



# Accreditation Standards and Indicators

for Independent Schools in the US

# The Standards

## Foundation Standards and Indicators

1. Enrolled students align appropriately with the mission.
2. The governing body/board assures the school remains sustainable and true to its mission.
3. The school's resources sufficiently support present and prospective operation.
4. The school employs an appropriate adult community to implement the mission optimally.
5. A proactive culture of health and safety permeates the school.
6. Proprietary schools ensure effective leadership, clear organizational structure, and the necessary resources to successfully execute the mission of the school for the foreseeable future.

## Program Standards and Indicators

7. Commitment to the mission informs decisions, guides initiatives, and aligns with the students' needs and aspirations.
8. Commitment to inspiration and support characterizes the approach to each student.
9. Commitment to excellence distinguishes the program.
10. Commitment to continuous professional learning and development permeates the adult culture.
11. Commitment to engaging with the greater community enhances the student experience.
12. Commitment to meeting the needs of each student drives the residential program.
13. Commitment to the health and well-being of each student guides the school's homestay program

## Strategic Planning Standard and Indicator

14. Commitment to long-term viability and innovation guides planning.

# Foundation Standards and Indicators

## FOUNDATION STANDARD

### **1. Enrolled students align appropriately with the mission.**

- 1.a. The school's enrollment and admissions process align with the mission, core values, and cultural context of the school.
- 1.b. The school identifies and addresses current enrollment trends and influencing factors.
- 1.c. Enrolled students are appropriate for the mission and their learning needs can be fully met by the school's program and personnel.
- 1.d. The admissions and enrollment management policies and practices align with the school's beliefs and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- 1.e. The granting of student financial assistance aligns with the mission.
- 1.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Current marketing and enrollment management plans
- B. Link to an online admissions application
- C. Parent tuition agreement
- D. Statement of financial aid policies and procedures
- E. Non-discrimination policy (may be included in other materials)  
*NEASC requires all students to be treated fairly and equitably.  
The missions of independent schools may be gender specific.*
- F. Parent and student handbooks with date of most recent revision

## FOUNDATION STANDARD

### **2. The governing body/board assures the school remains sustainable and true to its mission.**

- 2.a. With consideration of best practices and legal requirements for nonprofit boards in state of incorporation (if applicable), the governing body/board understands and carries out its responsibilities to the school's:
- mission
  - value proposition/educational quality
  - fiscal integrity
  - support for the head of school
  - long-term planning, with a minimum of a three-to-five-year horizon
- 2.b. The governing body/board accurately identifies and addresses significant opportunities and issues.
- 2.c. The governing body/board undertakes its leadership role in the development, review, and updating of the school's strategic plan.
- 2.d. The governing body/board seeks a balanced membership, representing the school community's diversity and key areas of expertise, interest, and abilities.
- 2.e. The governing body/board uses effective policies and procedures to identify, select, and mentor new members.
- 2.f. The governing body/board appropriately and effectively communicates decisions and actions to the school community.
- 2.g. The governing body/board manages its own leadership transition effectively.
- 2.h. The governing body/board plans for head of school transitions.
- 2.i. The governing body/board effectively assesses its governance practices.
- 2.j. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Current governing body/board roster indicating length of service
- B. Current bylaws
- C. Minutes of two recent meetings
- D. Governing body/board self-evaluation instrument
- E. Head of school evaluation process/instrument
- F. Corporate status as a tax-exempt institution, if applicable
- G. Conflict of interest policy with an annual member disclosure statement

## FOUNDATION STANDARD

### **3. The school's resources sufficiently support present and prospective operation.**

- 3.a. The school allocates, manages, and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support and advance its mission.
- 3.b. Based on Annual Report Data and/or other reliable studies, the school accurately identifies current and long-term financial realities and challenges and has a capacity to respond to fiscal emergencies or unforeseen circumstances.
- 3.c. Tuition and other revenue adequately support the school's stability and long-term financial sustainability.
- 3.d. The school maintains a system of documented internal controls, Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), as applicable, and complete financial transparency as a matter of legal compliance and ethical practice.
- 3.e. The school's facilities appropriately support the students and program.
- 3.f. The school undertakes appropriate and effective facilities planning to address needed, intended, and/or desired improvements and maintenance.
- 3.g. Technology infrastructure adequately supports both the educational program and institutional operation.
- 3.h. The school's development/advancement program identifies short- and long-term goals and strives to achieve them.
- 3.i. The school stewards its resources using best practices for environmental sustainability.
- 3.j. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Opinion audit\*
- B. Annual budget for most recently completed year (prior to Foundation Visit)
- C. Written financial plan including three- to five-year projection
- D. Report summarizing annual giving/voluntary support for the most recently completed year
- E. Evidence of sufficient liability insurance for the school and its extended programs (for example, summer camps, international travel, etc.). The declaration pages from policies are sufficient.
- F. List of employee benefits

\* By exception, reviewed financial statements with a management letter may be submitted by schools in place of an opinion audit with the written approval of a NEASC director. Catholic elementary schools may submit a Diocesan Review of School Finances form with required signatures in place of an opinion audit.

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Important: All financial documents provided for review will remain confidential. A few months prior to the Foundation Visit, the head of school will receive instructions from NEASC for uploading the school's financial documents to a secure document sharing platform. Access to the documents will be given to the school's Foundation Visiting Team.

## FOUNDATION STANDARD

### **4. The school employs an appropriate adult community to implement the mission optimally.**

- 4.a. The faculty and staff are qualified and well-suited for assigned roles and responsibilities.
- 4.b. Faculty are hired with an awareness of their commitment to the mission of the school and are provided with an orientation process that supports their assimilation into the school's culture and core beliefs.
- 4.c. Personnel policies and hiring practices align with the school's beliefs and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- 4.d. There are sufficient numbers of qualified faculty and staff to support the mission of the school and the needs of the students.
- 4.e. The school has specific, inviolable procedures to check the legal and professional background of all employees and of the other adults who may come into regular contact with students.
- 4.f. Faculty and staff compensation, benefits, and the work environment adequately allow the school to attract and retain qualified and well-suited personnel.
- 4.g. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Current employee roster, including roles and responsibilities, length of service, and professional qualifications
- B. Organizational chart(s) and/or protocols setting out lines of communication and areas of responsibility
- C. Examples of each type of faculty/staff/administrative contract
- D. Faculty handbook(s)
- E. Faculty code of conduct or similar document (if separate from faculty handbooks)
- F. The list of materials that the school consistently maintains in its personnel files. The following are recommended (do not include medical records or I-9 Forms):
  - Employment agreement or contract
  - Position description with role and responsibilities, unless included in an employment agreement
  - Signed receipt of employee policy handbook
  - Summary of most recent or current criminal background check
  - Signed performance evaluations

- Resume with references and/or letters of recommendation
- Copy of teaching or administrative credentials (if required)
- Official copies of all transcripts
- IRS W-4 Form
- List of emergency contacts and next of kin

## FOUNDATION STANDARD

### 5. A proactive culture of health and safety permeates the school.

- 5.a. School leadership embodies and cultivates a culture of health and safety within the entire school community and understands its accountability for the health and safety of the community.
- 5.b. The school understands its responsibility and commitment to each student's well-being and sense of belonging.
- 5.c. The school's culture of health and safety reflects the intentions of each of the following sections in the *NEASC Commission on Independent Schools Health and Safety Considerations* document:
- physical and emotional safety of students
  - information and data management
  - student behaviors and discipline
  - faculty and staff health training, policies, and procedures
  - communication
  - facilities
  - the crisis response plan (shared with local fire, police, and EMT offices)
- 5.d. The school assures that it meets the NEASC required Child Protection Requirements for schools, noted below:
- comprehensive due diligence in screening and hiring including background and reference checks
  - documented policies and procedures that ensure the safety and welfare of all students
  - appropriate and clearly outlined response if children are harmed, at risk of harm, or if allegations of harm to children are made
  - clearly defined leadership responsibilities for child safety and reporting
  - child protection training for all adults who work with students
  - child protection, including online safety, is included in the formal learning program for students
  - clear codes of conduct govern appropriate and acceptable behaviors for adult interactions with children and children's interaction with other children
  - compliance with the legal, ethical, and cultural expectations and requirements regarding child abuse within the jurisdiction in which the school operates
- 5.e. The school has a risk management process with qualified personnel to accurately and regularly identify and address any area(s) warranting immediate and/or long-term attention.
- 5.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Current crisis management plan/protocols, including up-to-date communications and contact information.
- B. Compliance Documentation, including:
  - current fire inspections for each facility
  - food service certification (i.e., cleanliness, safe handling, health inspection)
  - medical facility inspection as required (state and local requirements vary)
  - as required by state or locale, any additional necessary testing (i.e., water at the tap, radon, asbestos, carbon monoxide)
  - schedule of fire drills and lockdown/campus emergency and safety activity — both completed for the most recent year and planned for the current one
  - documentation around individual activities where specialized health and safety considerations are necessary (i.e., waterfront and pool areas, sports practices and games, field trips and off-campus trips, international travel, and immunizations)
  - policy on the acquisition of current student health records
  - statement from the head of school that the school's emergency plan is complete and has been submitted to the appropriate local officials

**Note:** NEASC accredits schools for students in grades Pre-Kindergarten to Post-Graduate. It does not accredit, certify, nor approve programs for children from birth to three years old.

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

## FOUNDATION STANDARD

### **6. Proprietary schools ensure effective leadership, clear organizational structure, and the necessary resources to successfully execute the mission of the school for the foreseeable future.**

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

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

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

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

1. Reasonable assurance that the school has the assets available to sustain operation of the school for the foreseeable future (which includes a current asset-to-liability ratio).
2. Assurances that the school has the systems in place to manage its finances appropriately. This could include:
  - tax returns for the organization, or its parent company or owner, for the most recent

fiscal year

- internal trial balance for most recently closed fiscal year

An annual audit is the best way to secure information in both areas.

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

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

**Important:** All financial documents provided for review will remain confidential. A few months prior to the Foundation Visit, the head of school will receive instructions from NEASC for uploading the school's financial documents to a secure document sharing platform. Access to documents will be given to the school's Foundation Visiting Team.

# Program Standards and Indicators

## PROGRAM STANDARD

### **7. Commitment to the mission informs decisions, guides initiatives, and aligns with the students' needs and aspirations.**

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

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Current mission statement
- B. Other guiding documents, if applicable
  - Statement of core values/beliefs/educational philosophy
  - Statement of vision
  - Value proposition
  - Vision/Profile of the Graduate
  - Statement of a school's beliefs and commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, or equivalent

## PROGRAM STANDARD

### **8. Commitment to inspiration and support characterizes the approach to each student.**

- 8.a. The school recognizes, values, and nurtures the unique reality of every student at each stage of development.
- 8.b. The faculty and staff regularly monitor each student's social and emotional development.
- 8.c. The school understands and responds to the realities of the students' social and emotional experiences outside the school.
- 8.d. The school inspires and cultivates in its students the personal qualities valued by the school.
- 8.e. Students' perspectives and opinions are appropriately heard and addressed.
- 8.f. School culture promotes, supports, and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.
- 8.g. The school understands the unique needs of each student with a disability, including disability-based behaviors, and, within the United States, the rights offered to children with disabilities under IDEA.
- 8.h. The school inspires student engagement and belonging in the school community.
- 8.i. The school's practice of equity reduces the predictability of who succeeds and who fails by ensuring every learner has access to the resources they need when they need them
- 8.j. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Documents describing specific support services and programs such as:
  - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
  - counseling
  - advisory program
  - college guidance
- B. Policies addressing the needs of neurodiverse students and those with disabilities, student support plans, and IEPs
- C. Any additional documents describing the school's strategies and supports for students with needs, such as:
  - Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework
  - Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) plan
  - Culturally and linguistically responsive practices

## PROGRAM STANDARD

### **9. Commitment to excellence distinguishes the program.**

- 9.a. A relentless commitment to excellence, as defined by the school, inspires the program.
- 9.b. The school's core values, beliefs, and educational philosophy inform and guide program planning at all levels.
- 9.c. The students' personal identities, neurodiversity, experiences, and particular backgrounds are intentionally reflected in the program.
- 9.d. The school's current written curriculum, evidence-based best practices, and/or pedagogical research inform the program.
- 9.e. The written curriculum aligns horizontally and vertically.
- 9.f. Faculty have dedicated time to discuss the written curriculum and how to implement it effectively.
- 9.g. Faculty employ a range of assessment practices to appropriately promote learning, monitor growth, and consistently measure student progress.
- 9.h. Educational media and technology enhance the instructional program and meet the needs of the students and faculty.
- 9.i. The school's international programs and partnerships (if applicable) are aligned with the school's mission and meet the needs of all engaged in or affected by them.
- 9.j. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Current written curriculum/curriculum guide
- B. List/examples of assessment tools/methods demonstrating longitudinal student progress
- C. Documentation detailing any specific provisions for international students
- D. List/examples of supporting resources essential to the delivery of curriculum

## PROGRAM STANDARD

### **10. Commitment to continuous professional learning and development permeates the adult culture.**

- 10.a. The school creates a safe and supportive teaching environment for faculty and staff that promotes collegiality, collaborative professionalism, and the collective belief of the faculty and staff in their ability to affect their students' education positively.
- 10.b. Professional learning and development are determined by the needs of the students and informed by the personal and professional goals set by faculty and staff in alignment with the school's strategic planning.
- 10.c. The school's beliefs and commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging support its professional learning and development.
- 10.d. The school's professional evaluation and assessment of all personnel assures the effective implementation of their responsibilities.
- 10.e. The school values and encourages research, reflective practice, and exploration of increasingly effective teaching practices.
- 10.f. The school defines clear lines of authority, the administration, faculty, and staff understand their roles and responsibilities, and communication among the school's constituents is clear and direct.
- 10.g. The school's leadership, faculty, and staff regularly participate in NEASC peer review visits.
- 10.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

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

## PROGRAM STANDARD

### **11. Commitment to engaging with the greater community enhances the student experience.**

- 11.a. The school equitably communicates and promotes a community of belonging for every family 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 the diversity of the students' perspectives and encouraging engagement with the wider world.
- 11.e. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Examples of communication with alums and parents

## PROGRAM STANDARD

### 12. Commitment to meeting the needs of each student drives the residential program.

*Schools with five or more students boarding on campus together or separately must complete Standard 12. Schools with fewer than five students boarding on campus should complete a narrative on how the school provides for the social, emotional, and physical well-being of its boarding students.*

- 12.a. The residential life program and curriculum align with the mission of the school.
- 12.b. The residential life program, including evening, weekend, and vacation activities, is integrated into the total life of the school and promotes appropriate interaction with day students.
- 12.c. The residential life program intentionally promotes an inclusive community of safe belonging for the diversity of students.
- 12.d. Those responsible for organizing the rooming arrangements of students take into account the ever-evolving variety of considerations that go into each assignment.
- 12.e. The expectations for the residential students and the residential staff are clearly stated, written, and understood, including acceptable use of technology.
- 12.f. Residential students are included in planning and developing policies, expectations, and programs.
- 12.g. Residential staff are appropriately qualified and assigned to meet the needs of students under their care and supervision.
- 12.h. Residential staff are appropriately housed in ways that enhance the experience of the students, faculty, and families.
- 12.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Residential student handbook (if separate from student handbook)
- B. Faculty or staff materials specific to the residential life program
- C. Residential life curriculum and pertinent policies
- D. Copy of weekend activities calendar
- E. Faculty housing policies

## PROGRAM STANDARD

### 13. Commitment to the health and well-being of each student guides the school's homestay program

*Schools with five or more students in homestays with unrelated families must complete Standard 13. Schools with fewer than five students in homestays should complete a narrative on how and how often the school monitors its homestay students' social, emotional, and physical well-being.*

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

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Agency contract
- B. International student handbook

# Strategic Planning Standard and Indicator

## STRATEGIC PLANNING STANDARD

### 14. Commitment to long-term viability and innovation guides planning.

- 14.a. The school, led by its governing authority, continuously engages in thorough, realistic, aspirational, and actionable planning in all critical areas.
- 14.b. The school conducts research, collects data, and evaluates its program and resources to inform planning.
- 14.c. The school proactively identifies factors that must be addressed to ensure sustainability.
- 14.d. The school considers issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in its planning.
- 14.e. The school has the capacity, competence, and commitment to achieve its goals.
- 14.f. The school's written strategic plan determines responsibilities and includes means to assess progress and demonstrate the completion of goals.
- 14.g. The school celebrates accomplishments and programs contributing to identity and legacy.
- 14.h. The school regularly reviews and adapts its goals and plans to actual experiences and unanticipated realities.
- 14.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A. Draft of strategic plan and/or other strategic planning documents

**Important:** A final draft of the school's strategic plan, including how the school will address any incomplete major recommendations and Standard-specific recommendations from the Commission Notification Letter, is due at the time of the Two-Year Progress Report.

# About us

## NEASC Mission

*NEASC partners with schools to assess, support, and promote high quality education for all students through accreditation, professional assistance, and pursuit of best practices.*

## Commission on Independent Schools

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

## Resources

Accreditation resources are available on our website at [www.neasc.org](http://www.neasc.org).

## Contact us

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