



Writing Effective Major Commendations and Recommendations

INSTRUCTIONS for Major Commendations: Begin each commendation with a noun or noun phrase. The essence of each commendation should be stated in one sentence. If supporting information is provided, the commendation should be stated at the beginning in bold-faced italicized font. Try to avoid too many commendations directed toward groups of people; when you do commend a group or groups, recognize them in direct relation to how they help fulfill the school's mission.

Examples of Effective Major Commendations

The ISACS accreditation team commends the School for its:

Highly-committed Board and administrative leadership who work together to steward the School's growing but limited financial resources--notably its decision to provide financial aid to half the student body--to support its mission and the broader institutional commitment to diversity throughout the life of the School.

Prominence, consistency, and intentionality of the marketing and branding of the school, inside the school, spoken out loud, and in print materials, especially as it connects to recognition, retention, and growth of the student body.

Delightfully engaged students who demonstrate inclusivity, kindness, and curiosity as they approach their studies, pursue their interests, and root their relationships with one another and their teachers in openness, respect, and responsibility.

Commitment to school improvement, as displayed by the execution of initiatives from the Self-study in advance of the accreditation team's arrival. Eagerness to take on the initiatives demonstrates commitment to school improvement. The accreditation team observed that the administrative team, teachers, and staff have all shown great dexterity with respect to the ever-changing evolution of the school, as it responds to the needs of the community. The Board of Directors, too, is open to self-reflection and is eager to implement the changes that have been identified as necessary for the improvement of the school at large. Even in the course of just one year, programs and services have expanded, and the community has demonstrated its commitment to ongoing growth.

Emphasis on pluralism, as evidenced throughout all aspects of the culture of the school. The ISACS accreditation team commends the faculty and staff for their commitment to developing programs and curricula and to fostering in students the habits of considering, examining, and discussing difficult issues from a variety of perspectives.

INSTRUCTIONS for Major Recommendations: Begin each recommendation with a verb or verb phrase. The action step of each recommendation should be stated in one sentence. If supporting information is provided, the recommendation should be stated at the beginning in bold-faced italicized font. **In addition to the recommendation statement and any supporting content, justification for each major recommendation must be included in the relevant section(s) of the accreditation team report.**

Avoid being overly prescriptive in stating the recommendation. Stay away from too-specific instructions, those with significant ramifications for the school's human or financial resources, or ones that might be counter to the school's mission, such as:

- Engage a consultant/purchase software/hire an employee
- Combine the English and History departments into a Humanities department
- Eliminate the practical life component of the Montessori curriculum and expand standardized test preparation
- Combine the two part-time admission positions into one full-time position and hire a development associate

Examples of Effective Major Recommendations

The ISACS accreditation team recommends that the School:

Direct the positive energy and initiative apparent within individual classrooms to create opportunities to become a more cohesive community. Initiate connections with colleagues within and beyond each level. Demonstrate leadership through initiating self-directed engagement in the broader school community. Proactively evaluate communication vehicles to ensure that information from all programs and departments is shared efficiently and meaningfully.

Prepare for the future by establishing a more clearly defined relationship between the Board and the Administration of the school, aligned with Standards A13 and A14 of the 20th edition of the Membership and Accreditation Guide. The Board of Directors has done an exemplary job in creating the school, in stewarding the generous gifts that have been given to the school, and in advancing the school from its inception to “the cusp of adulthood” (Self-study, p.2). As the school continues to mature and evolve, so should the relationship between the Board of Directors and the school administration. The Board should begin to focus less on management of the school operations, and more on strategic and long-term issues. It should also begin a deliberate and targeted expansion of its membership and prepare a succession plan for both Board members and key administrators. Organizations like NAIS, ISACS, and others, can provide resources to help guide this development.

Establish common language and shared metrics of expectations around pluralism that allows for independent and autonomous implementation across disciplines, programs, and grade levels, and facilitates and encourages a common sense of purpose, expectation, and action for all employees. While the ISACS accreditation team commends the school’s commitment to pluralism, it was evident in our visit that not everyone within the school community has a clear understanding of and/or feels equipped to successfully implement this initiative. The accreditation team recommends that the school continue to make an intentional effort to actively educate and empower constituents to implement and articulate the expectations and deliverables associated with pluralism.

Establish and continuously refine a consistent and comprehensive communications framework that solicits and values feedback from the faculty and staff on key institutional decisions. The ISACS accreditation team encourages a systematic and deliberate focus on communication to ensure that employees understand the intent and purpose of decisions and major changes within the community. The process should allow opportunities for faculty and staff input and feedback into major curricular, programmatic, scheduling, and facility decisions. As the administrative team continues to advance the mission of the school, unified planning, clear and transparent communication to all constituents, and community buy-in, will be critical to implementing future strategic initiatives successfully.

Document its curriculum, in accordance with Standard B4 of the 20th edition of the Membership and Accreditation Guide. It is essential to create, and regularly update, a consistent document of scope and sequence, JK through 12th grade. Examining and documenting the curriculum, vertically and horizontally, will ensure that it is sequential, philosophically consistent, and aligned with the school’s mission.