

Connecticut Association of Independent Schools



Commission on Membership and Accreditation

HANDBOOK FOR VISITING TEAMS

Connecticut Association of Independent Schools
P.O. Box 614
23 E. Main Street
Mystic, CT 06355
www.caisct.org

Rick Branson, Executive Director
email: branson@caisct.org

Guy Bailey, Director of Accreditation Services
email: g_bailey@caisct.org

To CAIS Visiting Team (VT) Members:

Thank you for contributing your time and professional wisdom to the CAIS school accreditation process!

The approach used by CAIS is based on a structured Self Study and disciplined peer review, followed by ongoing reporting by the School to the CAIS Commission on Membership and Accreditation (CMA, the Commission). This has proved over many years to be a quality-assurance resource of great importance for Connecticut's independent schools.

You may want to imagine, as you undertake your service, that you are taking a place in a long, long line of committed fellow professionals — a line which stretches back in time for more than a half century. All of the persons in this line have served, as you do, voluntarily. None has ever received added compensation or special recognition for his or her work. Yet the gift of service that has been provided has been of enormous value, and it has had a great deal to do with the exemplary quality of today's independent schools in Connecticut.

The following comments, based on CAIS experience as well as on materials developed by the Commission on Independent School of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and the International Council Advancing Independent Schools Accreditation (ICAISA), should help you prepare to perform your duty as a member of a VT. Note, however, that these comments are meant to be an introduction, not an exhaustive overview. Questions not addressed by this pamphlet may arise. These may be most appropriately addressed to the Chair of your VT.

The Purpose of Accreditation

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

- **The Self Study:** Every ten years a school undertakes a comprehensive self-evaluation, following defined procedures, which is the foundation of the accreditation process and provides the focus for the subsequent visit. The CAIS Manual for Accreditation integrates mandated standards into a Self Study protocol which is designed to confirm that the Standards for Accreditation are met and to generate plans for school improvement.
- **The Visiting Team:** The VT, composed of peers from other member schools, is charged with validating the Self Study and providing the School and the Commission with the observations and recommendations of experienced outside educators designed to guide the School to future improvement. The VT follows a methodology in its work, the objective of which is reliability in the results.
- **Follow-up:** The CAIS CMA's oversight assures effective follow-up on recommendations and plans formulated during the Self Study and VT phases. While adherence to standards provides some measure of quality, the best long-term assurance of quality is the commitment to ongoing school improvement to which accreditation attests.

The Visiting Team

The VT undertakes a four-day visit after receiving the School's Self Study. The VT's immediate task is to understand the School on its own terms and to validate the Self Study. It must then, working within the context of the School and the framework of CAIS policy, write a report which will include commendations that warrant exceptional recognition (not merely acknowledgement of performing expected duties) and recommendations designed to further school improvement.

The VT Report, described more fully below, must first establish the credibility of the VT as knowledgeable observers and careful listeners. It will make recommendations drawn from three sources: standards that are not met, discrepancies between policies and practices, and endorsements of recommendations the School has made for itself. The report is addressed to the CAIS CMA as well as to the School, and should assist the Commission in setting requirements for follow-up and the School in establishing a clear action plan.

- a. Before the visit, members of the VT will be asked to take specific responsibility for drafting one or more sections of the report. However, all VT members should have

read the entire Self Study and made notes prior to the visit. There will not be time to do so once the VT arrives at the School.

- b. Members should bring their own laptops. However, computers will be made available by the School, if necessary.
- c. On the first day of the visit (Sunday afternoon), the Chair will orient the VT to the task of accreditation. Here are some basic assumptions each member should bring to this meeting:
 1. Everyone is first a generalist even though each has assignments to draft sections of the report
 2. All members of the VT are responsible for the entire report and all recommendations
 3. The focus of accreditation is on encouraging school improvement
 4. The text for the visit is the School's Self Study and it is important to understand the School on its own terms
 5. The VT should listen actively. Hear what the School says; do not try to advise or consult
 6. Take time to gain an understanding of how the School functions before narrowing the focus to specific sections of the report
 7. Talk to faculty, students, parents and administrators
 8. Talk to those who prepared sections of the Self Study you are reviewing
 9. Students, especially in elementary schools, expect to see visitors in their classrooms and would be disappointed if this did not happen; however avoid investing too much time in this activity
 10. Take notes, compile notes, and begin writing early
 11. Each section will be shared in draft form. Be prepared to offer observations of sections other than your own
 12. The School has spent over a year preparing for this visit; be sensitive to their expectations
 13. The VT will need to gain the School's confidence if it wants them to listen to recommendations
 14. Remember... you are not meant to identify and suggest solutions to problems
 15. Recommendations come from three sources (only): standards which are not met, inconsistencies between mission and practice, and recommendations the School has made for itself in its Self Study
 16. Recommendations should define issues and may suggest directions in which the School might proceed, but they should not be prescriptive

17. Findings (observations) resulting in recommendations should be confirmed in the text of the report with evidence from more than one source

Voting on Standards & Accreditation Status:

One purpose of the VT is to assure that the School meets the Standards for Accreditation. The Chair will present one form which reflects the ratings. The Chair will record the VT's decisions on the rating for each standard. The forms should be returned with the Accreditation Report as a separate document.

The VT also will vote on the accreditation status to be recommended to the CMA. The following types of recommendations are possible for a school seeking initial accreditation:

- A vote of accreditation (or re-accreditation) for a period of five years, which is renewable for a second five years at the end of that period;
- Accreditation and some specific stipulation
- Tabling of action pending completion of a specific response from the School
- Denial of accreditation (This is an adverse recommendation and is subject to the appeal process of the Association.)

For a school seeking continued accreditation, recommend:

- A vote of re-accreditation for a period of five years, which is renewable for a second five years at the end of that period;
- Accreditation for a defined shorter period;
- Accreditation subject to probation, stipulation, or warning;
- Denial of membership, with specific recommendations regarding future eligibility or re-application. (This is an adverse recommendation and is subject to the appeal process of the Association.)

Continued accreditation that includes stipulations is a very common recommendation and suggests to the Commission that some follow-up activity beyond the regular interim reports is warranted. Most frequently a *Stipulation* is the strongest action recommended by a VT. It gives the School an opportunity to address a deficiency.

Warning status is used if a school does not respond adequately to requirements set by the Commission. It indicates that there are serious concerns and there is a need for close monitoring by the Commission. This is a private matter between the Commission and the School.

Probation status is more serious and it means that there will be a public announcement that the accreditation of the School is probationary. In the case of probation, the School is also closely monitored. There is an appeals system available to the School in the case of a recommendation for probation. Note that the VT recommends, but the Commission will make the final decision on accreditation status and follow-up requirements for the School.

d. After the visit, when you are dismissed by the Chair on Wednesday, your service has ended. The Chair should by that time have all materials in hand which you have helped prepare, and should also have your expense summary. Unless the Chair has reason to contact you after that time, you should expect no further communication regarding this visit. Neither a copy of the final VT Report nor any communication

regarding the eventual decisions of the CMA (which are in large part confidential) will be sent to you. If you, as a member of the VT, would like further information, please feel free to contact the Director of Accreditation Services or the CAIS office.

Written materials that were mailed to you in advance of the visit or have been provided during the visit, including the School's Self Study, should, at the Chair's direction, either be left behind for disposal or promptly destroyed by you. You also should consider that all deliberations, conversations and votes on standards which have been part of the VT process are privileged matters. They should not be reported to other persons in any way.

The VT Report

The VT Report is written in part by the Chair, and developed in part by the Chair using draft materials prepared by VT members. It is written for two audiences: the School and the Commission. The form of the report follows the outline of the Manual for Accreditation. Each section of the report should begin with observations and judgments, or conclusions that flow from them. If warranted, recommendations and / or commendations should follow.

It is important that the report be suitable for publication to the entire school community. It should convey understanding and appreciation for the distinctive mission and qualities of the School. It is an occasion to affirm the School for what it does well. It should contain clear and well-supported recommendations drawn from one of three sources:

1. A standard which is not met
2. A discontinuity between the School's mission and its practices
3. A recommendation the School has made for itself

Avoid prescriptive recommendations. Note: the VT may include suggestions in the narrative without requiring the School to respond, as it must to recommendations.

Major recommendations and commendations, which the Chair will place at the end of the report, should be drawn from the body of the report. They should relate to issues of major importance, and may tie together several individual recommendations.

Commendations should be included to recognize something that is truly noteworthy. They should not be made to acknowledge duties that are expected of individuals according to their job descriptions. They may be a way to show appreciation of the School's distinctive programs and qualities. Individual members of the School's community should be noted by title, not by proper names.

Recommendations and Commendations should follow from and be supported by observations and judgments which are based on evidence from more than one source. See samples of Standard reports, including comments, commendations and recommendations at the end of this document.

The Standards

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

The School is asked to provide a brief history of the School and its statement of mission. The VT should inquire into the procedure by which the statement of mission was developed, the procedures for systematic review, and the understanding of and agreement with the statement among the various constituencies of the School.

It is not unusual for this section to be discussed by the VT on Sunday evening, prior to actually seeing the School in operation. This is possible if the VT has met with faculty and other members of the School community at a reception and there has been an opportunity to ask questions about the section. Questions such as the following might be appropriate:

- Does the statement accurately describe the unique mission of the School?
- How well do parents and students understand the statement?
- Does the statement serve as the basis for the School's programs?
- Does the statement guide the School in decision-making in all areas of the School?

Remember that a school is measured against its statement of mission during the accreditation process. It is not compared with other institutions. The statement, therefore, is a very important part of the self-evaluation document and should be clear to all constituencies and unique to the School.

This section also provides the VT an opportunity to sum up its observations of the School in operation and of its distinctive character. The entire VT might wish to discuss this section and contribute perspectives before the report is drafted.

Suggested Indicators:

1.a The School has a clear statement of educational mission. The stated mission and philosophy guide the School's admissions, programming, planning, and decision-making.

1.b The mission of the School is congruent with principles of academic scholarship, permitting and encouraging freedom of inquiry, diversity of viewpoints, and independent and critical thinking.

1.c The mission of the School is embraced by all constituencies.

1.d The mission statement is reviewed regularly, using a process that involves representatives of major constituencies of the School, as appropriate.

1.e The School community is engaged in reflecting on ways to enrich the application of the mission in all aspects of the program.

1.f The School's climate and culture support an effective educational program, consistent with its stated mission.

1.g Requirements and expectations of students, parents, faculty, trustees, and employees clearly reflect the values and mission of the School.

1. h. The culture of the School reflects a commitment to implementing the mission of the School.

Standard 2 (Governance): The School has an appropriate system of governance that assures the School remains true to its mission and that it has the necessary resources to support its present and prospective operations.

The health of a school depends upon having a responsible and effective system of governance that assures that the School remains true to its mission and that it has the necessary resources to support its operations. There is no one governance structure common to all independent schools; therefore, this section of the Self Study asks the School to describe how the functions of governance are accomplished and to assess the effectiveness of the system for the School.

The VT should plan to meet with a representative group of those responsible for governance. Topics of discussion at that meeting might follow closely the indicators for the governance standard, being sure that all functions of governance receive adequate attention. A written long-range planning document should be available in the Supplementary Material Inventory.

Suggested Indicators:

2.a. The governance of the School is clearly defined, understood by all constituents, and provides for:

- continuity of mission
- stability and ethical process in transitions of leadership
- a comprehensive, multi-year planning process
- assurance of adequate financial resources
- institutional advancement/development
- evaluation of and support of the professional growth of the head of school
- a model of inclusive behavior, decision-making, and integrity for the School community
- establishing and monitoring needed school policies
- clearly-defined and regularly applied procedures to orient, educate, and evaluate the governing body
- risk management and school safety
- policies related to environmental sustainability

2.b. Provision is made for participation of all constituencies in the policy-making process, as appropriate.

2.c. The governing body demonstrates and clearly communicates its commitment to the mission, and consistently exercises its fiduciary responsibilities.

2.d. The governing body provides opportunities for generative thinking on a regular basis.

2.e. The School has a current Multi-Year Plan that integrates all school operations, programs, and finances, as well as timelines for implementation.

2.f. There is an understood delegation of decision-making that gives the Head of School the capacity to exercise effective educational leadership.

2.g. The governing body, in conjunction with the School's administration, provides for stability and continuity in the event of short and long-term periods when classes are unable to be held on campus and there is a necessity for distance (virtual and/or hybrid) learning experiences.

Standard 3 (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice): The School has created and continues to foster a program, culture and inclusive community of students, families, trustees, teachers and staff who embrace the multitude of perspectives, cultures, backgrounds and identities in our world.

Sample Indicators:

3.a Issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice are defined and incorporated into the School's program, policies, planning, and decision-making at both the operational and governance levels.

3.b The School articulates the value of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice to its community.

3.c The School attends to the quality of life of all members of the community and takes actions to create an equitable, inclusive, safe, and just environment.

3.d The governance of the School is clearly defined, understood by all constituents, and provides for: a model of inclusive behavior and integrity for the School community.

3.e The governing board establishes policies that reflect diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice and ensures that these qualities are reflected in decision-making and governing body membership.

3.f The School has defined what constitutes a diverse student body.

3.g The School, in harmony with its mission and resources, seeks, admits, and supports a diverse student body and creates educational and co-curricular programs that provide equal access for all students regardless of social identity, national origin, and/or citizenship status.

3.h The program offers a variety of cultural experiences to reflect (a) the diversity of students enrolled and (b) the multicultural nature of the region, country, and world.

3.i The School's teaching practices, curriculum, and broader educational program reflect a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and social justice.

3.j The School is mindful of the ways in which families of different identities,

3.k There is an evaluation process in place to see how the School's programs need to change to reflect the diversity of the School community and the world.

3.l The School recognizes and validates differences within the student body such as gender and gender identity, learning style or ability, race, age, ethnicity, family background, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and religious practice.

3.m Time is made available on a regular and consistent basis for teachers to learn ways in which their cultural backgrounds and life experience help or hinder their ability to plan together to work with students, parents, and other adults in the community.

3.n There is a process in place to see how the School's programs need to change to identify students who will need additional support to function effectively in a pluralistic environment.

3.o The School promotes and has ways to ensure an equitable, just, and inclusive community where students respect and value diversity and are active and responsible.

3.p Faculty and staff, School leadership, and members of the Board of Trustees are regularly trained in the current topics, language, and academic content related to racism, discrimination, and other issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.

3.q The School has defined what constitutes a diverse staff in accordance with the School's mission.

3.r The School has processes in place to recruit, hire, and support a diverse staff.

3.s The School develops and publishes a policy and plan on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, derived from its mission and core values that it uses to evaluate the status of the School in this regard and to guide planning to achieve goals.

3.t The School structures ways to work with parents/guardians proactively. The School is mindful of the ways in which families of different backgrounds and socio-economic status may be affected by School policies and programs.

3.u In marketing materials and other outward facing communications, the School demonstrates its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Standard 4 (Program): The School provides a comprehensive program of intellectual, aesthetic, and physical activities that stems from the School's beliefs about teaching and learning, is appropriate to support its mission, and effectively addresses the needs of the range of students admitted. Program planning is informed by relevant research regarding how students learn and the knowledge and capacities they will need to lead purposeful and constructive lives.

Sample Indicators:

4.a The educational program stems from the School's beliefs about teaching and learning that are regularly reviewed and that are consistent with the mission of the School.

4.b The School programs demonstrate consideration for the appropriate intellectual, social, physical, aesthetic, emotional and ethical development of students in all aspects of school and student life.

4.c The curriculum demonstrates continuity from year to year.

4.d. The School has a policy for regularly reviewing the academic program and has completed a recent, written Curriculum Plan outlining desirable and/or necessary improvements.

4.e Attention is paid to transitions between grade levels and/or divisions of the School so as to facilitate passage of students from one level/division to another.

4.f. The School recognizes developmental levels of children and takes them into consideration in planning programs and teaching methodologies.

4.g The School evaluates the academic rigor, effectiveness, and integrity of online courses that its students take, and of any online courses that the School itself offers, on a regular basis.

4.h The School strives to promote a culture of global understanding that is appropriate to the School's mission, size, and means.

4.i The School promotes a commitment to environmental responsibility and stewardship for current and future generations that is appropriate to the School's mission.

4.j The School's program is able to provide mission-driven opportunities to all of its students, as appropriate for distance (virtual/ hybrid) learning experiences.

Standard 5 (Early Childhood Programs): The early childhood program enriches the social, intellectual, and developmental needs of its students by providing appropriate programs, adequate staffing, and sufficient resources and facilities.

The early childhood program is often easily overlooked. Its location may be separate from the rest of the School, its hours may be longer, and its faculty may be less accessible. This standard is intended to assure that full attention is given to examining the early childhood program.

Suggested Indicators:

5.a. The School communicates and collaborates with parents of children in its Early Childhood Program in a manner which addresses the needs of this community.

5.b. Staff who work directly with children in the Early Childhood Program are trained in the field of early childhood education/child development. Their numbers are sufficient in relation to numbers and ages of children in each early childhood grouping to perform tasks effectively and safely.

5.c. The School has curricular and extracurricular programs in place which specifically and effectively address intellectual and developmental needs of children in the Early Childhood Program and are consistent with the School's stated mission.

5.d. Facilities provided for the Early Childhood Program, including instructional, activity and play spaces, and supporting resources such as lavatories and dining areas, are adequate in construction, space provided per child, and maintenance to meet the needs of the children in the program.

5.e. Materials, routines, and procedures are so organized as to protect the health and safety of young children enrolled in the Early Childhood Program.

5.f. Those sections of the Early Childhood Program that serve children under the age of three meet state health and safety guidelines for approval of child care facilities.

5.g. Realizing the unique needs of pre-school children and their parents concerning the demands of distance (virtual and/or hybrid) learning experiences when classes are unable to be held on campus, the school develops age-appropriate plans to meet these needs.

Standard 6 (Residential Program and/or Homestay Program):The residential program and/or Homestay Program provides for an intentional curriculum, appropriate facilities, engaging activities, and adequate supervision to meet the needs of each student.

Sample Indicators:

Residential Programs:

6.a The School ensures that boarding personnel receive specific training, supervision, and evaluation so as to be qualified to meet the needs of students under their care and supervision.

6.b The residential program is consistent with the mission of the School, and is integrated into the total life of the School, especially with regard to the interaction with day students.

6.c The School promotes environments that provide opportunities to enhance positive interaction among domestic and international students, and to develop sensitivity and understanding regarding cultural differences and needs that are specific to international students.

6.d Evening, weekend, and vacation activities are actively planned, as part of the residential curriculum, to meet the needs of the students.

6.e The School provides for the needs of international students, students with limited financial resources, and students who have difficulty adjusting to being away from home.

6.f If technological services, such as computers, Internet access, email, and/or telephones, are included in residential areas, there is a process to ensure that policies and procedures are consistent with the School's overall Technology Plan and Acceptable Use Policy.

6.g Through a well-defined process involving students, parents, and staff, a regular review of the residential program is accomplished which is intended to lead to revisions and/or improvements.

6.h There are clearly-stated, written, and understood expectations for residential students and staff.

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

Homestay Programs:

6.j The homestay program is consistent with the mission of the School.

6.k The School has a formal contract with homestay families if there is a direct placement or with an agency that provides homestay placements.

6.l The School assures that homestay facilities are safe and clean, and provide sufficient living space.

6.m There is a clearly defined process to screen host families, including a background check and a process for matching student and family interests.

6.n There is a procedure to include host families and students in defining and understanding the ethical and legal responsibilities of the School, host families, and students.

6.o The School has clearly stated, written, and understood expectations for the School, host families, and students regarding the 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.

6.p The School has a well-defined process, which includes students and host families, to regularly review the homestay program and the experience of the students for the purpose of improvement.

Standard 7 (Resources to Support the Program): Given the School's mission, there are adequate resources (facilities, equipment, technology, materials, and community) to support the School's program.

There are three program standards. The program section is usually the longest and most significant part of the Self Study report prepared by the School. Program, after all, is the heart of the School and faculties are encouraged to spend the greatest amount of time on this section. As a result, most VT chairs assign all members of the VT to contribute to the discussion of these standards.

The School is asked to scrutinize its program and assure that it reflects the School's pedagogical beliefs and that these beliefs are subject to continuing faculty discussion and review. The Self Study and VT report focus on the overall program of the School, not on individual departments or programs. The School has examined the component pieces of the program in its preliminary study and this information should be available in the Supplementary Materials Inventory.

Questions to be asked on this section will vary depending on the type of school and level of education. They might include, but should not be limited to, such questions as:

- To what extent does the curriculum meet the full range of student needs and abilities?
- To what extent are instructional techniques varied and appropriate?

- How effectively is assessment data gathered and used to improve the curriculum in a particular area?
- Is the level of financial support adequate to provide sufficient textbooks and other instructional materials?
- What impact has technology had in classroom instruction?
- What is a faculty member's input into curriculum revision?
- Do teachers talk about assumptions and beliefs regarding teaching and learning which are consistent with the mission of the School?

It would be well to frame additional questions that relate to each of the three standards. The School's response to the indicators may suggest areas for inquiry. The members of the VT should have the opportunity to review the student activities program including organizations, clubs, and sports activities. Counseling is a part of the program section. Library and Technology are areas of rapid change in many schools.

The persons who prepared the sections of the Self Study should be interviewed. In addition, both students and faculty should be interviewed about their experience with and perception of all aspects of the program.

Suggested Indicators:

7.a. Instructional facilities (including space, furnishings, and play/recreation areas) are adequate for the instructional program and are age appropriate.

7.b. There are instructional materials and equipment in sufficient quality, quantity, and variety to give effective support to the aims and methods of the program.

7.c. The School has a Library Plan which is integrated with the curriculum and which provides students with age appropriate experiences in research and reading and supports the broad purposes of the educational program.

7.d. The School has a written Academic Technology Plan, developed by teachers and academic leaders, covering the integration of technology into the various components of the program and providing for the professional development of teachers in the implementation of this plan.

7.e. The School has in place an Acceptable Use Policy of which students and families are informed and the School provides information to students and families on the appropriate and ethical use of technology.

7.f. There are procedures in place to assure that teachers have a leading role in planning the use of technology in their teaching.

7.g. Non-academic programs, if available, are consistent with the School's mission and are well organized, supplied, and staffed.

7.h. The schedule is planned by day and year to provide for the total program.

7.i. The School interacts with the community in which it is located and avails itself of community resources.

7.j. The School strives to be a positive member of the community in which it exists, is sensitive to the interests of its neighbors, and takes appropriate advantage of the character of its setting.

7.k. The financial aid resources committed to students and their families reflect the goals and mission of the School.

7.l. The School has sufficient resources to support any online courses that it offers.

7.m. The School provides the necessary technological infrastructure to accommodate its faculty, staff, and students with the ability to succeed in the case of short and long-term period when classes are unable to be held on campus and there is a necessity for distance (virtual) and/or hybrid) learning experiences.

Standard 8 (Experience of the Students): The School actively considers individual students and has developed plans, policies, programs, and pedagogy to nurture, support, and encourage all students to reach their potential and to participate in the life of the School.

Sample Indicators:

8.a Time is made available on a regular basis for teachers to plan together and to discuss students (both individuals and groups).

8.b There is a procedure in place to assess and report on how individual students are meeting the goals of the program with regard to both personal and academic growth.

8.c Resources are available to faculty (in-school or through outside consultants) to assist in identifying and meeting the needs of individual students.

8.d There is a process in place to identify students who might benefit from a modification of the program.

8.e There is a process in place to identify students for whom the School is inappropriate and a supportive process for counseling those students.

8.f Counseling, advising, and guidance procedures and personnel address the needs of the students.

8.g The School ensures that homestay host families receive specific training, supervision, and evaluation that address the needs of international or other guest students.

8.h College or school placement counseling, as applicable, addresses the needs of the students.

8.i Information is systematically gathered regarding students' experience at the School and is used to inform program planning.

8.j The School assures that the design and delivery of online courses that its students take or the School offers meet the needs of the students and support student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions

Standard 9 (Faculty): There is a sufficient number of appropriately qualified faculty to carry out the mission of the School.

A school worthy of accreditation is concerned about the quality of teaching and assures that the number of qualified faculty is sufficient to carry out the mission of the School. It is also important that the School treat faculty members with respect and actively promote their professional growth.

It is typical for VT members to visit classes and meet with teachers. This is not to assess individual professional performance, but rather to evaluate the policies followed and the procedures used to assure quality teaching. The VT will observe the professional staff as a total entity and will evaluate its suitability to carry out the School's program. The VT will seek to determine if the professional staff is appropriate for the mission of the School.

VT members assigned to this section should meet with those persons at the School who were responsible for preparing this section of the Self Study, as well as other staff.

Sample questions might include, but should not be limited to, some of the following:

- Are the professional and support staffs adequate in number to support the programs of the School?
- How effective is the program for orienting new teachers and staff?
- Are in-service programs appropriate and helpful?
- Is the professional development budget adequate?

During the visit it is certainly appropriate for all VT members to ask similar questions of individual teachers during interviews and conversations.

Suggested Indicators:

9.a The School has a procedure for recruiting professional staff who are the best available for the tasks to be performed and for the mission of the School; and also has a procedure for screening and interviewing candidates and providing them with necessary background information about the School.

9.b Academic personnel are qualified by education, training, or experience in the areas to which they are assigned.

9.c Personnel practices provide ethical treatment among all faculty, administration, and staff with respect to compensation, workload, and working conditions.

9.d The School demonstrates a commitment to staff development by providing opportunity for and expecting participation in professional growth and development.

9.e Professional development time is used for faculty to discuss issues of teaching and learning.

9.f The School has a shared understanding of teaching excellence.

9.g The School has a defined program for the evaluation and supervision of teachers.

9.h The faculty are treated with respect and the School sets clear expectations for their professional behavior.

9.i If the School offers online courses, faculty responsible for providing these courses are appropriately qualified, trained, supported, and evaluated.

9.j In the event of unanticipated distance (virtual and/or hybrid) learning, teachers have been prepared, in advance, to pivot from one mode of teaching to another.

9.k Teachers are provided training to become familiar with and able to provide mission-driven, distance (virtual and hybrid) learning experiences.

Standard 10 (Administration): The administration provides leadership and maintains a structure to facilitate the effective functioning of the School, including the participation of faculty in decision-making.

Both administrators and faculty carry out decision-making functions. The VT should meet with those who prepared this section of the Self Study report and also speak to other individuals to assure that there are a variety of people appropriately involved in the decision-making process. It is well to remember that there is no correct way to make decisions at a school. Certainly a Quaker school will have a very different decision-making system than a military school. However, it is expected that there are channels for faculty participation in program planning and review.

Suggested Indicators:

10.a The administration is effective in carrying out the program of the School and the policies established by the governing body or school board.

10.b Administrative personnel and support staff are qualified by education, training or experience to serve in the areas to which they are assigned.

10.c The administration assures review and evaluation of the educational program and provides that a current Curriculum Plan is in place.

10.d On an annual basis, the appropriate school personnel review and approve all procedural plans to be implemented in the event of short and long-term periods when classes are unable to be held on campus and there is a necessity for distance (virtual and/or hybrid) learning experiences.

10.e The School involves faculty in decision-making about the program of the School.

10.f The School demonstrates a commitment to administrator development by providing opportunity for and expecting participation in professional growth and development.

10. g. The School has a defined program for the evaluation and supervision of administrators.

10.h The school ensures equal opportunity for its students and families in their ability to access and benefit from distance (virtual and/or hybrid) learning experiences.

Standard 11 (Communication): The School maintains effective systems of external and internal communication and record keeping that inform all constituents and facilitate participation.

This standard refers to the entire network of communication among members of the School community. The VT should talk with administrators, faculty, parents, support staff, students, board members, and alumni.

- What forms of communication are used?
- How effective is formal communication throughout the School?
- Are written records complete and are they kept secure?

Schools will typically arrange for members of the VT to meet with a group of parents, often those responsible for the parent survey. It might also be wise to speak with other parents and that may be possible with a bit of imagination. This may take place after school in the parking lot, etc. It is important to determine if parents are appropriately engaged in their children's education and that communication with the School is satisfactory.

In some cases the relationship of the School to its geographical community is extremely important and in other cases it is less so. The VT members involved in this section should use their judgment about that importance and make appropriate inquiries both within the School and the local community.

Sample Indicators:

11.a The School publishes current school policies and procedures in handbooks or makes them readily available in other forms to the affected constituencies.

11.b. There is an internal communication system to distribute minutes of meetings, give notice of decisions, and inform the School community of events and other news.

11.c The School has a mechanism in place for input from staff into decision-making regarding personnel policies, budget preparation, and other areas, as appropriate.

11.d Information regarding the financial responsibilities of the parent/guardian or student to the institution is clearly stated in writing and is made available prior to enrollment.

11.e There is a procedure for determining equitable adjustments in tuition and other financial obligations existing between the parent/guardian and the institution.

11.f Appropriate channels are available for parents to reflect their concerns and interests to school personnel.

11.g Student progress is reported regularly to parents in a clear and comprehensive manner.

- 11.h The School's record retention policy and practices are consistent with current federal and state statutes.
- 11.i The School maintains complete and accurate records for both current and former students, faculty, and staff members that are maintained in safe storage with backup.
- 11.j The School ensures appropriate confidentiality of records, making them available only to authorized personnel.
- 11.k The School's records are protected against catastrophic loss.
- 11.l The School communicates effectively, in advance, to its students, parents, and faculty/staff, concerning its plans to be implemented in the case of short and long-term periods when classes are unable to be held on campus and there is a necessity for distance (virtual and/or hybrid) learning experiences.

Standard 12 (Enrollment): The admissions process assures that those students who enroll are appropriate, given the School's mission, and are likely to benefit from their experience at the School.

The School will provide information about the composition of the student body, admissions, graduates, and student families. The VT should explore the material provided to determine the degree to which there is congruence between the mission and the composition and aspirations of the School community. There is the expectation that the programs of the School fit the needs and abilities of the students.

VT members assigned to this section will spend time reviewing procedures, files, and policies. Admissions officers, deans, the registrar, and alumni/ae officials should be interviewed, as well as faculty, students, and parents. This is primarily a data gathering section and so it will be well to review with the responsible persons the information provided in the Self Study.

Sample Indicators:

- 12.a The School in its public relations materials presents an accurate description of its mission, organization, staff, program, and facilities.
- 12.b The mission of the School is reviewed with prospective families.
- 12.c The School is transparent in its admissions and retention policies and provides information that accurately describes tuition levels, fees, and all other expectations.
- 12.d The School has mission-aligned procedures in place to ensure that students can be well-served by the School programs.
- 12.e The School has clearly stated procedures for the admission of students, which are developmentally appropriate at different levels.
- 12.f The School has developed a profile of its student body that defines the range and type of students suitable for admission.

12.g If tuition assistance is offered, there are clearly stated policies and procedures for the application for and award of grants which are consistent with the mission of the School.

12.h The School uses information concerning the performance of students and graduates in evaluating admissions procedures.

12.i The School undertakes an analysis of the reasons students depart prior to graduation and uses the results to inform admissions procedures and program revisions.

12.j Those responsible for admissions communicate with those responsible for the program of the School to assure that necessary resources are available to meet the needs of individual students who are admitted.

12.k The admissions staff communicates regularly with the teaching faculty about the specific talents/strengths/skills/needs of newly enrolled students.

Standard 13 (Evaluation and Assessment): The School engages in forms of assessment related to fulfilling its mission and core values. This data is used to inform decision-making and planning.

This standard refers to a school-wide culture of evaluation and assessment. The indicators suggest the broad range of areas warranting inquiry, such as:

- Does the Board engage in self-evaluation?
- Does the School gather and use data on the performance of graduates?
- Are procedures used for the evaluation of staff helpful, effective, and ethical?
- Are policies and practices evaluated in terms of their success in meeting goals?

In interviewing members of the School community, the VT should look for a commitment to using evaluation and assessment in guiding school policy and practice.

Suggested Indicators:

13 a The School conducts annual program review and revision based on assessment of student performance.

13.b Procedures are in place to assess individual student progress toward meeting the goals of the program, and to communicate progress effectively and appropriately to students and families.

13.c The School uses some form of longitudinal assessment of student performance (such as portfolio assessment).

13.d The School conducts exit interviews of students and faculty and uses the data to inform admissions and program planning.

13.e The School has procedures to follow-up on the experiences of alumni/ae and uses the data to inform admissions and program planning.

13.f The School brings in consultants and/or visitors from other schools to participate in the periodic evaluation of programs.

13.g The School participates in state sponsored learning results activities, as appropriate.

13.h The School carries out programs for supervision and evaluation of all personnel that are understood by all concerned.

13.i Those responsible for leadership engage in periodic self-evaluation of their performance.

13.j If applicable, the School's plans for developing, sustaining, and expanding online courses are integrated into the overall planning and evaluation procedures of the School.

13.k The vitality/influence of the mission in the life of the School is assessed.

Standard 14 (Infrastructure):

There are adequate resources (personnel, finances, facilities, equipment, materials, and community) to provide for the overall institutional needs of the School.

This section covers a wide range of administrative and service functions. The VT should meet with those responsible for each of these areas. There is the expectation that administrative staff are sufficient in number and have appropriate training and experience to be effective in their roles. It is also expected that administrative activities are appropriate for the mission of the School.

An assessment of the financial management is extremely important in the accreditation process since effective resource management is necessary to sustain the mission of a school. Some VTs include business managers or others with financial backgrounds, but often the chair and assistant chair must draw on their own experience to review this section. The VT chair will receive confidential financial information that is not available to the rest of the VT. This includes an audit conducted by an independent certified public accountant (or an approved alternative), budgets, salary and benefit information, and operating statements. Because of the confidentiality of much of this information, it is usually not shared with the entire VT unless there are issues of concern.

It is expected that there is effective financial management, and it is further expected that there is thoughtful financial planning to assure the future of the institution. Those VT members involved in this area should ask to see financial plans, and be assured that the financial future of the School is secure. The VT might wish to consider financial management, long-range planning, and development together.

The School's facilities must be effective in housing and supporting the School's program. Conversations may be conducted with the VT that prepared the section, administrators, teachers, board members, or students. Questions might include some of the following:

- Are the facilities and equipment adequate for your programs? If not, what is the problem?
- Is there long-range planning to address current and future facility needs?
- Is there adequate staffing to maintain an appropriate level of cleanliness?
- If something is broken, how long does it take to get repaired?
- Is the facilities budget adequate?
- Is there deferred maintenance? Is there a plan to resolve this?

- Are there programs that should be offered but are not because of facility limitations?

VTs should avoid recommending overly prescriptive solutions to facility shortcomings.

On the other hand, facility problems should be clearly identified.

A VT may be at a school that provides three meals a day, seven days a week or it may be at a school where all students carry their lunches and the School simply provides space for students to eat. In either case the VT should note the appropriateness of the arrangements. In some situations it will be necessary to check health inspections and in other cases the VT should just assure itself that there cleanliness.

The VT should satisfy itself that service and office personnel are sufficient number and appropriately skilled to assist in carrying out the mission of the School.

Suggested Indicators:

Sample Indicators:

14.a There is evidence of effective management resources sufficient to advance the mission of the School and to provide for financial sustainability.

14.b There are effective policies and procedures for the management of operating and capital funds in compliance with generally accepted principles.

14.c The School has appropriate procedures for accounting and for auditing the accounts of the School.

14.d The School has adequate financial resources for the needs of the School.

14.e The School has adequate provision for insurance coverage.

14.f The physical facilities of the School are appropriately maintained.

14.g There is a recent, written Facilities Plan covering future needs, improvements, and additions.

14.h The School has a clear picture of its long- and short-term development needs and the plans, organization, and staffing to meet those needs.

14.i The School has a written, institutional Technology Plan that provides for the coordination of academic and administrative functions, defines the technological services available, projects needs and directions, and describes the management system.

Standard 15: Health and Safety: The School is a safe and healthy place for students and faculty.

Assessing the safety of the School requires the VT to make judgments. The indicators will help identify areas for inquiry, such as supervision policies, arrival and dismissal procedures, emergency response plans, etc.. The VT should reach consensus in rating the School on this standard.

Every school has responsibilities to provide health services for its student body. This differs greatly between residential and day schools. Health services appropriate to meet the emotional and physical needs of the students, should be appropriately staffed, and adequately housed.

Suggested Indicators:

- 15.a. The School's climate, policies and procedures, rooted in inclusivity and empathy, honor the dignity of every person in their community.
- 15.b. The School is a safe, clean, well-organized place that nurtures learning and mutual understanding among students and faculty. Concerns for safety include physical and emotional well-being
- 15.c. Students affirm they are supported in the development of relationships (student to student and student to faculty) based in trust and mutual respect.
- 15.d. The School has a comprehensive written Crisis Response Plan that is clearly understood by faculty, staff, students, and parents.
- 15.e. The physical facilities and staffing for health care are adequate to meet the needs of the student body, whether residential or day.
- 15.f. Facilities and staff for food services are adequate and the quality of the food meets reasonable nutritional requirements.
- 15.g. The School has necessary support services and programs to meet the emotional needs of students.
- 15.h. The School continually audits and validates the systems, facilities and practices that ensure the safety of the School community.
- 15.i. There is a person or VT with responsibility for reviewing safety provisions for any on-campus or off-campus activity, including field trips, athletic events, wilderness expeditions, etc.
- 15.j. The School requires appropriate adult-student supervision during school hours and all school-sponsored student activities and programs
- 15.k. The School has a reporting procedure in place to record and follow-up on any incidents regarding the health and safety of students or staff.
- 15.l. The School thoroughly and regularly educates and trains all personnel in the legal requirements of mandatory reporting, appropriate emotional and physical boundaries and healthy relationships.
- 15.m. There is a procedure in place to identify and monitor compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations. A list will be made available to the VC Chair.

Standard 15 (The Accreditation Process): The School is fully committed to institutional improvement and to the process of accreditation. The School completed

an inclusive Self Study, conducted in a spirit of full disclosure and following association guidelines; responds to Commission recommendations and the requirement to meet all standards; and participates fully in the peer review process, hosting a VT and sending personnel to serve on VTs to other institutions.

The quality of the Self Study, the inclusiveness of its preparation, and the plans place for follow-up are important factors in assessing compliance with this standard. The VT should also ask which members of the staff have served on VTs to other schools and what plans are in place to encourage this activity in the future.

Suggested Indicators:

15.a. The School has completed a thorough Self Study in accordance with CAIS policies.

15.b. Administration, professional staff and those with governance responsibilities have actively participated in and are familiar with the Self Study and its findings.

15.c. The School has in place a procedure for follow-up on plans and strategies found in its own Self Study and on recommendations in the VT report and to integrate improvement plans resulting from the Self Study into the School's Multi-Year Plan.

15.d. The School participates in the Association's peer based accreditation process and is represented on VTs to other schools.

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

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

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

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

NOTE: Specific action plans must be presented in Part II for any Standard on which the School rates itself as 3 (needs attention) or as 4-7 (failed).

Sample Report Segments

Standard 2 (Governance): The School has an appropriate system of governance that assures the School remains true to its mission and that it has the necessary resources to support its present and prospective operations.

Overview (Using information from the Self Study)

The governing body (Trustees) consists of 13 members elected by the members of the corporation at their annual spring meeting. Trustees serve for three year terms and may be elected for two consecutive terms. Officers include a Chair, Vice Chair, Clerk and Treasurer. There are five standing committees: Executive; Finance; Development; Curriculum; and Human Resources. From time to time task forces are formed for special projects. The Chair and Vice Chair are ex officio members of each committee, with the Chair heading Executive, the Vice Chair, Development, the Treasurer, Finance, and other trustees heading the other two.

Observations/Conclusions (Using information from the Accreditation Visit)

Governance of the School is exemplary, evolving from a time-tested alliance between the Board Chair and Head of School. Communication is open, timely, and productive. This sound system of governance is both appropriate and attentive to the mission of the School. The by-laws of the Board clearly define the composition, procedures, powers and responsibilities of the Board.

At the request of the VT, we were able to meet with several members of the Board. The VT finds the Board to be a most effective organization, deeply committed to carrying out the purposes and objectives of the School. In addition, the Board clearly has an in-depth understanding of the critical issues facing the School. A new policy of term limits has been implemented, and the Board has also established an orientation program in efforts to help new trustees ease their way into the role of Board member.

The Board Chair has taken an active role in his interactions within the School community. Through frequent visits to the campus and a willingness to listen to expressed concerns, the Board has maintained a healthy relationship with the School as a whole.

The Board has established a committee structure that is responsible for setting policy. The Board has recently completed a long range planning process during which the entire school community was involved. The Board is committed to reviewing this document on a regular basis as it assesses the on-going needs of the School.

The evaluation process established by the Board to determine the performance of the Head of School is a clearly structured, well-conceived procedure.

Commendations

1. The VT commends the BOT for the commitment it brings to the School community and its in-depth understanding of the critical issues facing the School.
2. The VT commends the BOT for its thorough orientation for its new members.

3. The VT commends the Board for its continuous effort to involve the entire school community in long-range development.
4. The current Board president is commended for the excellent work in communicating with the greater school community.

Recommendations

1. The Visiting Team strongly suggests that the Board establish a written policy that assures that members of the Board have no conflicting interest between duties to the School and their own personal business or professional roles.
2. The Visiting Team recommends that the Board continue its active leadership efforts to secure additional financial contributions to reduce the School's outstanding debt.

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

Overview

Northridge School provides a program of intellectual, aesthetic and physical activities that stems from the School's beliefs about teaching and learning and is consistent with the needs of the students admitted. Its mission and core values are at the heart of the School's programmatic decisions.

The School's programs reflect its mission and pedagogical beliefs and are subject to continuous faculty discussion through weekly and monthly faculty meetings, on-going professional development opportunities, and a hands-on approach to supervision.

Observations/ Conclusions

Robust learning is clearly evident at Northridge. From the kitchen to the classrooms the students and the teachers genuinely enjoy a comprehensive program of study. This holistic approach makes the School a very special place where students are challenged, opinions are stretched and diversity is valued.

Overall, transitions between grades and divisions are smooth. The School's faculty, staff, parents and students remain committed to providing a depth of experiences for the entire school and across all grade levels.

Throughout our visit it was evident that the climate of the School promoted an "open door" policy of communication between faculty and administration. This healthy collaborative model was clearly reflected in the warm, supportive relationships teachers have created with their students. It was an atmosphere of mutual respect and a joy for learning.

The VT observed examples of differentiated instruction in the math program. In the Lower School, math instruction is supplemented by appropriate manipulatives that allow for the hands-on study of the skills and concepts introduced each year. The math

coordinator provides support and enrichment at all levels. The Upper School students are sectioned in appropriate homogeneous groups starting at grade six. Recently a move was made to a three-track system to create smaller class sizes.

The Science curriculum is complete, well conceived and age appropriate. It covers a breadth of topics and includes the study of current trends in science education. The subject areas covered in the curriculum are presented in a spiraling nature that affords students the opportunity to see the relationships among the various disciplines of science. Classrooms are bright, well decorated and cheerful. Student work is prominently displayed on classroom walls. The teachers in the department communicate openly and effectively with each other.

Commendations

1. The Visiting Team commends the quality of science instruction, especially considering the constraints of both time and space. The creative uses of the outdoors and of the new computer facility speak to the dedication and willingness of the teachers to go beyond the traditional walls.
2. The Visiting Team wishes to commend the School for fostering an enthusiastic and vibrant learning environment where students engage together in the learning process.

Recommendations

- 1 The Visiting Team recommends that the School leadership and science faculty examine science facility and equipment needs.
2. The Visiting Team recommends that the Middle School re-examine the teaching load of their science instructors across grades five and six.

Some Errors in the Writing to Avoid

Commendations

1. Written commendations that cite specific members of the School community.

Example: The Visiting Team would like to commend Mary Carpenter for her excellent work in producing the monthly newsletter that provides an artful and effective communication with parents.

2. Written commendations which are too specific in content and narrow in focus.

Example: The Visiting Team commends the School for adding a part time grounds keeper to the maintenance staff.

4. Written commendations which illustrate what is usually expected of the School.

Example: The Visiting Team commends the math department for its clearly outlined curriculum

Recommendations

1. Recommendations that are overly prescriptive.

Example: The Visiting Team recommends that the School add an after school program for its students which would be available to all families with scholarship funding available to qualified students.

2. Recommendations that compare/equate other programs to the School being evaluated.

Example: As is the custom in other junior boarding programs, the VT recommends that the School institute a “no cut” athletic team approach to include every student interested in participating.

Accreditation Style Guide

The School Name should be spelled out on the first reference in each major section with the abbreviation following. After the first reference, an abbreviation should be used:

Happy Valley Community School (HVCS) – first reference; HVCS – second

When referring specifically to the School, capitalize School....i.e. the School offers financial aid. Otherwise, lower case...i.e. parents expressed displeasure with the school year calendar.

The name of specific constituent bodies within a school should be given its full title in each major section and then can be shortened as appropriate:

The Board of Trustees - first reference; The Board - second and subsequent references

The Parent Association (PA); The PA, second and subsequent references.

School departments are capitalized; subjects (unless a proper noun) are lowercase; courses are capitalized:

The Math Department teaches all kinds of cool math including Algebra I but it does not teach Latin.

School divisions are capitalized when the reference is to the specific entity: the Lower School, Admissions Department.

Titles are capitalized before a name and lower case after a name:

Head of School Jane Jones; Jane Jones, head of school.

Accreditation references should be capitalized when the reference is school specific, but lower case when it is being used in a generic fashion. This includes the terms such as the Self Study, the Visiting Team, the Visiting Team Report, the Action Plan:

The HVCS Self Study included a reference to . . .

When completing an action plan . . .

Be cautious with all nouns that are singular but appear plural and use the proper antecedent:

The Board of Trustees voted to amend its evaluation process . . .

(Members of the board state their intention to . . .)

The Faculty voted to adopt its own procedures for using a technology . . .

(Faculty members expressed their satisfaction with . . .)

Avoid using specific products or services as schools can change vendors during the life of an accreditation cycle and should not be committed to product positively recognized in a report:

The Visiting Team compliments the School on the use of the IBM Selectric . . .

The Visiting Team compliments the School for using advanced technology . . .

Avoid complimenting a specific person or department unless it appears appropriately in commendations.

NO: The Visiting Team applauds the work of Coach Smith who daily goes over and beyond his time commitment with students as compared to other coaches . . .

Numbers one through nine are generally spelled out, and 10 on are generally used as numerals.