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**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.**  
**Commission on Independent Schools**

# **Sample Self-Study Reports**

## **Program Standard 11**

### **Emerson Academy**

**and**

### **Hawthorne Academy**

**Note:** *The following sample Self-Study Reports for Program Standard 11 are provided as illustrations and are not intended as a model that other schools must follow.*

*September 2020 Version*

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## Emerson Academy

### Program Standard 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 student perspectives.
- 11.e. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

**School's Self-Rating:** SM2

#### Explanation of Rating:

The school has plans in place to strengthen this Standard and has placed a priority on making changes, particularly those feasible without significant funding.

#### Committee Membership:

Dawn Daily - *Grade 1, faculty*

Joe Johnson - *Grade 7, faculty and alumni*

Mary Moore - *Art, faculty and current parent*

Sue Snow - *Grade 8, faculty*

The Committee met on six occasions. During the first meeting, the survey results were reviewed which initiated a significant discussion regarding communication. The school principal joined two of the meetings to talk about parent communication. The principal acted as the liaison for communication with the Board regarding the make-up of the Board.

#### Materials Provided:

Emerson provided three examples of the Principal's weekly newsletter.

**Summary of Reflections on the Standard and Indicators:** (This summary should include an analysis of the current status.)

Emerson Academy has always taken pride in its communication with the families of its students and the emphasis it places on home-school collaboration. There are three scheduled parent conferences per year and a web-based grading portal that allows parents to view their child's academic progress at any time. Faculty and administrators are accessible to parents and answer email communications promptly. There is a weekly newsletter sent electronically to all families as well as monthly community-building events sponsored by the Home-School Association. As the Standard 11 Committee discussed the school's means of communication with its families, it became clear that nothing has changed for the past two years. There has been no intentional conversation about parent communication and no feedback sought from families until the surveys completed as part of the Self-Study. Recent survey data indicated that parent satisfaction with communication is mixed. This has resulted in three focus groups to discuss communication and Home-School collaboration. As a PreK-8 school, there is an implicit assumption that the school works with the families to nurture and support the young children in its care, but conversations have now begun about explicitly referencing this collaboration in the school's mission.

Given the school's physical location on Main Street, there is a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with the local community. The school generously allows local organizations to use the school facilities at a nominal fee. Most notably, during a particularly harsh winter, the school opened one area of the facility as a warming station for the homeless population of Burlington. Demographic data indicates that 75% of the student body lives in Burlington. Survey data indicated that the vast majority of parents and students agree that the school interacts positively with the local community, and alumni indicated that they were provided ample opportunities to be involved with the local

community through service projects, visits to nursing homes, and participation at seasonal local events. Despite the positive relationship with the town, there are no local business owners on the Advisory Board. It was agreed that this should be a priority for the nominating committee of the Board.

Given the size of the school and financial constraints, there is no alumni office. Outreach to alumni is informal and strongest while the recent graduates are enrolled in local high schools. Once graduates leave the area for college, outreach generally occurs only once a year through the Annual Fund mailing. Although there has been some conversation about more frequent and formalized outreach, this a personnel issue and no funding is available. There is alumni representation on the Board, and there is an alumni Facebook group that is administered by an alum with no school oversight.

The student body of Emerson Academy is diverse, as is the faculty. There is a commitment by the faculty to address global issues in the classrooms and encourage students to look beyond their immediate area. Eighth-grade students have a service requirement for graduation, and these projects are presented in a Middle School Assembly. The Standard 11 Committee discussed how to share these projects with the whole school community including parents. Student diversity is not only celebrated but respect for one another is fostered throughout the everyday events of the school. The teachers have received extensive diversity training for the purpose of aligning the school culture with its mission. Critical reading and critical thinking are encouraged across the curriculum. Conversation and discussion are a part of all classrooms, and students are intentionally taught how to listen to various perspectives and disagree respectfully.

### **Significant Challenges:**

Emerson Academy has limited resources, and every employee wears multiple hats. There are many outreach projects, each initiated by a different teacher or parent. It would be helpful to have one person designated to oversee the outreach calendar, ensure that there is mission alignment with the various projects, and to publicize news of the projects with the broader community.

The school needs to make a more intentional effort to gather contact information for alumni, maintain an alumni database, and engage alumni in school events.

### **Significant Strengths:**

Emerson Academy is an integral part of the town and well-respected for its outreach and support of the town.

Alumni tend to feel great loyalty to the school and, during their high school years, often return to visit or volunteer at school events.

### **Aspirations and Plans:** (Describe the school's aspirations and specific action steps to strength this Standard.)

The school has formed a committee of faculty and parents to address parent communication and collaboration. At the same time, the faculty has agreed to include students in the parent conferences beginning next year. A faculty in-service around this model of conferences has been scheduled for the spring and two faculty members have visited other schools utilizing this format.

The school has submitted a grant to fund a part-time outreach coordinator and a part-time development director.

The Language Arts Committee is reviewing the required reading for Grades 4-8 to ensure that the reading materials present a range of perspectives and provide students with a global outlook. At the same time, the school librarian is evaluating the library collection and prioritizing the purchase of books representing the diversity of students at the school.

The Board is committed to seeking a local business person to join the Board as well as a young alum. Currently, there is one alum on the Board who graduated from the school over 35 years ago. The goal is to have these two new appointments for the fall.

# Hawthorne Academy

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

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

**School's Self-Rating:** SM2

### Explanation of Rating:

Hawthorne Academy lacks a comprehensive, value-driven, and institution wide strategy to develop a systematic plan for community engagement. Our core principles clearly state that community engagement and global citizenship are a large part of what we do, and we believe that community engagement and effective communication must be an intrinsic part of the school's values. Done well, these elements will build networks that extend into the lives of students post-graduation, enhance understanding of the value proposition of the Hawthorne Academy experience with parents and alumni, and connect the Academy to communities with shared values. Hawthorne Academy employees continue to offer community engagement experiences but without administrative support. Opportunities are personality-driven. We strive to coordinate and connect student engagement through academic, co-curricular, alumni, and parent networks, however this is not currently achieved through over-arching institutional alignment. A clear and comprehensive institution-wide plan would facilitate a better understanding of how the school can deliver to all constituents most effectively.

### Committee Membership:

Stan Smith - *Head of School/Faculty*  
Belinda Boxer - *English Faculty*  
Colin Freeman - *School Counsellor*  
Larry Lewis - *Director of Testing and Studies*  
Sandra Price - *Member, Board of Trustees*

### Materials Provided:

Examples of communication with alums and parents

**Summary of Reflections on the Standard and Indicators:** (This summary should include an analysis of the current status.)

Hawthorne Academy hosts two well-attended Parent Weekends per year where families meet face to face with faculty. During these weekends, parents attend classes with students and have time for one-on-one conferencing with instructors and advisors. These weekends often have community dinners, musical or theatre performances, and seminars to receive information on upcoming events, trips and other programming. Hawthorne Academy has a presence on multiple social media outlets including Instagram and Facebook, where the larger Hawthorne Academy community outside of campus can learn about sports victories, weekend trips, and activities in the classroom.

Hawthorne Academy has systems and resources for integrated internal communication—Canvas, internal comments, advising protocols—to convey student growth. Parents receive midterm grades halfway through each term and final grades with comments from every teacher at the end of every trimester. The midterm grades exist to inform parents of the students' individual progress in each class. The Academy's systems of communication to convey student growth to families is guided but relies much on the personal relationships between advisors and student families. We do not have a statement on adolescent development to reflect and streamline the Hawthorne

Academy experience, which could enhance communication and support to families. Email, text, and organizational mailings help to convey the student growth experience; however, we do not practice value-driven communication that is guided by a collective understanding of adolescent development, measured by feedback from a variety of constituents, or connected through programs. Without clarity on what is valued, our communication lacks cohesion and parents can get conflicting messages. Informal parent feedback supports this claim. Parents state, “We like Hawthorne Academy, but who are you?” Marketing firms have deduced that Hawthorne Academy is “unique and peculiar” and our identity is not mission or philosophically driven but driven by what is currently trending to advertise to prospective students.

The commitment to broadening students’ perspectives is most evident in our off-campus travel programming organized as part of orientation at the beginning of the school year for incoming students and school-wide opportunities over spring break; attention to signature community days like Martin Luther King service days and Earth Day; weekend activities like citizenship tutoring in the local town; and curricular experiences like Ecology of the local area, various museum labs, and Historical Society work. There are opportunities for students to participate in new experiences at the exposure level, but broadening student perspectives at the engagement level driven by a clear value is not consistently evident. The seminar program is a clear example of how we strive and succeed to connect the broadening of student experiences with adolescent development and social-emotional skills.

In our investigation about community interaction, we acknowledge many individually driven moments of community engagement. However, Hawthorne Academy’s programs do not systematically help students develop principles of interaction in communities. We have had success connecting students to local internships that were mutually beneficial, but that initiative no longer is administratively supported, and teachers do not have the capacity to add internship management to their responsibilities. Much like communication about a child’s development and broadening student perspectives on community engagement, programs are not driven by a clearly understood values statement or coordinated at an administrative level. Community engagement with parents, alumni, and friends is an opportunity to support student growth and to develop a network to extend beyond Hawthorne Academy and into the arc of student lives.

In a recent parent interview, questions were raised about community engagement as part of the Hawthorne Academy experience. In our parent survey, only 31% of the respondents rated the “service-learning/community service program” as excellent. And since that time, there have been fewer student engagement opportunities. Currently, we do not have an active student outreach group and only a few regular local community engagement practices. Yet, a recent student and faculty survey reports differing perspectives on the question, “Do you agree that the Academy has a strong commitment to the greater community?”

The following table shows the results of our survey:

<b>Students*</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Response</b>
29.4%	very much	13.9%	very much
31.6%	quite a bit	36.1%	quite a bit
24.3%	somewhat	19.4%	somewhat

*\*It is important to note that students frequently identified “local community” as Hawthorne Academy or the local area-centric, whereas the faculty had no clear indicator of how the community is defined.*

The advancement office confirms that engagement scores are lower than desired, and strategy relating to alumni needs tightening. The Academy’s recent program developments are not clearly linked to value statements; therefore, alumni are left wondering if the school is still what it once was. The advancement office confirms that family engagement is strong.

**Significant Challenges:**

In recent years, leadership turnover in some key areas has impeded coherency and the well-trodden phrase, “who are you?” hinders our stability.

Some of our existing networks are less than they could be with better institutional guidance. As the school develops a strategic plan, the school can better tie together the various outreach efforts to the greater community.

**Significant Strengths:**

Hawthorne Academy strives to connect students with the community inside of our institution as well as outside of our campus community. We have strong academic, co-curricular, and parent networks. We do have programming which teaches students how to broaden their understanding of community, and our programming helps provide guidance and intent moving on from the Academy. Our faculty works hard to communicate internally regarding student well-being, as well as externally with families and consultants.

**Aspirations and Plans:** (Describe the school’s aspirations and specific action steps to strength this Standard.)

Everyone sees the value of strengthening this aspect of our students’ experience. As noted in our reflections above, time seems to be the critical variable. How can we expand our community engagement when some would say we are barely treading water with all that we do now? This expansion of opportunities will be a non-starter if it comes to the faculty as a top down directive. It seems that the hiring Hawthorne Academy needs to do in some key areas may afford us an opportunity to bring in leadership in this area. As the strategic planning efforts re-engage in the next few months, there is a second opportunity to give this shortcoming the jump-start and direction it needs to become an integral part of the student experience.