to help children and young people become self-sufficient. The meaning of the terms “independence” and “confidence” require appropriate definition during different phases of a young person’s development. An “independent” third-grader may know how to read appropriate text and be able to complete thoughtful assignments. She may do relevant independent research and understand the differences between two and three-dimensional drawings. A senior in high school navigates the college admission process, manages personal relationships and understands consequences. In describing the approach to its students, the school gives evidence its students have ample and appropriate opportunities throughout the program to develop their independence and their self-confidence.

8.b. The school recognizes, values and nurtures the unique reality of every student at each stage of his/her development.

Each student in an accredited school deserves fundamental understanding and appropriate care for their individual abilities, circumstances, interests, emotional, physical and social reality. This consideration asks the school to reflect on the ways each member of the faculty and appropriate staff demonstrates both their understanding and their capacity to work with the students enrolled in the school.

- Is the student’s religion, ethnicity, family, talents, challenges, interests and potential clearly understood, communicated and valued?
- How are students observed?
- What records are kept of their progress?
- How are these records discussed?
- How is their importance communicated to students, individually?
- What kinds of encouragement are offered?
- How are optimism and hope expressed?
- When students need correction, or changed behaviors, how do teachers and administrators talk to them?
- If students have specific health needs or learning challenges does every person with a need to know in the community understand their own role?

8.c. School culture promotes and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.

This consideration focuses on the school's culture – the tone, the consistency, the deep commitment of every individual to create a school reality where each student feels welcome and where each is given fair, just and equal opportunities. NEASC offers an “Equity, Justice and Inclusion” questionnaire designed to help schools assess the quality of their culture. The principal concept is that a school measures its culture in the way classes are conducted, in the kinds of chatter one hears in the hall ways, in the ability of every student to be an appropriate member of activities and programs. Schools are not “perfect” and this consideration asks the school to contemplate strengths and challenges and the response to events or incidents when students or faculty fall short of the goal. Schools that include a description of how difficult situations were handled rather than merely noting their successes demonstrate their understanding of the depth of the term “promote” in this indicator.

8.d. The faculty regularly monitors each student's social and emotional development.

An accredited school is committed to the full development of each student. Academic, artistic or athletic development may be more objectively assessed than social and emotional development – though there are certainly an enormous number of resources to measure these qualities – but it is crucial that schools seek to understand and appropriately work with the reality of students' social and emotional development. This indicator requires schools to demonstrate that faculty understand age-appropriate student behaviors and, importantly, that the school regularly finds ways to assess the social and emotional progress of each student. This indicator addresses the faculty's understanding of developmental stages and the variety of approaches required for differing levels of maturity. It addresses the school's capacity to confront, as necessary, behaviors that are “outside the norm” of its accepted students. Because NEASC accredits schools enrolling students from ages three to twenty who fall on a very broad spectrum of maturity and ability – from “gifted” to “challenged” – this indicator speaks to the importance of understanding, assessing and creating approaches and programs to strengthen students' emotional and social progress.

8.e. Students' perspectives and opinions are appropriately heard and addressed.

This indicator asks schools to assess the ways they “hear” students, understand their points of view and respond appropriately to voices of students. This indicator covers a very wide range of school philosophies and ages and the term “appropriate” requires discussion and reflection. The line between an immature student outburst and thoughtful, reasoned expression of concerns requires faculty to develop a nuanced approach. An incendiary student newspaper article, a peaceful but persistent protest movement, an unsigned poster in the hallway, a request for a faculty member to support a friend – and a thousand more examples of students expressing themselves through language, behavior and tone – all require faculty to listen and intervene – or not – appropriately. Learning to listen and act appropriately with students is a key area for faculty development.

8.f. Students and parents as necessary can access support to address their respective needs.

Schools possess highly diverse support services for students and families. This indicator asks schools to examine their support services – academic, emotional, physical, creative, social, college, etc. – to ensure that communication and necessary engagement takes place. If parents have questions about a reported student interaction with faculty, how is that addressed? If faculty report concerning behaviors in class, what happens? If a child has on-going counseling needs, how are they provided for and monitored? If students are having trouble in classes, how is this communicated and to whom? How does the school assess whether or not support is adequate?

Also, where appropriate, schools should support parents' access to town or local services. In some communities, effective services for children and young people may be available that are not part of the school's own capacity. Schools that develop effective partnerships with local social service resources can be truly helpful to their students and families.

8.g. Students are encouraged to engage actively in the life of the school.

How does the school promote its programs? How are students placed in programs or encouraged to join appropriate activities? This indicator asks schools to reflect on the culture of the school and on the programs – athletic, artistic, social-service, clubs, etc. – that are usually described as “co-curricular” or “extra-curricular” but that may be an integral part of the school's total program. School programs often extend far beyond the classroom schedule. This consideration is not a measure of the variety or richness of the school's programs but of the ways the school works with students to engage them appropriately in the school's social life and both intentional and more spontaneous school activities.

8.h. The school strives to understand and respond to the realities of students' social and emotional experiences within and outside the school.

This consideration asks the school to assess how aware faculty and administration are of the social and emotional experiences students encounter both in and outside the school. Do students belong to particular “groups” and what does this relationship entail? Are they “loners” or do they have a small group of friends? What happens with the students at home? This is often a large and complex subject for schools and deciding when and how to intervene – or not – in a student's home life often requires significant deliberation by appropriate personnel in the school. Are students working a job after – or even before – school? Are they living in two homes? Do they come home to an empty house? Are there any suggestions or evidence of abuse? Are there significant disagreements among family members that affect the students? Are they fed properly? What language is spoken at home? If they are international students, does the school effectively understand the realities of their homestay and American experience? Do students have adequate access to technology?

Schools might also consider the following:

- Students bring their full lives to the school. Understanding and appropriately embracing the total life experience of its students should be a central goal for an accredited school. Conduct interviews with students about their experiences with faculty, staff and their fellow-students. Listen to what they say, seeking trends and themes. And attending to individual differences.
- Talk with parents about what their children tell them.
- Ask alumni how they reflect on their experiences a year or five years out.
- Construct a school-wide written assessment that heightens awareness of students' social experiences.
- Administer a school-wide assessment of equity, inclusion and justice
- Assign specific administrative responsibility to insure constant discussion among faculty of their observations about students and plans of actions, being sure that faculty understand the complexity of their students' social experiences.

8.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. School Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Survey (if appropriate and/or completed)
- B. Documentation describing specific services, programs or activities such as:
 - Learning Support services
 - Language Support services
 - Counseling and guidance support services
 - Testing and placement – courses, programs, college application
 - Other programs specific to the school

Program Standard 9. Commitment to Excellence Distinguishes the Program

“Excellence” defines the twin accreditation goals of “achievement” and “aspiration.” It is a term aiming toward high goals that does not permit an absolute definition. One recognizes the quality in practice. “Excellent” surgeons save patient lives. “Excellent” business leaders demonstrate high ethical standards. “Excellent” mechanics are honest and fair and competent. “Excellent” teachers understand their subjects and build genuinely caring relationships with their students.

“Excellence” might be an inspirational goal or a hackneyed cliché. In the Program Standard the term intends to set a high bar for the aspirations of every school program: academic, social, athletic and artistic.

To be genuinely helpful, this is a Standard that must be read in the context of a school’s mission and culture. A school with a mission to keep students healthy and active may find “excellence” in games where their teams are always in contention for victory. A school enrolling students from largely economically deprived families may find “excellence” in high rates of retention and graduation and students who go on to college. A school with a population of significantly challenged students may find “excellence” in the independence and eventual self-sufficiency of its graduates. “Excellence” means flexibility and persistence. It means empathy and strength of character. “Excellence” is a sense of humor and playfulness and an abiding seriousness of purpose. “Excellence” exists in the broadest context of achievement and practice.

9.a. The school’s culture nurtures and promotes program excellence, in particular the academic program.

The school should regularly discuss what achievements and aspirations are considered “excellent” within the school. Is “excellence” certain scores on objective tests? Is it observed behaviors of kindness within the community? Is “excellence” the relative progress of students with severe disabilities? Is it examples of initiative and creativity? Is it the way a team behaved after a victory – or a loss? Is it kids who support classmates in difficult circumstances? What does the school reward? How are these rewards measured and communicated? “Excellence” may contain objective measures: a high school track star running a four-minute mile; a student winning a Westinghouse scholarship; a school constructing a LEED Platinum building. “Excellence” may include value-driven behaviors: a child who raises awareness of unfair behaviors in school; a teacher who creates an opportunity for everyone in the school to address hunger or homelessness; a parent who initiates a faculty appreciation fund. “Excellence” may be reflected in the obvious growth students make in their mathematics understanding or their musical performance. The most important elements of this indicator are the behaviors and goals which the school believes most accurately represent its definition of “excellence.”

9.b. The program consistently reflects the Mission.

Most importantly, this indicator asks the school to translate the general and abstract language of its mission into specific and concrete programs. If the mission contains language around “truth”

or “a generous spirit” or “following in the footsteps of Jesus” how, specifically, do the programs reflect these values? What is key to this indicator is the school’s ability to demonstrate the meaning of its mission as witnessed in specific programs and approaches. The strongest Self-Studies report clear and concrete examples of the mission in action and show how these examples characterize the school’s general programs. If “honesty” is a core value in the mission, for instance, how does the school manifest this value in the way classes are taught, tests taken, homework assigned? How does “honesty” play a role in music rehearsals or soccer practice or in social service projects? Programs will be informed, of course, by the values of the program, itself. “Honesty” plays a significant role, for example, if the teacher encourages students to ask questions when they do not understand or rewards them for building a positive environment. “Honesty” among young people who know they are trusted plays an important role in their development.

9.c. Curriculum planning supports the school’s core beliefs and the needs of the students.

The way faculty plan the curriculum – establishing over-all goals, organizing progression, deciding the best uses and amount of time to allot to specific lessons, the use of technology, field trips, textbooks, film – all should demonstrate an understanding of the ways the school’s core beliefs and the needs of the students coalesce. Students learning the fundamentals of figure drawing, the relationship of algae to nitrogen, the language of Shakespeare, the concepts of Calculus, the way to combine primary colors or, if they are visually impaired, how to locate themselves in unfamiliar circumstances – all have needs that will be met in the context of the school’s researched and essential understanding about learning. While NEASC does not assert a particular educational philosophy, Accreditation strongly supports the essential role of research and study around educational practice. Research around teaching and learning constantly highlights approaches, materials and assessment practices that may strengthen student development.

9. d. Written curriculum aligns horizontally and vertically, and faculty have time to discuss curriculum alignment.

“Horizontal” curriculum alignment refers to the coordination of programs for students at the same general place in their education. It means that students taking “Algebra I” in a school with more than one instructor will have generally the same level of expectation. It means, more broadly, that students in similar grades have generally equivalent experience. “Vertical” alignment refers to the progression of the curriculum from elementary to more advanced topics and expectations. These alignments are about grade levels – third graders moving to fourth grade and subject transitions – Introductory Biology moving to Advanced Placement or “honors” Biology. These alignments are about some reasonable consistency for students in similar courses or grades. Most importantly, this indicator asks the school to give specific evidence of intentional thinking and planning about what and how teaching and learning occur. While there is clearly value in individual and even idiosyncratic teaching styles, a good school also demonstrates age or grade-level appropriate planning and develops a palpable “arc” to the curriculum. If the school

believes, for instance, that learning to do independent research is fundamental to an excellent education, then this value should be clear at every grade level and throughout the program. If a school believes helping students develop their creative spirit is vitally important, then all teachers should demonstrate how creativity is specifically manifest in the planning and execution of courses, artistic endeavors and individual progress. Ultimately, the school prioritizes time for the faculty to work collaboratively on curricular review.

9.e. Current research about subject matter and pedagogy informs the program and instructional practices.

One of the most intriguing aspects of work in education is the constant and ever-evolving research into effective practice, imaginative approaches and new paradigms. Countless university courses, workshops and meetings, journals, websites, books and online programs are available to every school with a computer in its library or offices. Readily available weekly summaries such as *The Marshall Memo* or *The Educator's Notebook* offer a smorgasbord of advanced thinking and reflective practice on multiple topics. Accredited schools encourage their faculty and staff to think broadly and deeply about their subjects, to be restless scholars and ever-curious about human development and to keep themselves current on the larger world. Educational research is often very good at asking intriguing questions and sometimes less effective in providing definitive answers; but what is important about this research is the constant stimulation it offers teachers to contemplate their own ways of doing things, their perceptions of what is effective and the possibilities for improvement that a new thought might bring. In many ways, it is the “spirit of inquiry” that characterizes the educated mind and should infuse the culture of the school.

9.f. Media and technology resource services support the program and meet the needs of the students and faculty.

It is a cliché to note that few if any innovations since the printing press have affected education as profoundly as technology and media. Schools should have written plans and protocols around media and technology that encompass academic, creative and social uses. Most importantly, schools should regularly and thoroughly review the use of the full – and ever expanding – repertoire of technology and should seek the most effective and creative approaches possible. In the early days of technology, schools touted – with some pride – “a generous spirit” or “following in the footsteps of Jesus” how, specifically, do the programs the simple fact that each student “had a laptop” but often there was little understanding about the purposes of this tool. The internet, social media, cell phones, and the endless array of gaming opportunities change fundamental realities for schools, students, families and society. This indicator asks schools to discuss their approach to the vast world of technology within the context of their understanding of child and youth development, the social lives of students and the goals and context of the many programs offered. The fundamental question is how these programs, policies and approaches manifest and extend the mission of the school.

The indicator asks schools to think in some depth about the uses of technology and the potential to strengthen the educational endeavor of the school. Some schools have founded significant portions of their goals for students on a facility with technology – video production, music,

theatre, art, and every academic discipline. Others, like Waldorf Schools, have consciously eschewed student use of most or all technology. Schools should consider students' technical resources in the context of the school's requirements. Accreditation does not require a particular infrastructure or philosophy or deep understanding of available technology. It does ask that schools consider the world of technology in light of their mission and operations and demonstrate the effectiveness of current practice.

9.g. Faculty use effective assessment to promote learning and monitor growth.

Assessment is central to understanding the effectiveness of the school's program. Schools should understand and use both "formative" and "summative" assessments and be very clear about the purposes of these approaches. Generally, "formative" assessment is used to understand student progress and guide next steps. "Summative" assessment is used to measure current achievement. The most succinct distinction we know appears in The Social Profit Handbook by David Grant when he writes "when the cook tastes the soup that's formative assessment; when the customer tastes the soup, that's summative assessment." NEASC recommends that schools make extensive use of formative assessments as these prove helpful to learning. "Summative" assessment has a place – particularly for the necessities of grading – but can be an "easy" substitute for the deeper educational progress in the formative assessment. If a teacher asks a third-grader to explain primary colors and the teacher's real interest is the student's actual grasp of the concept, that is formative assessment. If the teacher assigns a grade to the student's description based on its accuracy describing red, yellow and blue that may be summative assessment. The distinction lies in the purpose of the questions asked and the behaviors for both teacher and student that follow. Schools might also note, particularly in their vertical planning, that the frequency of summative assessment is likely to increase as students advance through the grades. The balance of these two fundamental approaches and the ways schools gather data, compile statistics and use the techniques of analytics to make effective decisions should be constantly reviewed. Each teacher in school and the whole faculty should demonstrate thoughtful, clear and articulate policies and procedures around assessment. Faculty should also strive to keep abreast of research and modify approaches where it is applicable. Students and their families should understand the uses, purposes and protocols for assessment in the school.

9.h. The program supports a range of learning styles and developmental levels.

Few topics in education generate as much constant review as the role "learning styles" play in learning. For a time, teachers were advised to "teach to the individual student's learning style" – visual learners, aural learners, students who benefitted from taking notes, etc. Current scholarship seems to indicate that using multiple approaches benefits everybody and that a student with a particular "learning style" may not gain as much from a single approach. The central tenet of this indicator lies in faculty awareness and understanding of the differences among their students and the capacity of both teacher and student to grow most effectively. Understanding that a student may not have "taken in" all the information in a visual PowerPoint but, if given time with the material in a written format, might grasp the issues at hand. This indicator is also about the strategic use of patience and alternate approaches to helping students

master material and skills. A teacher should understand that each student is an individual. A teacher should be willing to try novel or varied presentations, questions and activities with the singular goal of helping students understand and be motivated to further study.

9.i. Every aspect of the program reflects awareness of and commitment to equity, justice and inclusion.

These qualities must, like the mission, permeate the culture and climate of the school. While it is worthwhile to have programs and discrete events – an MLK Celebration, a “Rainbow Day,” a showing of *Schindler’s List* – the real test of the depth of equity, justice and inclusion comes from the day-to-day approaches, expectations, responses and routines in the school. NEASC research indicates the force of the school’s leadership to set an expectation and a tone that all students are treated justly, equitably and inclusively. Again, this indicator emphasizes the reality that an embracing philosophy is beneficial to all. Many differences in appearance, language or country of origin may be easily observed; many differences in perspective, sensitivity, identity and ability or interest may not be. This indicator calls attention to the degree all students feel welcome in school’s programs.

9.j. The school’s international programs and partnerships (if applicable) are aligned with the school’s Mission and meet the needs of all engaged in or affected by them.

This indicator refers primarily to the school’s specific international programs. Some schools do trips abroad for briefer or longer periods. Some schools establish service-learning projects. Many schools maintain long traditions of fascinating and valuable international exchange programs, both sending students to and receiving them from other countries. Some schools are establishing “partnerships” with schools with the goal of implanting their school’s curriculum through faculty trained in or by the NEASC school. In each of these events or programs, the school should demonstrate both that the mission of the school is enhanced by the program and that it meets the needs of all students – and adults – who participate or are affected. Schools should be wary of programs whose primary goal is financial gain. NEASC notes that many schools engage with a variety of “Agencies” both to recruit from other countries and to supervise students when in this country. NEASC urges schools to use “Agencies” wisely, not to be overly dependent on them (or rely on just one) and always to maintain independent supervision and contact with each international student and his or her family. This is clearly an evolving area for many schools and the realities are both dynamic and fluid. All schools with students in homestay programs must demonstrate their independent supervision and contact with each of their students. Agencies have their strengths, but schools should recognize these groups fall on a broad spectrum from highly responsible to “only talks a good game....” and some schools have been seriously injured by disreputable entities.

9.k. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current written curriculum/curriculum guide
- B. List/examples of assessment tools/methods demonstrating student progress
- C. Documentation detailing any specific provisions for international students

Program Standard 10. Commitment to Continuous Professional Development Permeates the Adult Culture

An accredited school should model constant professional growth. Just as the school expects students to become “independent learners,” every professional person in the school should seek multiple ways to evolve and strengthen his or her own work. And the school, itself, must encourage, support and set aside time and resources available to this end. If faculty in a school talk with each other, read articles, take graduate courses, enroll in seminars and workshops and meet together regularly in a variety of groups (departments, all teachers of freshmen or third grade, teachers seeking to strengthen technical skills, all dormitory faculty, etc.) to discuss professional issues in depth, then a school is creating a culture and climate of continuous professional development. While it is surely helpful if schools possess financial resources to support multiple workshops or on-campus speakers, a great deal of professional development can be done very economically. A “professional development group” on campus can disseminate articles, spark discussion, bring in an effective speaker from a sister school, suggest new techniques, send a link to a fascinating Ted Talk or YouTube presentation. Technology brings a great many professional development opportunities to campus for free. This Standard focuses on both the professional culture and the climate as well as the specific programs for faculty assessment and growth. The basic question is direct: is this a school where the Board, the Head of School and each faculty and staff member – however the school is structured – obviously care about and pursue effective professional development? “Getting better all the time” is the goal.

10.a. The school values and encourages research, reflection and innovation.

The amount of educational research is, in a word, voluminous. The key is understanding that a great deal of it is about trying things, experimenting, taking a new idea and seeing how it works in practice, asking questions of colleagues, taking an example and attempting to replicate it. Teachers and administrators are very busy; constantly examining new ideas should be a component of the busy day. This indicator asks the school to assess how research, reflection and innovation are valued and encouraged. What does the school do to demonstrate the essential importance of learning and trying new ideas? Many schools pride themselves on being “vibrant learning communities.” This vibrancy must be a part of the faculty’s approach to their work and their students.

10.b. The school fosters positive relationships and thoughtful professional collaboration.

Collaboration is a learned skill. It means that individuals with different professional skills and responsibilities share common core values and seek solutions and approaches that strengthen the entire school. Collaboration takes place when individuals from different disciplines and areas understand that some key elements in a school require people to find answers that truly consider a variety of issues, potentials and possibilities. For example, “How does ‘the school’ work with parents?” is a collaborative concern of every adult in the school. “As a school community, we respond to all parent questions within 24 hours.” “We always answer emails sent to us by

parents and we always CC the Head of School.” “We meet with parents personally who want to talk with us.” “Our collaborative approach to communication is clearly understood and practiced by all.” “We also understand who makes decisions and those who make them always tell us what we need to know.” Not all issues or problems in school are solved collaboratively. Individuals often must take initiative and make decisions or come up with approaches. “How does ‘the school’ work together for the benefit of students?” At the secondary level, do several teachers of individual students ever form a collaborative group to meet a student’s needs? If there is a school-wide challenge – such as creating a new schedule – how does the school work collaboratively to resolve it? Building the schedule may define the kind of opportunity that inevitably includes compromises, differing perspectives and ultimate understanding that results from effective collaboration. This indicator asks schools to articulate two or three examples that illustrate the school’s capacity to foster positive relationships and professional collaboration.

10.c. Successful professional development planning aligns the needs of the school and the individual teachers at all career stages.

Planning a worthwhile professional development program requires thoughtful understanding of the school’s mission and goals, the variety of experience, knowledge and skill among the faculty and a practical consideration of budget and time. It should also be strategic – both for individual teachers and for the faculty as a whole – looking out two to four years to allow a cumulative rather than piecemeal evolution. Effective planning pays particular attention to the variety of faculty experiences and distinguishes among younger and more experienced folks.

Planning, as indicated above, should expect that teachers will be able to do individual work and that there will be a program focusing on both school-wide and individual goals that will be accomplished in various groups – including the full faculty. Most importantly, effective professional development requires thoughtful faculty assessment which might include the exchange of specific lesson plans and/or instructional goals, an understanding of the kinds of teaching techniques being employed, reasonable direct observation experiences and time for discussion and observation after the observation.

Effective faculty assessment should be embedded in the culture of the school in distinctive ways. Planning should ensure that the school and the faculty develop a shared vision of the effective teacher and a clear definition of “excellence.” Teaching is an art and a science developed over time. The school should aim to provide benchmarks of true growth in teaching as well as clear examples of exceptional teaching. In the Self-Study, school leadership should demonstrate the ways faculty and staff are nurtured, supported and guided at all stages of their careers. The school’s commitment to faculty development should be constant and fundamental to the school’s culture.

10.d. The school’s leadership and faculty participate in NEASC peer-review and visits.

Administration and faculty generally report participation on a Visiting Committee as one of their most significant professional development experiences. This process – developed over many

decades through the cooperation and collaboration of hundreds of schools – brings together faculty from many schools in an intense period of observation, discussion and reflection both about the individual school being visited and also about the nature of the Standards. The Self-Study and the Visit are fundamental learning experiences for all who engage with them and NEASC Accredited schools should expect that their leadership and their faculty will take active roles in the process. Schools contemplating and completing their Self-Studies should be sure some members of both administration and faculty participate on a Visiting Committee.

10.e. The school’s professional evaluation and assessment of all personnel assures effective implementation of their responsibilities.

Effective faculty and staff evaluation continues to be a significant challenge for many schools. An accredited school must have a reasonable approach/method for assessing the work and professional contributions of each member of the faculty and staff. For faculty, these approaches should include collegial conversation about goals and methods for achieving them, direct and unbiased observations of faculty at work and, where appropriate, should incorporate various kinds of student and colleague response. The assessment procedures should include an opportunity for discussion and reflection and might include subsequent goal setting and further discussion around implementation of changes where necessary.

Doing all of this well is time-intensive and is likely the reason such procedures sometimes are given less attention than they should be.

Educational research and experience have grappled with the conundrum of definitions for “effective teaching” pretty much since the beginning of time. These questions are front and center in Standard Four. This indicator asks that the school provide evidence of its approach to these ever-fascinating and often difficult questions. The goal – “assurance of effective implementation” – may be an ultimately elusive one, but the school should give evidence of structured and thoughtful approaches to its achievement.

10.f. School personnel understand their decision-making roles and responsibilities.

This indicator asks schools to be clear about organization and decision-making within the school and to demonstrate that clarity exists among faculty, staff and, where appropriate, students and parents. “Who decides what” and “where/to whom do I go for a discussion and/or decision about which issues” should be as widely understood as possible. “I know what my job is and I know what I have the authority to decide and what I do not” are essential distinctions within a school community.

This indicator does not make assumptions about what decisions should be made by whom within a school – but it does require that folks are as clear as possible about their own roles. If a faculty member wishes to change a textbook, for example, does he or she have to discuss this with anyone? Faculty may – or may not – have absolute discretion about teaching materials. If a faculty member encounters a student in a questionable disciplinary situation, where and when does he or she have authority to act? When is she sure she will be backed up if necessary? If a

young faculty member is unsure what to do in a certain situation, is he sure where to find support?

10.g. Lines of authority and communication are clear and effective.

Schools are largely composed of individuals making decisions. Many of these must be done quickly and effectively and often out of sight of other adults. Does the school help all faculty and staff know which situations – and generally what kinds of responses – fall within their authority and when they may have to refer situations to others?

This indicator asks that the pathways – personal conversation, email, phone call – around decisions are clear and the folks know from whom to expect decisions and who has responsibility for what. 10.d. asks that faculty and staff are clear about their own decisions. This indicator asks that they are clear about whom to go to for what – and about who may speak or write to them about what.

Some schools have a great deal of shared decision-making while others have – or say they have – very clear hierarchies of decisions.

Effective schools are clear about who makes what decisions and about who has responsibilities. Vagueness in either area can result in unnecessary confusion, miscommunication or emotional upset.

Communication is always a challenge in a complex environment and good schools focus on developing as much clarity around lines of responsibility and authority as possible.

10.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. List of effective and completed professional development opportunities provided to faculty and staff for the past three years
- B. List of current faculty, administration and staff who have participated in NEASC Visiting Teams in the past five years
- C. Evaluation/assessment documents/protocols for faculty, administration and staff

Program Standard 11. Commitment to Engaging with the Greater Community Enhances Student Experience

All schools exist in the context of their families, their alumni and, variously, local, national and international communities and in the global environment. This Standard asks schools to contemplate this wider context from a variety of different perspectives. How does the school talk to and listen to parents and families? How does the school engage with their local cities and towns? How do they assume responsibilities for the environment? How do they continue their relationship with alumni and past parents and families? What are the school's fundamental values around social commitment and how are these played out in school programs? An accredited school makes a significant effort to extend its mission to all constituencies and to the wider world. In essence, a school has a "bully pulpit" to advocate for an inclusive, fair, equitable world and accredited schools should do all that is possible to promote this privilege.

11.a. The school effectively communicates and collaborates with families around their children's development.

An accredited school undertakes significant responsibility to communicate with families. An accredited school regards families as essential partners in their children's education and develops programs that inform, solicits informed responses to school programs and, particularly, that provide helpful perspective on each student's development. This indicator asks schools to reflect on the many ways this communication occurs and to assess the effectiveness of each. Schools use assignment and grade-reporting programs, sponsor regular parent conferences and written comments, use their website to keep their constituencies up to date on campus events, use such programs as Naviance for juniors and seniors in the college process and send various mailings throughout the year. Evidence for achieving this indicator's intentions come from family and alumni surveys, from conversations with representative groups of parents both current and past. "Effective communication and collaboration" should bear out the school's mission and core values.

11.b. The school and the local community interact to their mutual benefit.

Accredited NEASC schools exist in an enormous variety of physical settings ranging from downtown in large cities to suburbs, to rural, sometimes isolated, locations scattered through the New England countryside. This indicator asks schools to assess the interactions and relationships the school establishes with its physical community. Because the variety of landscapes – or cityscapes – New England independent schools occupy is highly diverse, this indicator asks schools to discuss the mutual benefits of their immediate locale. Additionally, schools seek to maximize program development stemming from the potential of their location. This relationship should indicate clearly to students what responsible local citizenship means and, where appropriate, should engage students in enhancing community engagement. Accredited schools present a vast array of possible local relationships and this indicator asks the school to assess the ways the mission of the school extends into the community.

11.c. The school effectively engages with its alumni and friends.

For many schools, relationships with the alumni body are crucial to the school’s health and progress. Alumni may serve on the Board of Trustees/Directors, may return to the school to teach or lead and clearly “spread the word” about the school’s current realities and strategic plans. Maintaining the alumni network is an important objective for an independent school, albeit one that is carried out with highly variable degrees of success. Relationships with alumni and friends – who include past parents and grandparents and various other constituencies as, over time, schools develop their circle of associates – is a significant challenge for all schools. Simply keeping accurate contact information remains, for all schools, a major and constantly evolving struggle. Many schools seek comparative data to know how they are faring within the broader context of “schools like ours” but it is unclear if such data – which falls on a spectrum from reassuring to troubling – is truly helpful. And it is not necessary to accreditation. Alumni, advancement and development programs in accredited schools fall along an extremely long spectrum and, from the accreditation perspective, the essential question is how well the program serves the mission of the school and whether or not there are creative or specific or necessary steps the school should take to strengthen the program. Few school programs define “elusive final goals” more vividly than alumni stewardship and cultivation. That being said, however, there is voluminous literature on the operation of effective alumni and advancement offices. NEASC’s expectation is that a school will use this indicator to assess the goals and effectiveness of the current program and to establish plans for future improvement all within the scope of the mission, goals and resources.

11.d. The school is committed to broadening students’ perspectives.

One of the essential goals of accreditation is encouraging schools to seek multiple ways to expand their students’ awareness of and engagement with the “wider world.” This may be done through study as when young students in a Waldorf School make vividly colored maps of Africa or when high school seniors undertake Advanced Placement Chinese. It may be done through service-learning projects when students venture to the Dominican Republic or New Orleans to rebuild hurricane-destroyed houses. It may happen when students volunteer for the Special Olympics or serve as companions at a retirement community or engage in a week-end long clean-up project in a rural New England town. It may happen when a school spends a year defining what a “third-world country” really is and how it might progress. It may happen when a racially or gender-biased comment appears in a school bathroom and the entire community sets out to think together about the depth and reality of prejudice and to see if these forces can really be changed. The opportunities for “broadening perspective” are endless. This indicator asks schools to assess their commitment to this goal and to ask how that commitment might be strengthened.

11.e. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Examples of communication with alums and parents

Program Standard 12. Commitment to Meeting the Needs of Each Student Drives the Residential Program
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In boarding schools, the residential program should be founded on an intentional curriculum centered on assuring the health and well-being of each student. Facilities, relevant and engaging activities, and appropriate supervision to meet the needs of each student are essential.

12.a. The Residential Program is consistent with the Mission of the school.

A residential school should have in place a clearly thought-out and consistently organized residential program. The program may have many components but the whole program should be conceived and carried out to enhance the school's mission for its students. No list could include all the components of a well-thought-out residential program, but the following are some of the elements to be considered:

- How secure are the residential facilities?
- How is dorm/house student leadership established?
- What responsibilities are dorm/house student leaders expected to carry out?
- What training/orientation do they receive?
- Do they have any distinct "privileges?"
- Does the school use vertical housing?
- What responsibilities are expected of dorm/house parents?
- How frequently are individual dorm/house parents "on duty?"
- What training and orientation do they receive?
- Is there a role for "back-up" or non-residential faculty to play?
- If these individuals are on duty, do they have reasonable facilities when in the house/dorm?
- What role do other faculty play in residential life?
- What expectations does the school have for the social realities of dorm parents? Does the school allow unmarried couples to live together in dorms/houses? What expectations does the school have for unmarried faculty around visitors and significant others? How does the school account for the ages and levels of maturity of faculty?
- What activities are part of the culture of the dorm/house?
- What rules/regulations are in place?
- How are these rules/regulations enforced?
- What expectations are there for visitors?
- What expectations are there for deliveries?
- How is dorm/house safety handled?
- How is cleanliness managed?
- Are expectations consistent across campus or are there different expectations for different dorms/houses?
- How are noise and music managed?
- Are there common rooms and how are they used and managed?
- How are bathrooms monitored, cleaned and maintained?
- How are the grounds around the dorm/house maintained? What is the role of students?

- How is electronic technology – cell phones, computer, gaming, internet – managed?
- Are there traditions in the dorm/house or residential program and are they positive and in alignment with the mission?
- How is the health of students monitored?
- What happens in the dorm/house on weekends?
- Are there specific residential activities?
- What place do day students have in the dorms/houses?
- Who in the administration has specific responsibility for dorm life?

12.b. Residential staff are appropriately qualified and assigned to meet the needs of students under their care and supervision.

Residential schools staff dorms and houses many ways. Likely the majority of faculty in dorms in New England are teachers/coaches/administrators in the school. But a few schools hire individuals specifically to live in dorms and undertake residential responsibilities. The key is that all individuals with direct responsibility for students in a residential setting are appropriate to meet the needs of students and that they receive the necessary training and supervision to carry out their work effectively.

Specifically, the ages of the students, their specific needs, their gender, maturity and developing sense of responsibility must all be considered when staffing a dorm/house. For example, balancing the ages and family situations of house/dorm parents in a particular dorm would be important. If there are six dorm parents under the age of thirty and no families in a house, the school may be placing unnecessary strain on everybody.

Staff should receive considerable – and ongoing – professional development around the challenges of residential life. What situations may they encounter? How do they deal with them? How do they get better at doing so? To whom do residential faculty turn when they have questions – and are they actively encouraged to ask questions? Are they trained to deal with emergencies? Excessive alcohol or drug use – or any alcohol or drug use? What if they encounter students fighting? Are they 100% sure – without exception – that their students are accounted for when they should be accounted for? What about a “middle of the night” absence? Who should be called? What about parents who disagree about visitation/custody issues? How clear about communication and “duty assignments” are all affected faculty?

Creating a thoughtful, responsible, enjoyable and positive dormitory program requires considerable attention and a capacity for constant monitoring, review and training. Residential programs should exhibit particular care around the qualifications, assessment and discussion necessary to help dorm parents do their jobs well.

12.c. The Residential Program, including evening, weekend and vacation activities is integrated into the total life of the school, especially regarding the interaction with day students.

Again, except for the very small number of residential schools without day students, the school should develop an intentional policy and set of procedures for day students and boarding students to create an integrated school culture. The most common perceptions among students seem to be that boarding students have it better because they can develop friendships and be “part of the

action” throughout the 24/7 life of the school... and that day students have it better because they can go home at night and be with their families and friends.

Developing mutual activities, allowing for visitation back and forth, encouraging day students to be part of dorm life – and also to bring boarders home on occasion – are all pieces of an effective residential program. A school should acknowledge and spend time understanding the relationships between day students and boarding students and the strengths – and challenges – within the program for both. How evenings, weekends, vacation times and visitation are conceived and planned for is essential to a healthy residential program.

12.d. The school provides for the needs of a wide range of students.

An essential component of residential programs is the reality of the richness of the school community and the crucial recognition and respect for this variety of students in all residential planning. A school that plans a weekend activity to a local Six Flags, for instance, must make provisions for students who could not possibly afford such an adventure. A school should acknowledge that some students will adjust relatively easily to being away from home while some will struggle with homesickness and other emotional concerns they may never have experienced before. Schools with international students should understand the many challenges specific to kids who are half-a-world away from home including the reality that their families live in very different time zones. A four-in-the-morning conversation in Massachusetts is an afternoon event in China. Schools should pay careful attention to the constraints, opportunities and difficulties students from diverse backgrounds who possess very different resources – emotional and financial – for dealing with residential school life.

12.e. The residential spaces have technology infrastructure and support, with a process to ensure that policies and procedures are consistent with the school’s overall technology plan and acceptable use policy.

Gaming, cell phones, internet, social media. The force of these platforms and technologies assert themselves from the first moment students enter their dorm rooms. The school should anticipate these realities and establish clear and enforceable policies around them. The school should also endeavor to understand the roots and consequences of technology in all its guises, for example, online papers and research, programs that check for plagiarism, video reports and creative projects, digital photography and photo-shop, Facebook, Snapchat (etc. Ad. Infinitum) texting and sexting, gossip and gaming. When we speak of “21st Century Skills – and the education to understand and master them” – these are some of the items we’re calling out. Without waxing poetical or wringing our collective hands in despair, the infinite possibilities for creativity and “creativity” hover inescapably for every one of our students, their teachers and their schools. In particular, residential schools must contend with the small and large details of it. Do we take away cell phones at the start of study hall? Do we monitor gaming in the evening – or the middle of the night – or on Saturday afternoon? Do we care about the sites our students visit? How do we know? Do we have policies about faculty “friending” students (“Never” strikes NEASC as the best policy) and how do we approach the world of private photos taken and sent? (See indicator comments in Indicator 9.f.)

12.f. There are clearly stated, written, and understood expectations for residential students and staff.

Given the reality that all written documents – including particularly this one – risk obsolescence as soon as they are constructed, it is still essential that boarding schools write down, distribute and go over with faculty and students the written policies for the issues listed above and likely several others. A written handbook is perhaps most important simply for the act of creating it and the requirement to think through and evolve a policy out of the necessity to put in on paper/online. Such a document helps students feel confident about the school’s approach and is reassuring as well as clarifying. Such a document is a platform for discussion, for anticipating behavior and temptation and discipline when necessary and, also, as a place to start when policies need revision and when, inevitably, something previously unimagined crops up.

12.g. Students are included periodically in planning and developing policies, expectations and programs.

How schools approach in-house/dorm discussions is a necessary aspect of all boarding school cultures. In the most effective residential settings, frequent, dependable and open conversation about issues, concerns, events of the day or week, anticipation of things ahead, reflection on events past is vital. How schools include student voices and perspectives as policies and procedures and simple day-to-day living unfolds indicates a great deal about the health of the residential program.

12.h. Residential staff are appropriately housed in ways which enhance the experience of the students, faculty and families.

Recognizing that schools have a very large spectrum of faculty in-dorm housing, NEASC notes that paying thoughtful attention to faculty in-dorm housing is essential. Such attention includes the appropriateness of housing for families, single faculty and spaces for “out of dorm” faculty who may be on duty. NEASC notes that in virtually all residential settings, concerns around faculty housing are ongoing and constant elements of planning and action. Maintenance issues, personal preferences, changing family dynamics, experience and age of faculty, pets and location all play significant roles. The goal is housing that fits the needs of individuals and families as closely as possible and that, most importantly, provides a suitable place to live for faculty to supervise and work with students effectively. Privacy, respect for family realities and the history of faculty within a school community are always balanced – and sometimes with difficulty – with the needs of the students. Does a school ask a long-time faculty couple whose children have grown and left home to move from their four bedroom apartment to make room for a new family with three young children? Is there a policy about this kind of shift or does the school make these decisions on an ad hoc basis? Does the school have a large dorm with only single faculty apartments? Is such a housing arrangement providing the kind of mature stability the students need? If a faculty member needs to bring an aging parent home to live, how will the school accommodate this reality? Is an apartment near a busy street the right place for a family with very young children?

NEASC asks only that schools have – to the best of their ability and given the realities of the physical campus – considered the complexity of the issues housing students and adults together.

12.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Residential Student Handbook (if separate from Student Handbook)
- B. Faculty or staff materials specific to the Residential Program
- C. Copy of weekend activities calendar

Program Standard 13. Commitment to the Health and Well-Being of Each Student Guides the School's Homestay Program

In the last ten to fifteen years, several day schools have enrolled international students and housed them in a variety of “homestay” settings. This Standard requires schools with homestay students to understand, monitor and ensure the healthy experience of these young people. The principal focus here is that a school with a homestay program must demonstrate their attention and active participation in the experience of their international students. While there may well be agencies and services who manage the logistics of homestays very thoughtfully, the school must always be aware of the policies and procedures of the agencies and must be able to provide clear evidence of such awareness. The school should commit to a Homestay Program providing an intentional curriculum centered on the health and well-being of each student, with appropriate facilities, relevant and engaging activities, and adequate supervision to meet the needs of each student.

13.a. The school is ultimately responsible for the health and well-being of each homestay student and assigns appropriate school personnel to assure this.

Agencies may recruit and help students apply, may vet homestay families and place students within these settings. Perhaps the majority of schools enrolling international students currently employ such services. That being said, a school must not delegate to any agency the final responsibility for their students. A school may establish a healthy partnership with the agency and may, through frequent and detailed conversation about each student and each homestay situation, maintain a constant awareness of these emotional, physical and healthy realities. But the qualities of candor, sensitivity and capacity to take appropriate action must always be assured. Most schools employ an international student advisor/coordinator/director. This is an advisable approach. But all schools must be sure there is/are specific individuals who take responsibility for knowing and following-through appropriately with each international student and their families.

13.b. The Homestay Program is consistent with the Mission of the school.

Most schools have turned to international students for two reasons: first, these students re-enforce the school's missions to bring a broad understanding of the world and to help all students learn to live and work with individuals from many cultures. Second, international students have bolstered revenue for many schools. This indicator asks schools to be sure that international students are being well-served by their program and are never seen simply as “providing funds.” Schools should be candid and honest in their assessments of their own motivations for enrolling international students and of the programs created to serve the students. International homestay programs require a considerable amount of thoughtful attention to be done well. Ensuring that homestay families are appropriate, monitoring the social and emotional lives of students far from home is a significant responsibility.

NEASC schools universally possess missions that aim for the healthy physical, intellectual and spiritual lives of their students. It is imperative that the homestay and international programs support and enhance this essential mission.

13.c. The school has a formal understanding with homestay families if there is a direct placement or with an agency that provides homestay placements. This understanding should detail the ethical and legal responsibilities of the school, the host families and the students.

As noted in the materials required, schools should have formal, written contracts with families and/or with homestay agencies. These contracts should specify the responsibilities of the school, the agencies and the families. The contracts should cover travel, health, academic and social expectations and clarify the role and expectations for the agency if one is used.

13.d. The school can assure that homestay facilities are safe and clean and provide sufficient and appropriate living space.

It is imperative that school personnel be sure that homestay facilities meet this indicator. The school must be sure that personal, regular and on-site visits are conducted and that international students are given the opportunity to assess candidly their homestay setting. Agencies may take this direct responsibility but the school, as indicated above, must monitor the work of the agency and be completely assured that this assurance can reasonably be provided.

13.e. There is a clearly defined process in place to assure appropriate screening of host families including background checks, and a process for matching student and family interests.

Candidly, NEASC finds a wide variety of capacities among agencies and schools to screen and vet host families appropriately. This indicator asks schools to be sure that each homestay family has gone through a proper back-ground check, including all members of the family eighteen or older who reside at home. The school should be sure these records are on file and can be provided as necessary. A school may rely on an agency to do such checks but should, again, monitor this work to be sure it has been accomplished.

13.f. The school has clearly stated, written, and understood expectations for the school, host families, and students regarding the student academic program and experiences both during the school week and on weekends and vacations, and these expectations and responsibilities are published and disseminated in a school handbook.

A written handbook for international students and families – preferably translated into the language of the family – will prove very helpful. A school may work with an agency to produce such a volume but articulating in writing these expectations and programs is helpful to everybody. We would emphasize the importance of translation between the school and the students' families.

13.g. The school has a well-defined process to include students, host families and appropriate school personnel to regularly review the Homestay Program and the experience of the students.

It is highly advisable to schedule regular discussions about the unfolding realities of student and school experiences throughout the year. Providing a meeting time and place and a dependable agenda brings homestay families to the school and, also, creates the necessary impetus for all

parties to bring concerns – and positive experience – to the fore. It is particularly important that such meetings/processes be scheduled regularly to ensure that experiences – many of which may fall outside the direct experience of the school – are reviewed and, when necessary, remediated.

13.h. The school has procedures in place to integrate international and other students living in homestay situations into the school’s social and academic fabric.

Part of the school’s responsibility is ensuring that international students are included as much as possible in the life of the school. Staging weekend experiences for international and local students, inviting international students into other students’ homes, taking these kids on trips and outings, being sure they are part of service-learning endeavors all bring them to experience the real life of New England kids and families. It is too easy, sometimes, for international kids to sequester themselves on evenings and weekends, and schools have a significant responsibility to help these young people find a larger experience.

13.i. Students are included periodically in planning and developing policies, expectations, and programs.

It is important that schools meet regularly with the international students to plan activities, develop programs and review the progress of their lives. Giving students a forum and helping them become comfortable expressing their perspectives is crucial to a positive experience.

13.j. The school ensures that homestay students have a family experience and their social and personal lives outside of school are both safe and rewarding.

While schools will find that the homestay experience of students will always, to a degree, be dependent on the personalities and dynamics of the homestay families, it is important for schools to help families understand their role in creating a positive experience. Schools should talk with families about the value – for everybody – of including their homestay student as much as possible in their family life – and, to the degree possible, make sure that such expectations are clear through the vetting process. Again, NEASC finds that agencies can be skilled in encouraging homestay families both to understand and to follow-through on their commitment to a positive experience for their students. And, when they are less so, schools should be prepared and able to step in.

13.k. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Agency contract
- B. International Student Handbook

Strategic Planning Standard and Indicators

Strategic Planning Standard 14. Commitment to Long-Term Viability and Innovation Guides Planning

Thoughtful strategic planning lies at the heart of the sustainable and viable school. In two words, schools either advance or they decline. As the school must imagine the future for the students whom they serve – what will the world become for which we are preparing them? So, too, schools must constantly, even reflexively, envision and plan their own future. A healthy school is both conservative – how do we maintain our strengths? – and visionary – how can we create and achieve higher goals? To achieve this Standard, schools should demonstrate their commitment to planning through a written planning document. Plans should originate in the school’s mission and, ultimately, serve it. Plans should be visionary – what might be possible? Plans should be practical – who is going to do what? In how much time? How will we know when a goal has been reached? How do we celebrate accomplishment? Plans should demonstrate determination and, also, leave room for the unexpected. Planning documents sometimes appear as four-color brochures intended to sway potential donors and inspire alumni. Planning documents sometimes reflect a variety of possibilities within a broad framework. Planning documents may be presented as binders of projects with budgets and time-lines. Planning may encompass goals for personnel training, for student support, for renewed mission, for the campus, for program development, for international partnerships, faculty responsibilities and benefits, student retention and recruitment, for ancillary sources of income, for working with parents. Most importantly, planning should identify the key strengths of the school and the singularly important, vital objectives. Planning establishes priorities and sets out a specific map to reach them. Planning is founded on responsible financial management and accurate data.

A word about “strategic,” “long-range” and “multi-year” planning. The distinction here is perhaps more significant than that between “culture” and “climate.”

“Strategic planning” aims to articulate vision, mission and essential goals. Usually “strategic planning” is the province of the Board and the Head of School. “We want to create a truly sustainable financial program” is a strategic goal. “We want to be the leaders in marine science education.” “We want a genuinely global education that attracts students from around the world.” “We want to be seen as the most personal and friendly elementary school in our city.” These are all strategic goals. Leadership constantly reviews and revises strategic goals and strategic planning requires thinking in broad terms about the school’s purposes and the world where they are to be achieved.

Long-Range Plans contain the steps necessary to get to strategic goals. Long-Range Plans have time frames – usually three to five years – steps toward larger goals, individuals assigned to tasks and measures or assessments of achievement that are commonly understood.

“We want to be the premier marine science program in New England secondary education” would require a fund-raising campaign, land acquisition, a new facility, new training current faculty members and perhaps a new hire, a unique curriculum and a careful examination of other

such programs, an outreach to students and families and an alumni education program. The strategic goal drives the Long-Range Plan to achieve it.

14.a. The school engages in thoughtful, realistic, thorough and continuous planning.

This indicator asks the school to assess the over-all approach to and quality of the school's planning. Does the Head of School constantly encourage the Board to plan? What role do the Head's plans and objectives for the school determine the direction? Does the Board create a Strategic Plan and review and revise it at least annually? Is there a written, accurate and up-to-date copy of the document readily available to all? Who is responsible for monitoring – “bird dogging” as one school head termed it – the plan? How are the qualities “thoughtful,” “realistic,” “thorough” and “continuous” defined and assessed? Is the community aware of the plan? Is there general and enthusiastic support for the goals among the school's constituency?

14.b. The school conducts research and collects data that informs planning.

Data – financial, enrollment, demographic, trends, general understanding or opinion, success or failure of programming – must inform effective planning. A responsible feasibility study should articulate reasonable goals for a capital campaign. A three-to-five-year financial projection should guide decisions around tuition, financial aid and potential increases in salaries and benefits. The school should collect, analyze and appropriately share key data from its own study and, also, should take into account local and national trends. A day school in a town where a major new manufacturing facility is being planned and one in a town where one has just closed should account for the realities this “outside” force may introduce. The essence of this indicator is that schools should demonstrate they have identified, collected and analyzed data necessary to every phase of long-range planning.

14.c. Goals and plans are appropriately adjusted in light of actual experience and unanticipated realities.

Simply stated, no one can possibly plan for every contingency nor unexpected event. But, in their planning, schools should make every effort to anticipate where both positive and negative events might enhance or derail plans. A school should be cautious, for instance, about writing binding construction contracts based on “promises” of a donation. Often promises are kept. Sometimes they are not. Plans tend to be idealistic and optimistic, setting out time-lines in anticipation of trends that may or may not materialize. How long will current leadership be in place? How stable is the Board? Is the State contemplating some potential legislative initiative that would influence enrollment? This indicator asks schools to demonstrate their capacity for contingency planning and to articulate possible alternatives and options and to give examples of the types of events that might result in one or more of these alternatives actually occurring.

14.d. The school clearly identifies challenges that must be addressed to insure sustainability.

New England's independent school community – some 1300 schools – face the realities of changing, often dramatically so, demographics. Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine have seen significant declines in their school-age populations and many – if not most – urban areas in our region are undergoing major demographic shifts. Boarding schools enroll, on average, more than 30% of their boarding students from other countries, principally China. Urban areas that were once predominantly Catholic have experienced a metamorphosis in religious affiliations. This indicator asks schools to pay close attention to enrollment and financial trends, to make realistic projections and to examine underlying assumptions about staffing, program priorities and to carefully analyze facilities infrastructure. How clear is the school about the most significant challenges in front of it?

14.e. The school possesses the capacity, competence and commitment to effect its goals.

Key to effective planning is the capacity to carry out plans. This Indicator asks schools to make a realistic assessment of the components of accomplishing a plan. If a school lays out financial goals and decides a constituency-wide capital campaign is necessary to reach them, has the school also made a careful analysis of the actions, resources, time and personnel to carry out the campaign? If the Head of School will need to spend significant time on the road, are there individuals in place to whom he/she can delegate the on-campus tasks necessary? Does the current development/advancement office understand the various components of a capital campaign? How has the Board determined realistic goals? How much time will the campaign take? How much “seed money” will need to be in the door during the “quiet phase” to allow a public announcement containing reasonable assurance the goals can be met? If a Board and Head decide that the fundamental approach to teaching and learning needs to shift from “teacher centered” to “student centered” classrooms, how will these decisions be communicated and how, specifically, will each faculty member come to understand both the nature of his or her current teaching and what exact training, observation, reflection, practice, feed-back are necessary to make the requisite changes. How will these individual accomplishments be monitored and assessed? Are the academic leaders in the school sufficiently trained and do they have the necessary time to devote to this work? This indicator asks the school to demonstrate the necessary provision of personnel, resources, time, facilities, understanding and skill to effect a proposed idea.

14.f. The school considers issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in its planning.

Unanticipated consequences remain one of the most difficult components of long-range planning. It has been NEASC experience that schools who meet the stated goals of a plan often discover a host of unseen implications were also achieved. This indicator asks schools to consider the effects of its planning on every constituency in school to ensure that all students are respected and included. If a school intends to require each student to use a laptop or Chromebook, what provision has been made for those who cannot afford them? If a school

intends to help students take more responsibility for their own learning, has the school assessed the variety of abilities students possess actually to do so? If a school emphasizes in its planning the “highly competitive nature” of its student body, is it also realistically assessing the enormous variations in ability and interest that exist even in the most competitive environments? In a plan to move to a “competency or proficiency-based diploma” (Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine are currently leading this charge in public education) has the school considered what “mastery of material” must be “demonstrated?” and whether or not a positive-sounding goal genuinely improves education for each of its students? This indicator asks schools to consider the implications of all aspects of its planning on the ways it embraces the diversity of its student body and works to insure equity and inclusion of all.

14.g. The school celebrates accomplishments and programs contributing to identity and legacy.

This indicator asks schools to be intentional in their recognition and celebration of accomplishments. The aim of this indicator is simply to encourage schools to keep optimism and hope, recognition and celebration at the forefront of their development. In a school with a long tradition in a community, are long-tenured teachers honored and recognized? In a school that has made a “turn-around” – even a small one – in its enrollment, noted the event with joy? In a school that aimed to increase its alumni annual-fund participation and, in the next year went from 18% to 22% – a twenty-two percent increase! – giving credit to all the volunteers who worked hard for this goal? This indicator asks schools to assess how it measures and highlights the “small victories” (and the larger ones!) along the path toward long-range goals.

14.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

- A. Current Strategic Plan

NEASC/CIS Health and Safety Considerations

The Standards of the NEASC Commission on Independent Schools recognize the importance of regulatory understanding and compliance and, also, of culture and climate when creating a healthy and safe school. School personnel need to have appropriate knowledge of laws and regulations, to follow safety protocols and to recognize that a safe school is as much about perceiving and anticipating risk as about law and compliance.

Accredited schools:

- Build a school culture and climate devoted to health and safety in every program and activity
- Help students learn to care appropriately for themselves and for others
- Nurture students' growing maturity and independence, appropriately supervising and supporting them according to age and development
- Provide all adults who care for, teach, work with or are around students the necessary knowledge, training and skills to keep students safe
- Insure these adults possess the character, education, background and experience required to work safely with students and in the community

“Safety” is not a single static state; it is a capacity. A “safe school” is an approach and a practice. Schools must practice the ability to assess risk and make sensible choices. They must practice the perception of danger and possible alternatives, and additionally they must practice acting swiftly in some circumstances and behaving with restraint in others. “Safety,” to paraphrase Reinhold Niebuhr, “is the wisdom to know what needs to be changed.”

In a safe school community, adults care for children and young people, protecting them from foreseeable risk and appropriately nurturing their growing independence. A safe school helps students understand and respect potential dangers and, when appropriate, helps them take responsibility for themselves and others. Safety and health are approaches to life's realities seen through the lens of experience and perspective young people often do not possess but will gain over time. Health and safety are often matters of anticipation and prevention.

The “Considerations” listed here are intended to help schools identify, anticipate and address a variety of potential issues. The extent of the list underscores the complexity of establishing a healthy and safe environment. These “Considerations,” drawn in part from insurance companies' and other school associations' guidelines and check-lists, reflect the experience of NEASC Accredited schools. However, as substantial as this listing appears to be, it cannot address the full range of school activities and safety concerns facing each school and it cannot encompass certain aspects that may be unique to a school. The distinctive reality of many schools will call for the inclusion of many considerations not listed and may render some inapplicable.

Schools run playgrounds with slides and swings and monkey bars and programs like dodge ball and tag and frisbee. School sports include football, lacrosse, field hockey, soccer, basketball, ice hockey, baseball, volleyball, track and field – including hurling javelins and shot-puts – and competitive archery. Schools operate rowing programs, swim teams, competitive and

recreational sailing programs, kayaking and windsurfing, fencing, gymnastics, cheer-leading, cross country running and rock-climbing. Schools take students on tall-ships and winter camping trips, offer downhill ski racing, ski-jumping, Nordic skiing with courses many miles from campus and figure skating, water polo, synchronized swimming, competitive diving and scuba-diving. School groups and individuals travel to Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Students in independent schools learn to ride and jump horses, operate chain saws, drill presses, table saws and acetylene torches. They install lighting for drama productions, make movies and mix chemicals in labs and dark rooms. Students carve wood and marble, place and remove their ceramic pieces from kilns and paint with oils and acrylics.

And, as they mature, they learn to drive, begin to date and negotiate their own sexuality and that of those around them. Students may have been approached by drug dealers or persons encouraging drug use. Some students never know deprivation, and some come to school hungry or return to an empty house. Usually the people they live with are loving and involved (or over-involved) and sometimes they prove difficult, or worse, abusive. Sometimes there's a bigger kid or a mean kid or a strange adult influencing their lives. Sometimes students' friends turn on them and sometimes their friends need a variety of support they have no idea how to provide.

Each of these realities, programs and activities present distinct challenges and their own unique universe of potential health and safety issues. The nearly unfathomable variety of situations lies at the heart of the NEASC emphasis on culture and climate. While no single individual could know or enforce every safety consideration in every school activity and no listing could encompass all potential risks, if all individuals know that health and safety is their first priority then the program of the school properly aims toward safety. Van Gogh (not known as an expert on safety) once wrote "If one is master of one thing and understands one thing well, one has at the same time insight into and understanding of many things." In schools, the culture and climate of safety is the "one thing" to know well.

Considering all the items here – and the hundreds more embedded in school programs – does not and cannot guarantee that a school has a plan or approach to resolving every possible contingency in each category. "A safe school" recognizes risks and helps adults and children confront and manage them appropriately. A safe school considers "safety" a goal for which it always strives.

There is no substitute for legal or other expert counsel. NEASC does not provide legal advice to schools and does not consider the list below a substitute for professional counsel.

No list of Health and Safety Considerations can be complete or adequately anticipate every circumstance. This is a list of some potential school safety issues. NEASC recommends that schools use this list as a springboard to regular discussion, reflection and planning. A school's planning might address every item on this list and still encounter entirely novel events. Appropriately and consistently considering these items and the many others embedded in the variety of school programs is good practice. Such planning and discussion, however thorough, cannot guarantee absolute safety and security, the avoidance of all risk or death. But a school devoted to creating a safe climate and culture can create an environment mitigating risks to safety.

Physical and Emotional Safety of Students

1. Immunization records are up-to-date and in compliance with state requirements/codes.

Note: As of 2017, of the six New England states, only Maine still offers a “philosophical exemption” from certain vaccination requirements; the other five states (and Maine) all offer certain religious and medical exemptions. Schools should consult relevant statutes in their state.

2. The school uses a formal medical release (Child Medical Consent to Treat) form. Parents use a “consent to treat” or “medical release” form to authorize providing medical treatment to their child if an emergency occurs and parents or guardians cannot be reached. These forms should be on file for each student. These forms may also provide authorization to treat or address food or medication allergies and other health issues (such as diabetes, epilepsy, bee-sting reactions, fears or other psychological conditions).

3. The school has attendance policies for students with potentially communicable diseases and distinguishes (if relevant) between boarding and day students.

It can be helpful for schools to publish attendance policies for such conditions as scabies, lice, flu and other communicable childhood illnesses or conditions. Published policies prior to the appearance of such conditions on campus clarify for parents and school personnel what the school will and will not permit.

4. The school has a written concussion assessment and management protocol.
5. The school provides sufficient counseling services and referrals to meet the needs of the students.
6. The school has anticipated its approaches to public/behavioral manifestations of mental health concerns. (For instance, acting out, outbursts, abusive or offensive language, threatening gestures, suicide gestures and attempts).

Note: There are many responsible approaches to student mental health. NEASC recommends that schools recognize the vital importance of mental health and include appropriate services to meet both acute and chronic issues. Further, schools need also to recognize the limits of issues that can reasonably be addressed within their community. Some schools are reasonably prepared to deal with issues that would be outside the range of another school.

Regardless of their approach, however, schools must assess whether or not a physical or mental health condition presents a disability protected by various legal requirements and schools must review each situation individually where the law requires, considering the nature of the condition, the needs of the student, the appropriateness and availability of any accommodations and the extent of the health services available at the school.

While such situations may present case specific challenges, schools will likely maintain an expanding portfolio of protocols and possible responses that take into account academic, residential (if a boarding school) and related requirements and available resources. NEASC notes that the area of policy development around accommodating

students with physical and mental health disabilities is nuanced and subject to legal requirements and seeking legal counsel is advisable.

Students' mental health and the ability of a school to offer appropriate support can be challenging and specific situations require judgment and experience.

7. The school has a policy and procedure for the administration and storage of medications.

Some schools, for instance, provide a place at mealtimes for a nurse or qualified healthcare provider to distribute certain medications. Schools need to be sure students understand where their medications will be reliably available. Schools should pay attention to arrival and departure days to be sure that all medications have been properly collected, identified by student and stored or locked as necessary. Schools should consult with parents or guardians about possible distribution of unused medication on departure days; in general, NEASC would recommend that medications in bulk not be accepted from or distributed directly to students when parents or guardians are not present. Delivery services can provide for international students.

8. The school has a policy for student possession of prescription and non-prescription medications.

It is important for schools to decide what – if any – medications, including both “over the counter” and prescription medications – students may have in their personal possession. Many schools require that all medications be kept under the control and supervision of appropriate designated school personnel on campus.

9. The school requires reasonable screening for student vision and hearing.

10. Where necessary, the school requires spinal screening.

11. The school has a policy for obtaining information on student allergies and procedures to respond to allergies in student areas such as classrooms, food service, athletics, dormitories and on field trips.

It is particularly important that school personnel (i.e. classroom teachers, activity supervisors and coaches) be aware of any potentially life-threatening allergies (peanuts or particular foods, bee stings, etc.) among the students with whom they are in contact.

12. The school has access to healthcare professionals adequate to meet the needs of the students.

Schools employ and/or may make referrals to a wide range of health professionals. NEASC recommends that schools make a thoughtful determination of the needs of their students including, where possible, their lives beyond the walls of the school.

13. For residential schools: the school has developed and properly distributed a *Residential/Boarding Handbook* for students (this is an example of such a title).

The *Handbook* should provide residential policies, rules and regulations around hygiene, hours, noise, fire & safety, personal relationships, study conditions, electronic technology, visitors, locked doors, theft, security etc., and the tone and culture of the

residential setting. Many residential schools include this kind of information in their general *Student Handbook*. NEASC does not require a separate publication. However, it is essential that residential students, faculty and families understand the range of specific approaches, climate, culture and regulations applying to residential programs.

14. The school has policies about guests in buildings, deliveries to campus and procedures around student mail and packages that respect privacy without compromising the need for safety.

Who is and is not allowed into student housing or school buildings and the hours of such entrances should be clear. The exterior doors of dormitories and many school buildings are usually monitored by locks and/or on-site supervision. Schools should be clear about times and situations when students can exercise independent judgment about allowing visitors to enter and which visitors are allowed.

Schools should clarify for students if packages or deliveries to them will be inspected or monitored. Schools should have clear policies around food or package delivery to students. For example, students should expect that deliveries by mail or package service that include drug paraphernalia or substances will, when suspected or detected, be subject to inspection and appropriate action including referral to criminal authorities.

15. Schools with international students clearly recognize the emotional needs, cultural integration, language challenges, dietary needs, family and travel complexities accompanying their time in the States. The school designates an individual or office with specific responsibility for international students.

16. The school has clear policies around its direct responsibilities to international students in homestay programs and, specifically, does not rely solely on agencies to deal with homestays but does monitor, physically inspect and insure the proper housing, diet, cultural integration and family communication on behalf of its international students.

Note: Many accredited schools enroll international students. These students come seeking an American education and experience and bring much to enrich their schools. It may be noted that their personal needs fall along a very broad spectrum. That being said, it is not unusual for international students to be stoic and schools should be sure to reach out personally and frequently to these young people to assess their current state physically and emotionally. International students also bring cultural realities around, for instance, gender, academic expectations, diet, dress and religion that require understanding, respect and insight to integrate safely into the school. The international student faculty coordinator/leader/director plays an essential and often complex role within the school as all parties learn to navigate differences in healthy ways.

17. The school appropriately considers the parameters of confidentiality in all public discussions.

Schools are privy to a great deal of personal and sensitive information and all school

personnel need to be conscious of the importance of respecting confidentiality. Students should be advised that if they choose to share sensitive personal information with appropriate school personnel, any statements that could reasonably be interpreted as implying harm to themselves or others will be shared as necessary and will not be kept confidential. Trust in schools is largely dependent on the appropriate preservation of confidentiality and schools should include training for both faculty and students around the exercise of appropriate confidentiality.

Information and Data Management

1. Medical records' retention and access policies meet applicable state and federal requirements.

The retention and access requirements for elementary and secondary independent school medical records are quite complex. NEASC recommends that schools receive legal counsel about their situation. Retention rules may require schools to keep some records until students reach 18 or until the required state time-requirement has been met, whichever is later. Rules around medical record retention vary by state; Vermont requires ten years with the other five New England states each requiring seven. Schools should note that these laws are subject to change and particular situations may give rise to the need to extend the retention period. FERPA rules do not generally apply to independent schools if they do not receive specified federal funds. HIPPA rules may apply in specific situations; again, legal counsel is advised. Once schools have clarified the requirements for retaining – and disposing – medical records, it would be important to monitor compliance and to complete, at regular intervals (minimally every 24 months) a written report detailing work completed.

2. The school has protocols for access to and thoughtful storage of immigration records (i.e. student passports, I-20s, etc.).

Some schools elect to keep passports and I-20s in a secured area or safe to ensure that students have proper documentation when they travel. It has been noted that some international students are very meticulous about their documentation and some less so. It has also been noted that, at times, passports have been reported stolen or missing. Offering to help students keep track of these highly important documents may be helpful. The school's policies around this documentation should be clear to students and to parents.

3. The school has a policy for records retention (i.e. timetables and provisions for record removal and destruction) and safe, secure, fire-proof storage and should confer with its legal counsel about requirements that affect records retention.
4. The school has a data security policy addressing the protection of and access to Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and Personal Health Information (PHI) including both physical and electronic records and should confer with legal counsel about requirements affecting records retention.

Student Behaviors and Discipline

1. The school has policies and expectations for student behaviors.

School policies and expectations around student behaviors are deeply embedded in the school's culture. The Guidelines cannot articulate all areas of expectation nor the many nuances of a school's approach to disciplinary situations. These approaches should be true to the mission of the school. Some schools deal with many behaviors through various combinations of conversation, counseling and instruction; this is particularly true with elementary and middle schools but may be the approach at the secondary level as well. Some schools have various disciplinary requirements up to and including expulsion. The Guidelines in this section ask schools to be sure their approaches are well-articulated and promulgated to the community.

2. The school has policies around student drug or alcohol use or other potentially harmful substances (i.e. Vaping, Tylenol dosage, energy drinks, chewing tobacco, glue sniffing, etc.)
3. The school has policies, procedures and training around harassment, bullying (including cyber-bullying) hazing, sexual misconduct and sexual assault and related behaviors.
4. As appropriate by age of students, the school has policies articulating concepts of sexual consent and healthy relationships.

Note: The simple sentences in #3 and #4 above merit significant discussion, reflection and training for adults and students. The International Task Force on Child Protection "Final Report and Recommendations" and the NAIS "Independent School Task Force on Educator Sexual Misconduct" both address a broad range of considerations in these areas. Again, while no document will address all possible issues, these two provide useful reference.

5. The school has policies and approaches to student-to-student conflict resolution.
6. The school has clear "acceptable use" policies around technology and social media.
7. The school's disciplinary procedures and outcomes are clear.
8. The school appropriately communicates disciplinary situations.

The school understands and balances the range of appropriate public communication from "confidential" on one end to "broadly disseminated" on the other and has policies for communicating disciplinary decisions to students and families that keep student safety in the forefront. The school understands, for example, that students in the midst of disciplinary procedures may be in a heightened and more vulnerable emotional state.

The intention of this consideration is to underscore the care needed when disciplinary decisions are communicated. Specifically, for instance, students being separated from school should not generally be informed of this decision unless the school has a provision for direct and constant supervision. Schools should, in another example, be aware that

social media provides an avenue for disseminating disciplinary decisions with instantaneous implications. Schools should consider carefully “who needs to know” and “under what circumstances” decisions are communicated and by whom. If schools embrace student disciplinary committees, these groups have a particularly challenging responsibility in the electronic age. Schools have significant responsibilities stemming from multiple sources for communicating discipline situations sensitively and appropriately. Schools should consult with their own legal counsel and other professional advisors regarding these protocols.

9. A residential school has reasonable access or referrals to 24/7 medical advice and care. Most schools have access to 911 services. It would be worthwhile to consider a range of potential health or safety issues where 911 may not be the best option. For example, it is helpful to anticipate that some physical and mental health issues may arise “after hours” and to have worked out in advance whom the school might contact in these circumstances.

Faculty and Staff Health Training, Policies and Procedures

1. The school community creates and provides a written set of faculty/staff expectations. This document could take the form of a “*Code of Conduct*” or “*Staff Handbook*” but it should articulate interactions with students, colleagues and other members of the community that are in keeping with the school’s fundamental values and, also, with state or other legal and ethical requirements. Such a document should be reviewed annually and might include the following:
 - Statements of the fundamental values and/or ethical principles of the school
 - A statement of the intent of the *Faculty/Staff Code of Conduct*
 - A statement of the school’s responsibilities toward faculty and staff
 - A thoughtful approach to the reasonable range of faculty/staff behaviors/interactions
 - Specific policies and procedures around sexual harassment
 - Specific policies and procedures around child abuse and neglect
 - A clear description of state-mandated reporting requirements and procedures
 - Standards for professional conduct by faculty that also include clear examples of types of unacceptable behaviors
 - Disciplinary procedures and sanctions

A written “*Faculty Code of Conduct*” might be included in a school’s “*Faculty Handbook*” or it might be a stand-alone document. Its intent is to help faculty understand the importance of their behaviors in the context of the mission and life of the school community. The Considerations here don’t anticipate a moralistic or prescriptive tone nor is it intended to limit the joys of school life. Understanding the expectations of professional conduct and the legal and moral implications of the work adults carry out with young people is essential to a healthy community. Such a “Code” should not imply a heavy-handed enforcement but rather thoughtful agreement about the foundations of a

dependable and productive school community. A school without such a document might consider forming a faculty committee to create it.

2. The school provides and requires periodic training for all adults who interact with students on the requirements of state-mandated reporting, blood-borne pathogens, CPR and basic first aid.

Schools adopt different training requirements depending on their own realities. All adults in contact with students should be required to understand mandated reporting requirements. NEASC recommends that all school employees (and adult family members in a residential school) in contact with students undergo reasonable training for health emergencies. Predicting who might or might not be physically present in the event of an emergency is more difficult than assuring all adults have basic skills.

3. The school has protocols for screening/background checks for any adults who have contact with children.

This should be required for all faculty and staff prior to hiring (or completed retroactively for current faculty) and is highly recommended for all adult members of the community. The formal background check is simply a reality of modern life. While such investigations cannot ensure the responsibility of every faculty member, they are a requirement of responsible hiring practice. NEASC regards formal background checks and personal reference checking as fundamental to an accredited school's personnel and hiring procedures.

4. The school has a policy on faculty transportation of students in school and/or personal vehicles. School personnel should be clear about who may ride with them and under what circumstances and be particularly aware of the risks of adults and students alone in cars. The school should keep a record of the vehicles owned or leased by the school. The school should have on file individual faculty driver training record as necessary (for faculty who may be driving school buses for instance), periodic driver record checks and insurance requirements.

Through their own insurer, schools need to clarify if "school insurance" or "personal insurance" is in effect should a faculty member drive a student in his or her private vehicle. The school should articulate circumstances when such transportation might be acceptable or even desirable and when such a trip would be inadvisable. The school has a policy addressing when a faculty member or other adult in the community may or may not be alone with a student(s) in a vehicle. The school's insurance advisor should address these issues as unambiguously as possible.

5. The school has policies and procedures around adult supervision of field trips or off-campus events and clarity about appropriate adult/student ratios on such ventures.
6. The school has policies and procedures around supervision of after-school programs, including athletics, the arts, tutoring and specialized programs.

7. The school has a thorough *Faculty/Staff or Employee Handbook* covering all aspects of employment, duties & expectations, vacations, benefits, housing policies (where appropriate), etc.

As mentioned in #1 above, a school can surely combine this *Handbook* with a *Code of Conduct*.

Communication

1. The school has an *Emergency Contact Plan* containing necessary information for all members of the community (faculty, administration, student-family, fire, police, EMT) and readily available to designated school personnel. This Plan details whom to call under what circumstances (student injury or accident, fire, intruder, plant emergency, bus break-down, off-campus situation).

Note: The provision for “readily available” means that multiple copies of phone numbers, email information, emergency contact information, etc. should be broadly enough distributed in the school that an adult or student could physically put their hands on it when necessary.

2. Recognizing that technology defines “shifting sands,” the school strives for a robust cyber-security program to protect communication, records, sensitive information and, most importantly, students, faculty and staff.

Given the apparently bottomless capacity for activity ranging from cyber-mischief to criminal theft, the school should take all reasonable precautions to keep its networks secure from malware, worms, hacking, ransomware, etc.

3. The school has parent/guardian permission/release procedures/forms for student contact with media, publication of pictures and student information, etc.
4. The school has a *Parent/Student/Family Handbook(s)*.

Such *Handbooks* should detail the school’s responsibilities toward their students’ families and articulate the school’s expectations around all aspects of family/student/school relationships including such items as acceptable clothing, activity permission policies, illness, transportation permissions, vacation days, parent requests for student absences, technology expectations for in-school use of phones, social media sites, clarity around school provided computers or various grading/homework/communications websites.

5. The school has a policy around written recommendations for faculty.

This policy should make the distinction between a recommendation “from the school”– written on school letterhead and approved by school leadership – and one that is a “personal recommendation” written by a friend or colleague (which should never appear on school letterhead). The former should be “the school’s position” and the latter is a personal opinion.

Providing recommendations for departing employees is both an important and, sometimes, a complex undertaking. At times, a departing school employee may not wish the Head of School or other member of the school's administration to write or speak on his or her behalf. At other times, a member of the administration may inform an employee that they may not provide a positive reference. The intention of this consideration is to help a school anticipate these kinds of challenging situations. Fair, honest and straight-forward recommendations are crucial both to further employment and to the life of both a former and future employer/school. It is particularly important that personal recommendations never be promulgated as "the school's." In their hiring procedures, it is imperative that schools understand the sources of a prospective employee's recommendations.

Facilities

1. The school completes an appropriate safety and security review of all facilities, grounds and equipment.

A formal facilities review, often done in concert with the school's insurers, will be completed on a mutually determined schedule. At regular intervals, the school should take a close look at all its facilities, attending to safety issues – overhanging limbs, broken stakes, worn exercise equipment, leaks, inadequate or missing signage, faulty lighting, icy patches, etc. Checking the physical campus for "issues" should be part of a school's culture and making sure such issues are reported responsibly (i.e. through a regular inquiry among faculty and staff) should be part of everybody's "job description." "That's the job of maintenance" is an unacceptable approach to reporting physical safety issues. The school should have a dependable system for addressing safety/security issues.

2. In its facilities review, the school pays attention to the capacity of all facilities to be supervised appropriately; spaces should be well lit as necessary and accessible as required.
3. The school creates an appropriate approach to risk management when a physical project occurs on campus. When a school undertakes construction, road repairs, plant renovation or improvement, for example, informed individuals should analyze foreseeable risks and take appropriate preventive measures (properly places signs, fences, lights, public announcements, cones, sawhorses, etc.)

The intent of these Considerations is to remind schools about the importance of managing risks attendant to construction, repair work, general maintenance – i.e. painting, masonry, plumbing, road work, window glazing, etc. – that requires equipment, trucks, scaffolding, secure sites and changed pathways or safety zones. Sometimes these types of equipment or conditions "attract" the attention of students or others leading to unauthorized and unintended access. Anticipating and preventing unauthorized and unintended access is important.

4. The school has policies and procedures for third-party contractors providing physical services on campus (i.e. food service, janitorial services, lawn/landscape and building and utility maintenance). The school might, for instance, require contractors to provide their own back-ground checks on employees on campus. Such procedures might include a site check-in with an appropriate school employee, a posted schedule of work, a school-identification badge for every outside contractor, school-wide announcements about work schedules, etc. Such procedures may be affected by laws and the school should consult legal counsel.
5. The school conducts regular drills for fire, lock-down, intruder on campus – including bears, severe weather, bomb threats, campus/building evacuation and emergency relocation.
6. The campus is physically capable of being appropriately locked.
7. The school conducts regular/required inspections of the following:
 - Fire and emergency (i.e. carbon monoxide) alarm systems
 - Sprinklers and fire extinguishers – noting, particularly residential facilities
 - Smoke detectors
 - HVAC systems
 - Major electrical connections (interior and exterior)
 - Playground equipment
 - All athletic equipment (i.e. football tackling dummies, wrestling mats, nets, flooring, etc.)
 - Swimming pool, water safety equipment and pool access
 - Elevators
 - Water quality
 - All school vehicles
 - Seat belts and other vehicle safety equipment (i.e. fire extinguishers, first aid kits where appropriate, spare tires, flares, road-side contact information in each vehicle)
 - Asbestos sites, (responding to Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act)
 - Lead paint remediation as required
 - Radon levels
 - Pest control
 - Handicap parking requirements
 - Public street access
 - Campus signage – which should be clear where necessary for first-time visitors
 - Campus lighting
 - Trees, shrubbery, and clearing views where necessary (i.e. foliage blocking clear views of roads and pedestrian crossing zones)
8. The school establishes clear parking and traffic patterns, carpool guidelines, drop-off and pick-up protocols, parking for major campus events.

9. The school establishes lab and classroom safety protocols including policies on storage and use of chemicals, cleaning products, caustic/flammable substances in labs and art classrooms.
10. The school has policies to protect the safety of janitorial and cleaning staff and to safeguard the products used.
11. All school facilities are clean, sanitary and hygienic with specific cleaning and maintenance procedures.
12. Food service meets applicable local and state requirements and guidelines.
13. When a school has a pre-school program for children three and under, that program meets applicable state mandates and requirements and proper certification is provided.
NEASC reiterates that the Commission on Independent Schools does not accredit programs for this age group and notes that these programs are subject to often-rigorous state requirements.
14. The school has individuals/committees specifically designated to take direct responsibility for on-campus safety.
Note: NEASC recommends that all schools create a “Safety Committee” whose responsibility is regular review and thoughtful and clear response to the culture and climate, and specific health and safety concerns. This Committee should have adequate representation from all constituencies and might also include students and parents where appropriate.
15. The school has a Crisis Management/Response Team that is informed and conducts drills as appropriate.
A school may use its normal administrative or decision-making team for this work. It is important for the school to clarify who would expect to be part of the Management/Response Team and to decide, in advance of a crisis, the responsibilities of individual members. A school doesn’t want to be putting together this group “on the fly” should untoward circumstances arise.
16. The school clearly maintains all emergency ingress/egress passageways in dormitories, classrooms, all public spaces, hallways and stairways.
17. The school has specific regulations for the presence of firearms, fireworks or explosive devices, knives, slingshots, blowguns, bows and arrows and any other equipment or devices whose misuse might clearly cause harm.
18. The school maintains a Safety Incident Log that records any significant breaches or incidents of security break-down.
19. The school has a policy of parent notification in the event of a security incident.
20. The school has policies around the many issues arising from third-party use of the campus.

These should include proper insurance provisions, liability waivers, hold-harmless provisions and communication plans for those on-campus who might be affected by third-party users.

21. The school plans for any groups – athletic teams, performance or parent-event attendance, alumni gatherings, etc. – who use the campus at irregular times.
22. The school plans for all summer program or events on campus and for any other events (i.e. athletic tournaments, seminars, lectures or concerts, etc.) occurring when the campus is “normally closed.” The school should consult their legal counsel and insurance carrier around any special situations or requirements that apply to its summer programs and activities.
23. The school plans for any use of other non-school-owned facilities (rinks, gymnasiums, libraries, trails, parks, etc.) that are not part of the school’s own campus.
24. If the school has programs that regularly take place off-campus (camping and hiking trips, service learning projects, international travel, international exchange programs, class trips, etc.) the school has carefully worked through the many details of such ventures and has clearly communicated the advantages and potential risks of such programs to faculty, students, families and other individuals (i.e. homestay families, faculty in a host school, park rangers, guides and program directors) with an obvious need to know.
25. Schools in proximity to any body of water – swimming pools, rivers, pond, lake or ocean – have appropriate safety protocols, signage, training and necessary safety equipment, rescue facilities and communication procedures.

The Crisis Response Plan

To meet NEASC Foundation Standard 5 the school must have a thorough *Crisis Response Plan*. It may incorporate other plans such as a communication plan, fire and evacuation plan, etc., that are referenced at other points in these Considerations. Each school’s *Crisis Response Plan* will be tailored to its circumstances, location, staffing, age of children, facilities as well as local fire, law enforcement, EMT professionals, the availability of mental health coordinators and the media. The primary goal of a *Crisis Response Plan* is, above all, the safety and security of students, faculty, staff and all other human life. It should include programs for prevention, mitigation, preparation, response, recovery and, most importantly, communication. It will always be an evolving document; however thorough, common-sense and thoughtful a *Crisis Response Plan* a school puts into place, it can never anticipate all possible issues.

Some examples of issues that might be included in such a plan would be:

- Accident/injury
- Fire/smoke/explosion
- Bomb threats
- Death of a member of the community

- Child abuse
- Immediate and unexpected health emergency for students or adults
- Disturbances or threats in a neighborhood (a deranged individual; drunks, escaped convicts or individuals resisting arrest)
- Domestic abuse
- Outbreak of communicable disease or health compromise (ranging from lice to bed bugs to influenza)
- Lost/missing child
- Wild/diseased animals
- Dead animals (i.e. a squirrel or other rodent found dead)
- Severe weather/power outages
- Weather delays/snow days
- Structural or utility failure
- Significant leaks/broken pipes
- Traffic accidents – on and off campus
- Faculty chaperone found under the influence of alcohol
- Irresponsible parent behaviors
- Local demonstrations or civil unrest
- Unwanted presence of media or press on campus
- Arrest on campus
- Intruders
- Unruly students (either a school’s own students or others outside the community) before, after or during an athletic event, dance or on-campus event
- Theft by students – or faculty
- Student under the influence of drugs or alcohol

The *Crisis Response Plan* should be submitted to local authorities as necessary including police, fire and EMT offices. NEASC does not expect that these offices will “authorize” or “approve” a *Crisis Response Plan* (most are reluctant to do so) but should acknowledge they have received it. It is advisable that emergency services be consulted in the construction and on-going evolution of the *Plan*.

A useable *Crisis Response Plan* will address a range of concerns with a strong emphasis on thoughtful and pointed discussion, a clear chain of command and communication and the anticipation that, by definition, a genuine crisis will have distinctive features. Addressing all crises requires good judgment, rapid and thoughtful decisions and a dedication to rational and reasonable action. A school’s approach to campus crisis – from a sudden resignation or the death of a beloved faculty member or student to a severe student injury to a catastrophic equipment failure at exactly the wrong moment – will surely test its culture and approach to life’s uncertainties. A practiced and effective culture and climate are the surest bulwark against danger.

General Guidelines for the Self-Study Process

The Self-Study is an exercise in thoughtful reflection, analysis and strategic planning. It presupposes a thorough, annual review of the Mission Statement. The Foundation portion of the Self-Study is most often completed by a small committee although schools may choose to involve a broader range of constituencies. The Program portion of the Self-Study should be inclusive of as many faculty members as is feasible and should engage others as the school deems appropriate. The Self-Study Report documents the Self-Study process and follows a prescribed pattern for each standard.

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. **Steering Committee.** The Steering Committee has oversight of the accreditation process and the regular communication with all constituencies regarding the process. The Steering Committee should be chaired by the Self-Study Coordinators and where appropriate, include the principal and/or Head of School. It is also helpful to include at least one member of the governing body and/or any clergy associated with the religious schools.
2. **The Mission.** The school should review the existing Mission Statement through an inclusive process and revise as needed.
3. **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.
4. **Surveys.** Schools will survey parents, faculty, and students. Secondary schools are also expected to survey alumni/ae. The surveys provide an external perspective to help assess the school's alignment with the Standards. The school should coordinate with NEASC staff regarding the timing of the surveys and links for each of the needed surveys will be sent to the school using SurveyGizmo. Once the survey data has been collected, it will be provided to the school and uploaded to the Portal. This data should be provided to the various Foundation and Commitment Committees for their review and reflection.
5. **Documents.** The school should begin as soon as possible collecting the required documents for each Standard. The Standard committees should review the materials in preparation for their assessment of the Standards.

Self-Study School Data Sheet

The school must complete the School Data Sheet.

Self-Study: Reviewing the Standards (See Guide to the Standards)

Each Standard must be addressed separately in the Self-Study Report. The school should appoint Self-Study Committees, each responsible for one or more Standards. The committees should proceed as follows:

1. Gather and review relevant information from required documentation, surveys, handbooks, policy manuals, compilations of data, annual reports, etc.
2. Discuss the Standard and suggested indicators, identify other possible indicators relevant to the school, assess alignment 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 alignment with the Standard and how the school might strengthen this area of the school.
4. Draft the section of the Self-Study Report for the Standard. It should include five elements:
 - a. A thoughtful summary of reflections on the Standard and indicators
 - b. Challenges and strengths for the Standard
 - c. The school's aspirations and plans to strengthen this Standard
 - d. School's self-rating and an explanation of the rating
 - e. Committee membership and the process undertaken to address the Standard
5. For each Standard, there is a listing of required materials to be provided. These should be gathered early in the process and uploaded into the Portal to support the work of the Standard committees.

Review and Edit

The school should ask 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.

Reflections on Strategic Planning

“If you don’t know where you are going, you might end up somewhere else.” Casey Stengel

“Plans are nothing; planning is everything.” Dwight D. Eisenhower

Effective school management and thoughtful improvement require strategic planning. The Strategic Plan defines the school’s view of success and prioritizes the work needed to achieve it. Strategic plans may project three-to-five-year goals, but strategic thinking should be perpetual.

“When we remain in a strategic posture – when we stay attentive, nimble, and opportunistic – we can be true to our missions and visions and can navigate in this Age of Flux with greater confidence and success.” Pat Bassett, former President of NAIS.

Ironically, schools should be wary that “plans” don’t ossify and restrict rather than inspire creative approaches.

Michael Wilkinson articulates five fundamental reasons to plan:

1. Set direction and priorities
2. Get everyone on the same page
3. Simplify decision making
4. Drive alignment of resources
5. Communicate the message

A school seeking NEASC Accreditation commits itself to the ongoing process of self-assessment, goal setting, and planning. Planning should be based on the school’s mission and specific objectives.

Effective strategic planning follows this general outline:

1. Address basic questions: “Where are we now?” “What is our current context?” “What are our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.” (SWOT Analysis)
2. Answer the question: “Where do we want to be?” This answer begins to form the vision for the school’s future.
3. Articulate concrete goals to accomplish to achieve the vision.
4. Create an Action Plan that includes:
 - Measurable goals
 - Individual(s) charged with their achievement
 - Resources necessary to accomplish goals
 - Specific time frame for progress report/completion

Strategic planning is imbedded at every level in both the Foundation and Program Standards and a copy of the completed Strategic Plan must be submitted with the Standard on Governance. Note that schools may be working on their own individual schedules for strategic planning. While it might be ideal to coordinate the NEASC Self-Study with the school’s own strategic planning, accreditation asks only that a school have completed and be advancing through a formal Strategic Plan. The Annual Reports request a yearly update on this process.

Numerous models describe the construction of a Strategic Plan but virtually all of them will include the following components:

1. Enrollment Management and Marketing

The school should update enrollment projections for the upcoming three to five years. This projection should include: grade level, gender, and, where appropriate, separate numbers for students who will qualify for financial aid, children of employees who may receive tuition remission, and students who may be involved in special programs. Enrollment data should be aligned with projected tuition to forecast net income. Desired levels of financial aid should be included in this plan.

If enrollment is expected to change, the school should plan to adjust staffing, facilities, curriculum and other program components; these changes, driven by enrollment fluctuations, should inform other planning.

Note: The critical question is “Are all of our students Mission appropriate?” If not, the school should plan either changing its Mission or its admission practice.

2. Curriculum and Program

Based on the school’s vision for the future, what should the curriculum contain? Should the school create (or drop) particular courses and programs? Should it revise the approach to the teaching of the current ones? To ensure students will benefit from new programs, what courses, staffing, facilities, time, technology, and materials are required? Curriculum planning is usually quite complex and should always include appropriate provisions for faculty training and development. It is an old saw in education that it is relatively simple to envision a new program and usually complicated to put it into effect.

3. Technology

The technology component of the Strategic Plan should focus on both the instructional use of technology and the operational use of technology. Integrating technology into the teaching and learning process should aim to transform, and improve, the way teachers teach, and students learn. An effective plan should consider professional development, technical support, and the equitable allocation of resources. Operational needs, data management and communication, are also key components.

4. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The school’s efforts to support difference and multiculturalism might be facilitated by identifying the specific needs of various students and planning how best to provide:

- Special or augmented programs for certain students or groups
- The education of students about issues of equity and justice
- The professional development of faculty, including various relevant topics in the general curriculum
- Awareness by all constituencies of the complexities of the ways differing cultural and learning backgrounds affect the school’s environment and its ability to meet its mission

NEASC research indicates that a fundamental commitment by the school's leadership and a culture permeated by values of equity, inclusion and justice are necessary to creating a genuinely equitable school community.

5. Facilities

Thoughtful, thorough and imaginative facilities planning is essential to most Strategic Plans and the complex details of facilities planning require their own volume. These plans will include, among other elements:

- Thorough assessment of the entire plant, property and the many elements of the site
- Thorough assessment of current facilities – age, condition, use, potential for renovation
- Vision for the school's mission and program providing context for new proposals
- Objective analysis of the needs and outcomes of a new facility
- Thorough understanding of the costs of construction/renovation
- Long-term costs/depreciation of the facility
- Opportunities for revenue from a new facility
- Effect of a new facility on existing facilities

6. Financial Sustainability

The financial ramifications of strategic planning should be clearly articulated. Financial plans and projected cash flows should be updated regularly and contingencies analyzed. The financial plan should also help determine short and long-term development needs.

7. Faculty

The faculty should be appropriately engaged in planning and sufficiently trained and professionally supported to carry out the plan. Including faculty in the creation of strategic planning can often advance their understanding and their capacity to work positively with new approaches and innovative programs. A realistic perspective on the faculty's capacity to advance the plan may prove essential to its success.

8. Advancement and Development

As the direction and needs of the school evolve, the school also begins to develop an advancement program to meet them. The Strategic Plan will include such components as:

- The need for a capital campaign
- The level of staffing required,
- The role the Head of School
- The capacity and appropriate role of the Board
- The ability of school's constituency to fulfill the goals

9. Culture

The Strategic Plan should attend thoughtfully to the shared beliefs and values of the school community. Lists of these qualities will vary depending on the mission but, as Peter Drucker famously said: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

Drucker asserted that a culture will either enhance and encourage a strategic vision or strangle it. Planning should always strive to understand, strengthen and respect the school's culture.

Elegantly said, "No one ever changes the oil in a rental car. The keys to fostering a culture of ownership are alignment of personal and organizational values plus shared expectations regarding attitude and behavior in the workplace. A cultural blueprint is an essential step to creating a shared vision and common expectations."

Resources

"Strategic Planning – The Basic Idea" – Support Center for Nonprofit Management – idealist.org. 1995

Michael Wilkinson – "Why You Need a Plan: 5 Good Reasons" – blog – October 18, 2011

Pat Bassett – "Strategic Planning is an Oxymoron" – Independent School Magazine – Fall 2012

Joe Tye – "Eight Reasons Culture Eats Strategy for Lunch."

The Inclusive Self-Study

Accreditation should be inclusive, incorporating perspectives from representative members of the entire school community. Each school should consider how best to incorporate the ideas, observations and perspectives of the various members of the school community.

Faculty, Administration, and Staff

The faculty play a key role in the reflective process of the Self-Study, and to the extent possible, should serve on at least one Program Standard Committee. When there are too many faculty members to include on these committees, the school should use focus groups that provide each teacher an opportunity to have a voice in this process. Faculty surveys also gather data from all faculty.

Administrators and professional staff will likely find their greatest role in the Foundation Standards. School leaders and staff with particular areas of expertise should be involved in the discussions and planning outlined in the Foundation Standards.

Administrators should have an in-depth understanding of the accreditation process as a means to school improvement.

The best way to fully understand the process is to serve on a Visiting Committee to another NEASC school.

The Head of School, or designate, should arrange appropriate time for the various committees to complete their work and secure the necessary funding for the decennial visit. To the degree possible, NEASC recommends using previously scheduled faculty meeting time for the work.

Members of the Governing Body

Each school should consider how members of the governing body can best be included in the Self-Study process. With a focus on plans for long-term growth and viability, the Self-Study, and, in particular, the Foundation Standards, are an important place to include those with governance responsibilities.

Parents

Parents bring an important perspective and insight to this process. The school is expected to conduct parent surveys and might also consider parents on standard committees, particularly those around admissions, program, health and safety, student experience and finances. Given the variety of independent school missions, including boarding, elementary and middle schools and particular philosophical or religious traditions, schools will likely have distinctive approaches to including parents in the process. But their perspectives should be included, and the Visiting Committee will always expect at least one meeting with parents during their time on campus.

Students

The Self Study process ultimately aims to understand, respect and improve the quality of students' experience. As has been stated many times in this Manual, students are the essential focus of the school and of NEASC. Given the enormous range of students served by accredited

schools, NEASC strongly encourages schools to develop and implement effective mechanisms to draw out and welcome student voice in the process.

Such mechanisms might include:

- Administering the student surveys, as appropriate by age and ability (Note: Surveys for students below sixth grade are not usually effective. Family surveys are particularly important for this age range.)
- Including students as active members of some – or even all – Self-Study Committees
- Inviting students to speak directly with Visiting Committee members during their time on campus
- Inviting student groups – student council, newspaper staff, drama group, student leadership, etc. – to speak with Visiting Team
- Administering the NEASC (or other) “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Survey”
- Ensuring that the full range of students and their experiences are included in the Self-Study and/or during the visit

Religious Leaders for Faith-Based Schools

Schools affiliated with a religious organization should, at the least, share the results of the Self-Study with the appropriate religious leaders. Strategic Plans will be most effective when there is support and collaboration between the school and the religious community. Some schools may choose to include members of the religious community on standard-based committees.

NEASC Surveys

During the preparation and data gathering phase of the Self-Study process, schools are expected to survey their constituencies: teachers, families, students (grades 6-12), and alumni (high schools only). The NEASC surveys are designed to elicit feedback from the various members of the school community about the areas addressed by the NEASC Standards. Insight and understanding gained from the survey results should be used to inform the discussions and reflections of the Standards Committees, both Foundation and Program. In order for the committees to have the data from the surveys, it is essential that schools distribute the surveys early in the process.

Schools may use the surveys provided by NEASC or design their own surveys. If a school chooses to use the NEASC surveys, they cannot be customized. There are two different versions of the student surveys: General Student Survey and High School Student Survey. The General Student Survey will be more accessible for middle school students; the vocabulary is simpler, and the questions stated more directly. Each school can choose which version to provide to which population of students. Schools choosing to use the NEASC surveys will be sent links to the surveys that can be distributed directly to members of their school community. These surveys can only be completed online. The survey automatically scales itself to mobile devices, but it is recommended that respondents use a desktop or laptop. Generally, surveys will take no more than 15 minutes to complete and must be completed in one sitting. To access the survey, each respondent need only click the appropriate link; there is no password required.

Schools will be sent the electronic survey links following the faculty in-service provided by NEASC staff. A cut-off date will be noted in the communication from the NEASC office. Once the surveys have been closed, no additional responses can be entered. NEASC will then send to the school the survey reports as well as an Excel Spreadsheet with the raw data. Survey data should be used to inform the Self-Study, but Schools are also expected to make the survey reports and raw data available to the Visiting Committees, both Foundation and Program.

NEASC reserves the right to use school data anonymously for statistical analysis only.

Faculty Survey

1. The school's Mission accurately reflects the school as it currently operates.
2. The school's Mission guides decision-making.
3. The school enrolls Mission-appropriate students who will benefit from their experience at the school.
4. The admissions process is effective in enrolling students who will contribute positively to the school community.
5. Faculty have a role in the admissions process.
6. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the academic programs at the school.
7. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the athletic programs at the school.
8. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the extra-curricular programs at the school.
9. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the visual and performing arts programs at the school.
10. I am encouraged to explore new teaching methods to support student learning.
11. I have the resources and time that I need to do my job well.
12. I am respected as a professional.
13. School policies are administered fairly and consistently.
14. The role of faculty in decision-making is clearly defined and appropriate in scope.
15. Internal communication at the school is timely, clear, and effective.
16. The school culture promotes and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.
17. I trust the school leadership is operating in the best interest of the students.
18. The governing body acts with transparency and integrity.
19. The professional evaluation process is clearly outlined and understood.
20. Professional development is a priority at the school.
21. The school engages positively with the local community.
22. The school tries to broaden students' perspective on the global community.
23. The school is a safe, clean, and well-organized place for students to learn.
24. I am confident in the school's long-term viability.
25. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?
26. What is the best thing about working at this school?
27. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree – Agree – Disagree – Strongly Disagree – I Don't Know

Family Survey

1. I believe in the school's Mission.
2. The school's Mission is effectively communicated to the community.
3. The admission process was welcoming and conveyed an accurate depiction of the school.
4. The academic program at the school meets the needs of my child(ren).
5. The visual and performing arts program at the school meets the needs of my child(ren).
6. The athletic program at the school meets the needs of my child(ren).
7. The extra-curricular activities at the school meet the needs of my child(ren).
8. The school culture promotes and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.
9. The faculty and staff have worked respectfully and professionally with my child(ren).
10. The faculty uses effective assessment tools to promote my child's learning and monitor growth.
11. The school is a safe, clean, and well-organized place.
12. The school facilities are clean and well-maintained.
13. The school environment supports my child's social development.
14. The school environment supports my child's emotional development.
15. There is a clearly defined role for parents at the school.
16. Communication from the school is clear and effective.
17. I trust the school leadership to operate in the best interest of the students.
18. The governing body acts with transparency and integrity.
19. The school engages positively with the local community.
20. The school encourages my child to broaden his/her perspective on the global community.
21. The school's facilities enhance the student experience and the program.
22. The school's residential facilities enhance the student experience and the program, if applicable.
23. I am confident in the school's long-term viability.
24. This is a great school for my child.
25. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?
26. What is the best thing about this school?
27. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree – Agree – Disagree – Strongly Disagree – I Don't Know

High School Student Survey

1. The school's Mission is clear, and I understand it.
2. The academic programs at the school meet my needs and interests.
3. The visual and performing arts programs at the school meet my needs and interests.
4. The athletic programs at the school meet my needs and interests.
5. The extra-curricular programs at the school meet my needs and interests.
6. All students are treated fairly.
7. The faculty treat students with respect.
8. The students treat each other with respect.
9. The faculty who teach me are effective.
10. There are faculty to whom I can turn for academic help.
11. There are faculty to whom I can turn for help with personal issues.
12. School policies reflect the school's values.
13. Student perspectives and opinions are acknowledged and valued.
14. I am encouraged to think critically and problem solve.
15. The school is a safe, clean, well-organized place.
16. The school has a good relationship with the local community.
17. The school broadens my understanding of the larger world.
18. The school communicates effectively with me.
19. The school's facilities support the students and the program.
20. This is a great school for me.
21. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?
22. What is the best thing about this school?
23. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree – Agree – Disagree – Strongly Disagree – I Don't Know

General Student Survey

1. I understand the school's Mission.
2. I understand what is important at my school.
3. The academic classes at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.
4. The athletic activities at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.
5. The extra-curricular activities at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.
6. The visual and performing arts activities at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.
7. The teachers support and celebrate all students.
8. The teachers treat me with respect and encourage me to learn.
9. Other students treat me with respect.
10. There are teachers to whom I can turn for advice.
11. School rules are applied fairly.
12. Someone at the school listens to my ideas and opinions.
13. The school is a safe, clean, and well-organized place.
14. There are opportunities for me to get involved with the local community.
15. The school encourages me to think globally.
16. I am encouraged to think critically and problem solve.
17. The school's facilities support the students and the program.
18. This is a great school for me.
19. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?
20. What is the best thing about this school?
21. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree – Agree – Disagree – Strongly Disagree – I Don't Know

Alumni/ae Survey

1. The school's Mission and values stay with me today.
2. The school's Mission was matched by what happened at the school.
3. The academic programs at the school met my needs and interests.
4. The visual and performing arts programs at the school met my needs and interests.
5. The athletic programs at the school met my needs and interests.
6. The extra-curricular programs at the school met my needs and interests.
7. There were faculty to whom I could turn for academic help.
8. There were faculty to whom I could turn for help with personal issues.
9. The faculty who taught me were effective.
10. I was treated with respect by the faculty and staff.
11. I was treated with respect by the other students.
12. All students were treated equally and fairly.
13. The school environment supported my social and emotional development.
14. Student perspectives and opinions were acknowledged and valued.
15. The school was a safe, clean, and well-organized place to learn.
16. The school broadened my understanding of the larger world.
17. The school's facilities and resources adequately supported the programs.
18. The school's fundraising efforts, if applicable, are appropriate.
19. This was a great school for me.
20. When I left the school, I was well prepared for success in my next educational endeavor.
21. Did you graduate high school from this school?

If yes,

- a. The school stays in touch with me now that I have graduated.
 - b. I was well-prepared for college or vocational school.
 - c. My experience gave me the foundation to successfully hold a job.
22. If you could have changed one thing at the school, what would it be?
 23. What was the best thing about your school experience?
 24. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree – Agree – Disagree – Strongly Disagree – I Don't Know

SCHOOL DATA SHEET

(Note: Your completed School Data Sheet may be copied and included with the Visiting Committee Report.)

School Name: _____
 Address (line 1): _____
 Address (line 2): _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone: _____ Website: _____ Grades: _____
 Date of Founding: _____

Other Campuses (if applicable):

Second Campus/School name if different:

Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Grades: _____

Third Campus/School name if different:

Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Grades: _____

Partnerships and/or campuses in other countries (if applicable):

Address: _____
 City: _____ Country: _____
 Date Initiated: _____

Total Enrollment (at the time of evaluation visit): _____ Please submit one for each campus.

	PS	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	PG	Totals
Male																
Female																
Non-Binary																
Day																
Boarding																
Homestay																

International students included in the above table who are not U.S. residents:

Day																
Boarding																
Homestay																

Please complete for each campus:

Number of Faculty: _____ full-time _____ part-time

Number of Administrators: _____ full-time _____ part-time

Number of other Staff (Maintenance/Housekeeping/Kitchen/Administrative Assistants/Para Educators):
_____ full-time _____ part-time

Full-time or FTE Faculty to Student Ratio (number of students divided by number of faculty): _____

Sample Self-Study Report Template

Foundation Standard 1

1. Enrolled Students Align Appropriately with the Mission

- 1.a. The admissions process aligns with the mission and values of the school.
- 1.b. The school identifies and addresses current enrollment trends and challenges.
- 1.c. The school articulates its “value proposition” in light of enrollment, mission and societal trends.
- 1.d. Enrollment decisions create tuition revenue adequate to help sustain the school’s financial viability.
- 1.e. If applicable, the school understands and addresses boarding/homestay trends.
- 1.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Summary of Reflections on the Standard and Indicators

This summary should include an analysis of current status.

Challenges

Strengths

Describe the school’s aspirations and specific action steps to strengthen this Standard

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

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

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

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

School's Self-Rating _____

Explanation of Rating

Committee Membership

Process followed

Materials provided:

- A. Current Marketing/Enrollment Plan
- B. Current printed admissions materials and/or link to online site
- C. Student/parent contract(s)
- D. Statement of Financial Aid policies and procedures
- E. Non-discrimination Policy (may be included in other materials)
- F. Parent and Student Handbooks

Textbox and place to Upload documents – Materials Requested and Reviewed

The Visiting Committee

Selection of Chair and Visiting Committee

The Commission staff will identify the Chair of the Visiting Committee and determine the composition of both the Foundation and Program Committees. Once the Chair of the Visiting Committee has been confirmed, the Head of School and the NEASC Office will establish and coordinate dates for the Initial Contact and both the Foundation and Program Visits.

Scheduling the Foundation Visit

Prior to the Foundation Visit, the NEASC Staff will initiate a meeting (electronic or in person) including the Head of School, the Chair, the Assistant Chair (if possible) and a NEASC staff member. The purpose of this meeting is to review the Foundation Standards Report and to focus on the Foundation Visit. This meeting will address those Standards the school and the Chair determine are a priority and/or need more input or discussion. After this meeting, the Chair will arrange the schedule for the Foundation Visit, identifying individuals and meetings which should take place. The school is responsible for providing a private room at the school as well as transportation and other costs. If it is necessary for the Chair or Assistant Chair to stay overnight, the school is responsible for obtaining accommodations.

Scheduling the Program Visit

Visiting Committee members are scheduled to arrive on a Sunday afternoon and depart on a day determined by the Chair and the NEASC office. There will be overnight stays for the Committee members and the number of days (usually Sunday – Wednesday) will be determined by the size and complexity of the school. The school, in consultation with the Commission staff, should select the dates for the visit well ahead of time to facilitate planning. Fall visits are scheduled from the last week in September to the first week in November, and spring visits from the last week in March through the end of April.

The Chair of the Visiting Committee and the Self-Study Coordinator – or other appropriate individual at the school – will work out a detailed, specific, hour-by-hour, person-by-person, room-by-room schedule for each member of the Visiting Committee and the appropriate individuals on campus. Prior to their arrival at the school, the Committee will receive specific Standard assignments and will have coordinated with the Chair the working list of the people they need to interview and the places they need to visit.

This schedule should be circulated at the school well in advance of the Committee's visit and the details worked out by the Self-Study Coordinator or other appropriate individual on campus. The Visiting Committee members should each receive their schedules at (or prior to) their first Sunday afternoon meeting.

Usually, the first day-and-a-half of a Committee's visit will be reasonably tightly scheduled. After that, individual Committee members and/or the Chair or Assistant Chair may ask the Self-Study Coordinator to schedule additional conversations as necessary. In general, it is important that individuals engaged with a particular Standard meet with the Visiting Committee members charged with that Standard. Whether or not this is all the people who worked on a Standard or a representative individual from the group would depend on the size of the school and the number

of people involved. The composition of these meetings will be decided by the Chair in conversation with the Self-Study Coordinator and the members of the Committee.

The importance of a detailed, carefully articulated daily schedule cannot be overstated. The schedule permits the Committee to do their work most effectively and gives confidence in the school community that all relevant individuals – including Board members, students, faculty, staff, administration and parents – have been included in the formal visit.

Accommodations for the Program Visit

The school is responsible for arranging housing for all Committee Members for the overnight stays during the visit. Accommodations should be in a local hotel or motel and provide a private room and bath for each member. In addition, the school should arrange for a tech-equipped meeting room for the Committee at the hotel.

Meals

The school is responsible for meals during both the Foundation and the Program Visits. Ordinarily, the Committee will have lunches provided in their workroom at the school. Since the Program Visit entails an overnight stay, the school is responsible for providing breakfast either at the school or at the hotel. Most committees prefer to have working dinners on the days they are staying overnight, either at the hotel or a local restaurant. This may differ for boarding schools.

On Sunday the school customarily holds a small reception and dinner for appropriate members of the school community. The Committee has a great deal of work to accomplish in a short time and, therefore, social events and entertainment should be kept to a minimum and scheduled only in consultation with the Chair. The school is expected to make the Committee comfortable but should avoid extravagant expense.

Arrangements at the School

The Visiting Committee must have a private and secured tech-ready meeting room at the school which is appropriately tech-equipped for their use only. Refreshments should be provided during the days of the visit. The Visiting Committee Chair will discuss needed arrangements for access to computers.

What to expect from the Visiting Committee

The Visiting Committee will access and review the Self-Study from the NEASC Portal prior to their arrival. Their charge is to understand the school on its own terms, assess the accuracy of the Self-Study Report, determine alignment with the Standards for Accreditation, write a Report focused on commendations and recommendations, and make a recommendation to the Commission regarding accreditation.

The school should expect Visiting Committee members to be at the school all day on Monday and as needed on following days. While the presence of the visitors will obviously not go unnoticed, the school is asked to maintain as normal a routine as possible. Committee Members will interview faculty, administration, parents, students, and Board Members.

Members of the Committee will visit classes to gain a flavor of the academic program. Teachers should not schedule tests, field trips, or films during these days. The visitors will be observing interactions among students and between students and faculty. They will note teaching methods and instructional materials. The Visiting Committee will visit representative classes but, unless the school is quite small, will NOT visit all or even most of the classes offered. The Visiting Committee is looking at the entire program and does not evaluate individual faculty, staff or administrators and will not comment on the performance of individuals or identify anyone by name in the Visiting Committee Report.

The Committee departs after they have completed a draft of their report. The Committee is instructed not to share specifics of their report, however, since it has not been finalized. The Chair and another member of the Committee (usually the Assistant Chair) will meet with the Head of School and others as appropriate on the last day to review major areas of the visit.

Committee Chairs may or may not hold a “thank you” meeting with the school community though, in some schools this has proven difficult to schedule. The Chair will edit the Visiting Committee Report draft and send it to the school to ensure there are no factual errors. Once this is completed, the Chair will then finalize the Committee’s report and, within ten days of the Program Visit, submit it to the Commission. Upon receipt of the final report, the Head of School is invited to write a reaction to the Visiting Committee Report.

Commission Action

The Commission will review the school’s Self-Study, the Visiting Committee Report, the Visiting Committee’s recommendation concerning accreditation and votes on Standards for Accreditation, and the school’s reaction letter (if applicable) at its next meeting after all these items are received. The Commission meets three times each year in November, February and June.

If a school recommended for initial membership does not meet all Standards, action on their accreditation will be tabled until the Standards are met. If a school approved for Continued Accreditation should not meet one or more Standards, the school may be given up to one year to bring itself into compliance.

On the NEASC Annual Report Form, the school will report on actions taken in response to the school’s own recommendations and those of the Visiting Committee and the Commission. The Commission may ask the NEASC staff to follow-up with the school on concerns or may schedule a formal Focused Visit to inquire into progress the school has made.

In addition to any Special Progress Reports or visits, all schools are required to file an Annual Report and a Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report, documenting accomplishments in the follow-up process. School improvement is an ongoing process and the Strategic Plan submitted for the appropriate Reports should reflect this continual progress.

A one-day visit by a Commission staff member will also take place at the time of the Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report. This Five-Year Visit will review ongoing plans, aspirations and challenges for the School.

Eight years from the original visit, a Commission staff member will meet with the Head of School and selected individuals to begin the process again in anticipation for the next visit.

Self-Study Coordinator(s) Checklist

1. Preparation for the Self-Study
 - In consultation with the Head of School and NEASC Liaison, decide on dates for the Initial Contact and both the Foundation and Program Standards Visits
 - Login information and instructions for the online portal will be sent to the Head of School and the Self-Study Coordinator(s)
 - Meet with the Head of School to determine arrangements for the Visiting Committee accommodations and meals
 - Arrange for the Visiting Committee to have an area to work both at the school and the hotel, include refreshments and any materials requested by the Chair
 - Self-Study materials are available on the NEASC website at:
<https://cis.neasc.org/resources/self-study>
 - Register for a Self-Study Workshop at:
<https://cis.neasc.org/events/self-study-workshops>
 - Meet with the Head of School to plan the calendar of professional days to work on the Self-Study, decide on the Steering Committee membership, and review the list of active evaluators for the school
 - Register new Self-Study Coordinators for a workshop and advise NEASC staff regarding those available to participate on visiting teams during the two seasons prior to hosting the decennial visit
 - Schedule NEASC staff presentation at the school and meeting with the Steering Committee
 - Plan for a discussion and review of the Mission Statement
 - Arrange with NEASC for the survey links to be created, data collected, and data shared with all Foundation and Program Committees
2. Self-Study Foundation Standards
 - Following the NEASC staff presentation, work with the Steering Committee to confirm committee assignments and set timeline for the necessary work
 - Monitor progress of Foundation Standard committees
 - Arrange for all required documentation to be collected, uploaded or placed in files for Visiting Committee
 - Submit completed report six weeks prior to the Foundation Visit
3. Self-Study Program Standards
 - Survey faculty on preferences for Program Standard committees
 - Set committee assignments, create a timeline for completion of the work
 - Monitor progress of Program Standard work and compilation of all required documentation
 - Submit completed report six weeks prior to the Program Visit
4. Sharing of Report and Final Preparations
 - Share with all constituencies the results of the reports
 - Plan for the follow-up

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