



Accreditation Handbook

for public schools, districts, centers, and programs

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Introduction

Overview of the NEASC Accreditation Process for Public Schools

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation process for public schools is a 10-year cycle intended to serve as a guide for schools, districts, centers, and programs (hereafter collectively referred to as "schools") to meet their own goals for student learning based on alignment with research-based Standards for Accreditation. Secondly, it serves as an essential exercise for assessing the systems in place for ongoing self-reflection and the ability to be an effective learning organization.

Guiding Principles for the Accreditation Process

The NEASC Commission on Public Schools purposefully reflects on the value of Accreditation and the accreditation process to better meet the changing needs of member schools. Its practices are informed by feedback from numerous regional meetings, including member schools and districts, and multiple advisory committees with representatives from accredited schools and districts.

A Standards review committee drafted the current Standards for Accreditation, which were accepted at the March 2023 meeting of the Commission. The Commission further updated them at its March 2024 meeting. The Standards have been revised to ensure compatibility with career and technical education centers and programs and to streamline and clarify the Descriptors of Effective Practice throughout the Standards.

Throughout this collaborative process, a set of tenets guided the redesign work. These underpinnings were developed based on input from member school representatives about what they want the accreditation process to provide for their schools. By using these tenets in conjunction with the mission and core values of the organization, NEASC can offer an accreditation process that is adaptable to the needs of individual institutions and ensure that every school, district, center, and program has ongoing support to move forward on its journey toward improvement and growth.

The NEASC Accreditation Process:

- ensures a growth-oriented and inquiry-based approach
- promotes capacity building
- allows for creativity and differentiation
- emphasizes student learning outcomes
- encourages a vision for growth and development in schools
- fosters school improvement by encouraging schools to self-reflect, set and work toward goals, and act on feedback for continuous progress toward respective visions for growth
- supports schools to create or maintain structures and collaborative cultures for systemic learning for both students and adults that result in sustainable growth

- supports schools in developing manageable priorities that are complementary to other initiatives or obligations
- integrates with school and district priorities and state requirements
- corresponds with the time schools allocate for ongoing school improvement efforts
- provides flexibility for schools to determine who should be a part of the Accreditation process and in what capacity
- responds to and allows for differentiation among schools
- leverages technology to make the Accreditation process more streamlined and efficient

Methodology

NEASC serves the public and the educational community by establishing and maintaining high standards of educational excellence and supporting accreditation processes that focus on self-improvement through effective peer review.

NEASC member schools undertake a Self-Reflection process involving the participation of faculty members, administrators, staff members, students, community members, and board members. In addition, trained volunteers from the educational community work together on accreditation visiting teams, which travel to each school to conduct on-site, objective assessments of a school's alignment with the Standards for Accreditation. This process includes reviewing the findings of the Self-Reflection, identifying areas of strength, and making recommendations that will lead to school improvement. School personnel respond to recommendations stated in the visiting team's report by designing and implementing short-term and long-range plans for improvement.

Schools that voluntarily demonstrate their alignment with established NEASC Standards are accredited and thus become members of NEASC. However, NEASC Accreditation is not a permanent status. Member schools must demonstrate continuous improvement and alignment with NEASC Standards through a regular cycle of routine and special progress reports. Follow-up procedures are designed to ensure that all valid recommendations are acted upon promptly. NEASC expects that within five years, most of the recommendations in the Accreditation Report will be completed or have a program/plan in place that will bring them to completion within a reasonable time. NEASC's general expectation in evaluating all reports is that the school will continue to make reasonable progress toward meeting the recommendations. This process of self-reflection provides continuous reassessment in light of changing school and community needs, advances in pedagogy, and school administration and organization.

Important:

The heart of NEASC Accreditation is the peer review process, which depends on volunteers to staff teams. All member institutions are required to provide quality educators to serve on visiting teams for other member institutions each year.

Initial Accreditation

Candidacy

The Commission requires that a school seeking initial Accreditation apply as a Candidate.

To become a Candidate, the school must complete a Candidate for Accreditation Application and meet the criteria for Candidacy as articulated in the associated Commission Policy. The application must include a narrative assessment of the school's practices related to those called for in the NEASC Standards for Accreditation. Upon receipt of the application, the school should contact the Commission's Director for Accreditation and School Improvement to set a mutually convenient date for a Commission staff member to conduct a Candidacy Visit at the school. Once the application is submitted, the school will be billed for the candidacy fee.

The Candidacy Visit includes a facility tour, meetings with administrators and faculty, and classroom observations. A written report of the Candidacy Visit to the school is submitted to the Commission along with the school's Application for Candidacy. The Commission informs the school of its decision to deny or award Candidacy status in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Once granted Candidacy status, a school is assessed dues equal to those of member schools.

Candidacy status can be maintained for a maximum of three years. During this time, the school must prepare its Self-Reflection Report, host a Collaborative Conference Visit, and host an Initial Accreditation Visit.

Commission Structure

The NEASC Commission on Public Schools serves elementary, middle, K-8, K-12, middle/high, high schools, entire school districts, and vocational, technical, and career institutions in New England. The 35 members of the Commission represent each of the six New England states and include:

- 24 school- or district-level administrators
- 6 teachers or other educational professionals
- 5 educational partners

The Commission meets three times per year to review Collaborative Conference Reports, Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Reports, and progress reports presented on behalf of member schools and those institutions seeking Initial Accreditation.

Summary

The primary goal of Accreditation is to maintain a high-quality education for the entire student population. Accreditation ensures that, through a mutually agreed-upon process, a school undergoes a third-party examination by peers of the extent to which it aligns with the NEASC's Standards for Accreditation. The results of that assessment are then made publicly available as an indication of the quality perceived and attested to by objective professional educators.

The Meaning and Value of Accreditation

What does NEASC Accreditation mean?

Accreditation of public schools by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges indicates that the educational institution has conducted a self-evaluation of all of its programs and has hosted a visiting team to evaluate the institution in terms of its own stated educational goals and the Standards for Accreditation of the Commission on Public Schools.

The Standards for Accreditation are a research-based set of practices and concepts that guide school personnel on all aspects of educating the young people under their care. The Standards — considered living documents — are reviewed and revised, as necessary, every five years. The review process includes surveys of all member schools, specific consideration of feedback provided by schools that have recently undergone an accreditation visit, an appraisal of recent, relevant educational literature, and in-depth discussions at the Commission level. As needed, third parties, including consultants, are contracted to conduct research to inform the revision of the Standards. The Standards reflect current trends in research on public education without espousing one particular mode of thought.

The awarding of Accreditation signifies that the school has met the Standards for Accreditation at an acceptable level and is committed to both maintaining those Standards and improving its educational program by implementing the recommendations of the visiting team and the Commission. Continued Accreditation is dependent upon a school's demonstrating ongoing, reflective progress to improve teaching and learning and the support of teaching and learning.

Value of Accreditation for students and families

Accreditation most affects students since they are the central focus of the educational process. Accreditation by NEASC assures them that their needs are being met through a quality educational program, that a vehicle exists to correct deficiencies in the school program, that their transfer credits will more likely be accepted should their family move, and that college representatives have the assurance of the quality of their preparation. Their confidence in their school and teachers, attitude toward academic work, and personal development are fostered by seeing their school invite and respond to constructive criticism. Alignment with the NEASC Standards also ensures the singular focus of school resources on students' achievement of valued learning expectations that address transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for future success and social-emotional needs articulated in the school's public statement of core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of a learner.

Value for local citizens and taxpayers

Accreditation of a local public school by NEASC assures that tax money is supporting a school facility and programs that have been judged worthwhile by a visiting team of evaluators, both in terms of the school's stated core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of a learner, and in terms of the school's alignment with the Standards for Accreditation. Through Accreditation, the citizen is advised of the school's strengths, needs, and long-range plans. Moreover, the reputation of the community benefits from Accreditation since the retention or the loss of Accreditation has a demonstrable effect on local property values. It is common for principals of member schools to receive inquiries from potential homebuyers or renters in a given community seeking information about the nature and quality of programs in that community's schools. In addition to requests for information about the breadth of curricular and co-curricular programs and standardized and state test results, those inquiries often include specific questions about a school's Accreditation status.

Value for school board/committee members

School board/committee members are ultimately responsible for the quality of public education in their community. Accreditation assures the citizens that the board/committee's educational policies and plans related to accredited schools are sound. The self-reflection phase provides an ideal opportunity for board members to gain comprehensive knowledge of the school as it undergoes the evaluation and accreditation process. If changes are needed, the Accreditation process highlights them. The Accreditation process also provides the school with an approach that involves the entire school community in an introspective analysis of the nature and quality of school programs. The Standards for Accreditation and the self-reflection process encourage the inquiry and analysis that all organizations must embrace to maintain their vibrancy and efficacy.

Value for building administrators and teachers

The school's administration and faculty enjoy the professional pride of working in an accredited institution. Accreditation provides both a personal and professional opportunity to work in a collegial, reflective manner toward educational improvement. The Accreditation experience allows the professional staff to conduct and receive a rigorous analysis of present conditions with a specific emphasis on teaching and learning so that needed changes may be carefully planned and implemented following a reasonable timeline. Individuals develop a new perspective on their positions and a holistic view of the institution, which affords a better understanding of their roles in the school's operation. The accreditation process affirms the efforts of teachers and administrators by voluntarily subjecting their professional endeavors to review and judgment by a team of peers, using the demanding Standards for Accreditation to measure the quality of those endeavors.

Results of a NEASC survey involving schools that hosted a visiting team provided positive and thoughtful responses. Cited among the most significant findings related to the impact of Accreditation on the quality of a school's educational program were improved instruction, enhanced teamwork and collegiality, increased focus on current research and best practice, improved organization effectiveness and long-range planning; expanded professional development programs; and increased involvement of parents and community members in the school, including their support for school initiatives. Included among narrative findings from the respondents on the benefits of the Accreditation process were the positive impact of the Standards for Accreditation in transitioning a

school to a standards-based, student-centered educational program; the stimulation of professional dialogue engendering positive change; the commitment to increased levels of academic challenge and improved student achievement; and the provision of a system of continuity that promotes educational quality among member schools.

Value for district administrators

The Standards for Accreditation provide a template for school review and improvement that can be combined with local, state, and federal initiatives focused on compliance with mandates and restructuring efforts. The Standards themselves are reflective of best practices. Although firmly based on core concepts of accountability, equity, collaboration, personalization, and student engagement, the Standards provide latitude for individual schools to design programs and services specific to the needs of their stakeholders.

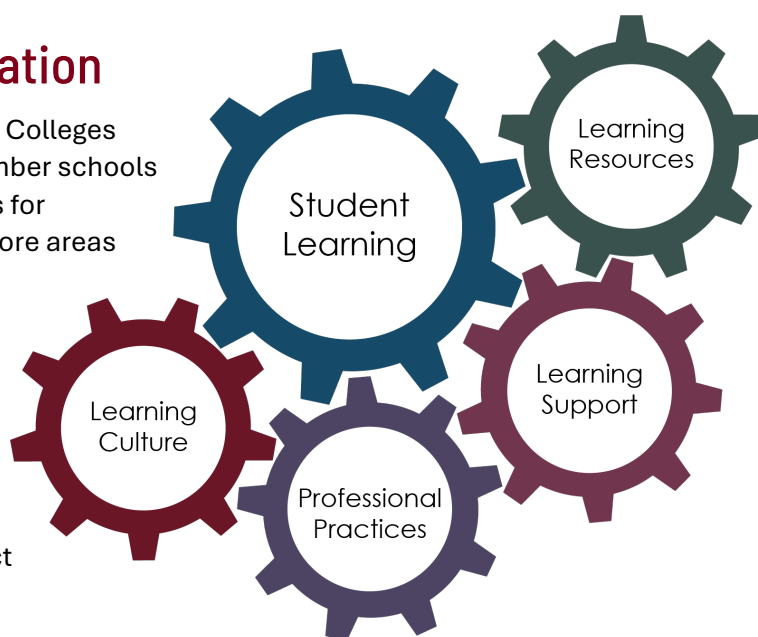
The Standards provide a template adaptable to local use, allowing for a cyclical review of all aspects of school programs and mandate consistency with the school district's mission and coordination of curriculum with other district schools. The Accreditation process provides a rich opportunity to integrate system programs and processes during the self-reflection phase of the decennial cycle, assess their effectiveness as part of the on-site Accreditation visits, and continue to effect changes throughout the follow-up phase of the cycle.

Overview

The Standards for Accreditation

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Public Schools requires member schools to demonstrate alignment with the Standards for Accreditation. The Standards comprise five core areas intended to promote an effective learning organization that can meet all students' needs through continuous reflection and growth.

In the Standards for Accreditation, each Standard includes Principles of Effective Practice that define the growth target for that Standard. Schools will be asked to reflect on and report progress in aligning with the Principles for each Standard.



Standards for Accreditation

STANDARD 1 Learning Culture	Learning Culture promotes shared values and responsibility for achieving the school's vision.
STANDARD 2 Student Learning	Student Learning practices maximize the impact of learning for each student.
STANDARD 3 Professional Practices	Professional Practices ensure that practices and structures support and improve student learning.
STANDARD 4 Learning Support	Learning Support ensures that the school has appropriate systems to support student learning and well-being.
STANDARD 5 Learning Resources	Learning Resources ensure that the school has the resources necessary to meet the learning needs of all students.

Foundational Elements

The Foundational Elements represent essential building blocks for each Standard. At a minimum, schools accredited by NEASC must align with each Foundational Element. Schools not yet aligned with Foundational Elements are expected to prioritize work to ensure alignment.

Standard	Foundational Elements
STANDARD 1 Learning Culture	1.1a The school community provides a socially and emotionally safe environment for students and adults. 1.2a The school has a written document describing its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of a learner that includes the attainment of transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for future success.
STANDARD 2 Student Learning	2.2a The school has written curriculum documents for all courses that include a scope and sequence or curriculum map with units of study that contain expected course outcomes for each student, guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, and assessments aligned with expected course outcomes.
STANDARD 3 Professional Practices	3.1a The school has a current school growth/improvement plan. 3.6a All career and technical education programs have a program advisory committee and implement a systematic program review process.
STANDARD 4 Learning Support	4.1a The school has intervention strategies designed to support learners.
STANDARD 5 Learning Resources	5.1a The school site and plant support the delivery of curriculum, programs, and services. 5.5a The school provides a physically safe environment for students and adults.

Rubrics for the Standards for Accreditation

Schools will assess alignment with each of the Foundational Elements and Principles in the Standards for Accreditation, based on evidence, using the following rubrics.

Foundational Elements Rubric

Use the criteria in the rubric to determine whether the school is meeting each of the Foundational Elements in the Standards.

Meets	Does Not Meet
All criteria of the Foundational Element are evident in the school.	Some criteria of the Foundational element are not yet evident in the school.

Principles of Effective Practice Rubric

Use the following continuum to determine the school's current phase of implementation, which best describes the school's alignment with each Principle in the Standard.

Not yet evident	Elements of the Principle are not yet evident in the school.
Initiating "Thinking About It"	The ideas and concepts of the Principle are being considered by the school community but not yet in action.
Developing "Working on It"	Some elements of the Principle are in place, and the school has developed plans and timelines for full implementation.
Implementing "Living It"	All elements of the Principle are firmly in place in the school. Organizations or systems have been formed to support and sustain these practices.
Transforming "Shifting the paradigm"	The Principle is driving innovative and transformative practices to achieve the school's vision of a learner.

The Accreditation Process

Step 1 – Planning Ahead

Schools are no longer required to assign all members of the professional staff to a Standard committee during the Self-Reflection. Schools can now differentiate the use of their faculties, assigning a representative number of education professionals to participate on the committee(s) that best meet the schools' needs. The Self-Reflection process has been streamlined so that schools can reduce the time for this step to no longer than 3-6 months.

Purpose of the Self-Reflection

The Self-Reflection allows the professional staff to gather and examine sufficient evidence to evaluate the school's alignment with the NEASC Standards in the first year of the Accreditation cycle. The Self-Reflection process and related data collection inform the school's plan for growth. It should be viewed as a research and reflection step to help the school sharpen its vision and action steps for continuous improvement.

Duration of the Self-Reflection Process

Based on myriad variables, such as the size of the professional staff, the allocation of release time, and the amount of time needed to complete existing initiatives, the Self-Reflection will take approximately 3 to 6 months.

Opinion Surveys

Before beginning the Self-Reflection, the school will conduct an online survey of the students, parents, and members of the professional staff. The NEASC survey provides an external perspective to help assess the school's alignment with the Standards for Accreditation. The complimentary survey tool will be provided to schools by NEASC. This external survey data is used as evidence during the Self-Reflection. The school should administer the survey in the fall or spring before beginning the Self-Reflection process. It is essential to ensure a valid response from all those surveyed, and the Commission expects a response rate of 95 percent or more from professional staff and students and 25 percent or more from parents.

The Steering Committee

The steering committee leads the professional staff through the key steps of the Accreditation process. The committee comprises the principal and three to eight faculty members, depending upon the size of the school, and it includes two Accreditation Coordinators, whom the principal selects from the faculty.

Formation of the Steering Committee

The principal forms and serves as a member of a steering committee to oversee all aspects of the Accreditation process. The principal should have an in-depth understanding of the Standards for Accreditation. While the principal does not have specific assignments, she or he provides guidance on school policies and procedures and affords additional assistance, such as arranging release time to work on the Self-Reflection and securing funds for the Accreditation budget. The principal should attend all steering committee meetings.

The steering committee should be a representative group of individuals who can work well with others and have effective leadership skills. Steering committees customarily comprise faculty members and administrators; however, the members need not be limited to those from the professional staff. The principal should appoint two members of the professional staff as Accreditation Coordinators, who will lead the steering committee. An Accreditation Coordinator may be a faculty member, a department head, or an administrator other than the principal. The Accreditation Coordinators must have an in-depth understanding of the Standards for Accreditation, excellent leadership ability, and the talent to coordinate the work of many people.

The number of steering committee members may vary with the size of the faculty and the grade span of the school. Most committees will include between three and eight members. The committee should reflect the school's grade span. Steering committee members support the Self-Reflection Report writers and, in general, should not serve on other committees unless the size of the school necessitates more help on those committees. The steering committee need not be a new or special ad hoc committee; it may be a standing committee.

The Commission staff strongly recommends that steering committee members and lead Self-Reflection Report writers serve on visiting teams to other accredited schools to broaden their understanding of the Accreditation process.

Purpose of the Steering Committee

The purpose of the steering committee is to:

- design and oversee the Accreditation process, and determine how the Self-Reflection phase will progress
- develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between each of the Standards for Accreditation to help all staff members understand the Standards and the process
- ensure the preparation of the Self-Reflection Report and write the School and Community Summary section
- determine which groups or individuals will be responsible for the investigation and writing of Part 1, *A Look Back*, of the Self-Reflection Report (Part 2 is for the Self-Reflection committee)

- coordinate efforts to collect evidence
- provide state report information
- involve school personnel in the Self-Reflection process
- communicate consistently about the progress and next steps throughout the Accreditation process to keep the entire professional staff and all school stakeholders informed and engaged
- include parents, students, and community members, where appropriate, in the Self-Reflection process
- ensure that requirements and timelines are met
- ensure that all evidence and documentation are available for the Collaborative Conference and the Decennial Accreditation visiting teams when they are on-site
- ensure that all components of the Self-Reflection Report and other information are complete in the portal
- complete and implement the plans for the Collaborative Conference and the Decennial Accreditation Visits, including accommodations arrangements for the visiting team members

The Self-Reflection Committee

The school develops a Self-Reflection committee dedicated to writing Part 2, *Current Conditions*, of the Self-Reflection Report, which engages in self-reflection through inquiry and evidence-gathering. Part 2 comprises the five Standard narratives and CTE program reports, if applicable. However, the committee should find ways to include and draw information from faculty members, administrators, students, families, and other stakeholders as it completes the Self-Reflection (See Self-Reflection Guide).

The Self-Reflection Committee writers:

- determine the extent to which the school is aligned with the Standards for Accreditation through a reflective process based on evidence and review of all the Standards
- may be organized in a single committee made up of various members of the school community, or several smaller subcommittees or focus groups
- are representative of multiple stakeholders in the school community, such as administrators, teachers, other professional staff members, support staff members, parents, students, community members, etc.
- engage the school's faculty in the Self-Reflection phase through involvement in the collection of evidence, providing input and feedback, and regular progress updates

The Part 2 writers should enlist additional help from the faculty and administration in sections in which evidence or background knowledge is needed. They should thoroughly discuss information in all parts of the report and ensure a consensus on its accurately reflecting the school.

Steering Committee Checklist

- A. Getting Started
- B. Self-Reflection
- C. Collaborative Conference Visit

A. Getting Started

1. The principal selects Accreditation coordinators.
2. The principal and two Accreditation Coordinators attend the Accreditation Seminar.
3. Establish the steering committee.
4. Establish the Self-Reflection committee to investigate and write Part 2 of the Self-Reflection Report.
5. Determine which groups or individuals will be responsible for the investigation and writing of the School and Community Summary and Part 1 of the Self-Reflection Report.
6. Contact the school's NEASC staff liaison to schedule the liaison site visit to train the steering and Self-Reflection committees and present information to the professional staff.
7. Develop a Self-Reflection timeline after meeting with the NEASC staff liaison.
8. Submit the press release on Self-Reflection.
9. Order and administer the NEASC opinion surveys.
10. Ensure the inclusion of parents, students, faculty members, and support staff members in the process.
11. For career and technical education schools or centers, ensure the director and faculty members know their roles in the Self-Reflection process and writing of the Self-Reflection Report.
12. Apprise members of central office professional staff of their roles in the Self-Reflection.
13. Prepare a budget in collaboration with the principal.
14. Make preliminary plans for the Collaborative Conference Visit.
15. Write the School and Community Summary and share it with the faculty.

B. Self-Reflection

1. Monitor evidence-gathering and check for quality and quantity of evidence.
2. Monitor the analysis of evidence by the Self-Reflection committee.
3. Monitor the development of the Self-Reflection Report and CTE program reports.
4. Distribute Part 2 of the report by Standard to the professional staff and seek comments and questions. Conduct formal presentations and vote on Part 2 using the established protocol.
5. Develop a process for gathering faculty input to develop Priority Areas for Growth.
6. Establish Priority Areas for Growth as determined by the principal and leadership team.
7. Distribute the draft Self-Reflection Report to the faculty.
8. Make final edits to the Self-Reflection Report to ensure completeness and accuracy.
9. Ensure that all elements of the Self-Reflection Report are entered in the portal using the Self-Reflection Checklist.

C. Collaborative Conference Visit

1. Use the Chair's Preliminary Collaborative Conference Checklist to review all components of the on-site visit, including the schedule, with the visiting team chair during the Chair's Preliminary Visit*.
2. Finalize hotel, meals, and other logistical arrangements.
3. Provide materials for the team workroom at the school and hotel:
 - a. Self-Reflection documents, including evidence identified in the Self-Reflection Report that have not been hyperlinked in the report or added to a digital folder for the team.
 - b. Laptops, printers, and large flat panel monitor or LCD projector and screen (consult with chair)
 - c. clerical supplies
4. Prepare a list of school activities occurring during the on-site visit.
5. Prepare a list of rooms and times for small-group meetings with the visiting team based on the schedule prepared by the chair and school.
6. Prepare emergency information for the visiting team.
7. Make name tags for visiting team members and staff members.
8. Ensure staff members, other school system personnel, parents, students, and community members are available to meet with members of the visiting team based on the schedule for the visit.

**The Chair's Preliminary Visit may be virtual.*

School and Community Summary

The steering committee is responsible for writing the School and Community Summary. The School and Community Summary is a 750-1500-word narrative that provides general information about the school, its location, and its place within the community.

Gather the information/data for each of the following:

- ☐ location of the town/city/district in the state
- ☐ the socio-economic profile of the community
- ☐ racial/cultural/ethnic makeup of the school district
- ☐ number of district families living below the poverty level
- ☐ number of schools in the system/district (public and independent)
- ☐ grade configuration of the school
- ☐ current student population
- ☐ enrollment stability
- ☐ expenditure per pupil for students assigned to the school compared to state average
- ☐ percentage of local resources spent on public education
- ☐ percentage of local taxation spent on schools
- ☐ annual dropout rate stated as a percentage
- ☐ graduation rate stated as a percentage
- ☐ attendance rate of students
- ☐ attendance rate of teachers, excluding professional days
- ☐ percentage of students who attend four-year colleges, attend two-year colleges, enter directly into the workforce, and enter the military
- ☐ school/business partnerships
- ☐ school/college partnerships
- ☐ student recognition programs

The summary does not have to be approved by the professional staff; however, the staff should have the opportunity to review it to provide clarification and input.

Developing an Accreditation Budget

Many of the expenses of an on-site visit relate to the size of the visiting teams, which will vary depending on the school, district, center, or program. The size and makeup of the visiting teams should be discussed with the school's NEASC staff liaison.

Training Seminars for School Personnel

NEASC sponsors complimentary virtual *Accreditation Seminars* for principals and Accreditation Coordinators of schools about to commence the Self-Reflection and host a Collaborative Conference Visit to acquaint schools with the procedures.

Approximately two years later, in anticipation of the Decennial Accreditation Visit, the NEASC sponsors complimentary virtual *Decennial Visit Seminars* (also called Initial Visit Seminars for Candidate schools). Held in the spring and fall for schools hosting Decennial Accreditation visiting teams the following season, these seminars provide some last-minute suggestions and an opportunity to ask questions. During the seminars, schools can discuss the preparation of the School Summary Report and the Decennial Accreditation visiting team schedule. Schools find these meetings helpful in ensuring everything is in place for the Decennial Accreditation visiting team's arrival and work.

Follow-Up Seminars, which are complimentary and virtual, are held in the spring and fall of each year for schools that hosted Decennial or Initial Accreditation visiting teams the previous season. These seminars help schools organize and monitor their follow-up programs and understand the requirements for completing Progress Reports and responses to highlighted recommendations.

The principal of each member school is expected to attend the three NEASC-facilitated seminars (*Accreditation, Decennial Accreditation Visit, and Follow-Up Seminars*) and include two members of the school's professional staff. Again, these seminars are complimentary virtual.

Visit Fees

At the time of the Collaborative Conference Visit and the Decennial Accreditation Visit, the school is assessed a Visit Fee for each visit. The fee for the Collaborative Conference Visit is \$1,500, and the fee for the Decennial Accreditation Visit is \$2,000. The school will receive an invoice at the time of the Collaborative Conference Visit and again for the Decennial Accreditation Visit.

Accommodations

Schools must reserve hotel rooms for the Collaborative Conference and the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visits. Schools should reserve a separate hotel room for each visiting team member, providing basic amenities such as a private bath, phone, television, and complimentary Wi-Fi. It is recommended that the school request the hotel's corporate or governmental rate for the visiting team and retain the right to return any rooms not used by the visiting team.

Chairs typically provide virtual training to the visiting team members so they can wait to check in to the hotel until the first full day of the visit. However, team members traveling more than an hour to the school may request a hotel room for the evening before the visit's first full day.

Therefore, *the school must keep the cost of possible "additional night" hotel rooms in its budget to cover this eventuality*. While rare, the school's location may require the whole team's presence at the hotel on the afternoon before the first full day of the visit, adding an overnight accommodation for which the school must budget.

Conference Room at the Hotel

The conference room should be adequate and provide one night's privacy and security for the Collaborative Conference visiting team and two nights for the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation visiting team. Please consult with your NEASC staff liaison or visiting team chair to help determine the appropriate size and amenities, such as coffee and tea service, water, snacks, a large flat panel monitor or LCD projector and screen, various clerical supplies, and provision for laptop AC outlets.

Meals

Breakfast and dinner should be provided in the hotel, when possible, with lunch at the school. Approximate meal costs at the hotel can be determined by consulting the hotel staff.

Visiting Team Travel Expenses

The school is expected to reimburse travel expenses, calculated using the IRS rate per mile plus tolls incurred by visiting team members traveling to and from the school site. Personal expenses are not reimbursable. NEASC does not process travel reimbursements for visiting team members, as this is the responsibility of the school and district. Please discuss how this process will occur with your visiting team chair, well before the visit. NEASC provides a travel reimbursement form, or the team can use a form provided by the school or district. Please ensure that the visiting team receives reimbursement checks as soon as possible after the visit.

Chair's Travel and Other Possible Expenses

Approximately one month before the Collaborative Conference and the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visits, the visiting team chair and assistant chair will hold the Chair's Preliminary Visit, which can be conducted virtually or in person. Preliminary visit travel expenses (if in-person), among other costs, could be included in the reimbursement requests.

Budget Estimates (for example only)

Item	Cost
Collaborative Conference Visit (spring or fall 2026)	
Cost* of rooms (6 guests for 2 nights** at \$200 per room per night)	\$2,400
Cost of the conference room at the hotel (1 night)	\$275
Cost of meals at hotel and school (6 guests at \$100 each)	\$600
Travel expenses for team members (6 guests at \$120 each)	\$720
Collaborative Conference Visit Fee	\$1,500
Collaborative Conference Total	\$5,495

Decennial Accreditation Visit (spring or fall 2028)	
Cost* of rooms (8 visitors for 3 nights** at 200 per room per night)	\$4,800
Cost of the conference room at the hotel (2 nights)	\$550
Cost of meals at hotel and school (8 guests at \$175 each)	\$1,400
Travel expenses for team members (8 guests at \$120 each)	\$960
Decennial Accreditation Visit Fee	\$2,000
Decennial Accreditation Total	\$9,710

*These cost estimates do not reflect regional differences.

** Visitors traveling more than 60 minutes from their homes may request an additional night the evening before the first day on site for the visit; therefore, the estimates are based on the maximum possible number of nights and will likely be lower than projected.

Scheduling a NEASC Staff Liaison Visit

A training visit from a member of the NEASC Commission on Public Schools professional staff, i.e., the Liaison Visit, is a crucial part of the Accreditation process. Each school has a NEASC staff liaison assigned throughout the Accreditation process. This service is provided at no cost to member schools.

The principal should contact the NEASC staff liaison assigned to the school, who is identified in a letter from the director, to arrange a convenient time for the half-day liaison visit. Having the visit before the Self-Reflection starts is essential in guiding the school in making the best use of its time throughout the Accreditation process.

During the visit, the NEASC staff liaison meets with:

- the principal and leadership team for a half-hour discussion
- the steering committee with the lead Self-Reflection Standard narrative writers for a 90-minute training session to highlight:
 - significant points in the organization and planning of the Accreditation process
 - approaches to evidence gathering
 - determining degrees of alignment with the Standards, specifically the Principles of Effective Practice and Foundational Elements
 - writing all aspects of Self-Reflection Report
- the entire professional staff to deliver a one-hour presentation to explain current procedures, the importance of the Self-Reflection, the role of the faculty and visiting teams, and the Standards for Accreditation

The NEASC staff liaison will schedule visits in the fall of 2026 to schools hosting 2027 Collaborative Conference Visits (and, therefore, 2029 Decennial Accreditation Visits). For schools scheduled for Spring 2027 Collaborative Conference Visits, the liaison will likely advise that the visit take place in September or October 2026, whereas those schools hosting fall 2027 Collaborative Conference Visits may have the liaison visit in the late fall of 2026. Because liaisons' visit schedules fill up quickly, schools are advised to schedule them promptly, so they can occur on scheduled faculty meeting or professional development days.

Central office administrators, school board/committee members, and any interested parents and students are welcome to attend the one-hour presentation to the school's professional staff, as the involvement of these groups may occur during the Self-Reflection.

In preparation for the NEASC staff liaison visit, the steering committee and Self-Reflection committee members should read this Accreditation Handbook, the Self-Reflection Guide, and the Standards for Accreditation, all available on the NEASC website.

Find resources online at:
neasc.org/resources-public-schools

Accreditation Timeline

Timeline	Spring 2029 Schools	Fall 2029 Schools
2026 Spring/Summer	Accreditation Seminar Establish steering committee	Accreditation Seminar
2026 Fall/Winter	Establish Self-Reflection committee Complete Self-Reflection	Establish steering committee Start Self-Reflection
2027 Winter/Spring	Host Collaborative Conference Visit; Develop Growth Plan	Establish Self-Reflection committee Complete Self-Reflection
2027 Fall/Winter	Implement Growth Plan	Host Collaborative Conf Visit Develop Growth Plan
2028 Winter/Spring	Implement Growth Plan	Implement Growth Plan
2028 Fall/Winter	Implement Growth Plan Write Summary Report	Implement Growth Plan
2029 Winter/Spring	Host Decennial Accreditation Visit	Implement Growth Plan Write Summary Report
2029 Fall/Winter	Update Growth Plan	Host Decennial Accreditation Visit
2030 Winter/Spring	Implement Growth Plan	Update Growth Plan
2030	Implement Growth Plan	Implement Growth Plan
2031	Implement Growth Plan; First Report of Progress and Planning	Implement Growth Plan; First Report of Progress and Planning
2032	Implement Growth Plan	Implement Growth Plan
2033	3-Yr Report of Progress and Planning; Update Growth Plan	3-Yr Report of Progress and Planning Update Growth Plan
2034	Implement Growth Plan	Implement Growth Plan
2035	Implement Growth Plan	Implement Growth Plan
2036	6-Yr Report of Progress and Planning; Update Growth Plan	6-Yr Report of Progress and Planning Update Growth Plan
2037	Apply for Continued Accreditation	Apply for Continued Accreditation

Sample Schedule for Spring 2029 Schools

March 2026	☐ Submit Application for Accreditation
April 2026	☐ Receive a letter from NEASC with the date for the CC and Decennial Accreditation Visits ☐ Attend Accreditation Seminar (principal and Accreditation Coordinators) ☐ Draw up a budget for CC visit in Spring 2026
May 2026	☐ Finalize selection of Accreditation Coordinators and steering committee ☐ Arrange a Zoom meeting with NEASC Liaison
June to August 2026	☐ Solicit interest in Self-Reflection committee ☐ Select members of the Self-Reflection committee ☐ Schedule a date for a visit by the NEASC staff liaison
September 2026	☐ Administer required NEASC parent, teacher, and student opinion surveys ☐ Begin work on Self Reflection and collection of evidence
Oct 2026 to March 2027	☐ Share School and Community Summary with professional staff ☐ Distribute opinion survey data ☐ Collect and analyze data ☐ Begin plans for the Collaborative Conference Visit ☐ Accreditation Coordinators contact NEASC staff liaison to update progress ☐ Draw conclusions based on analysis of evidence; write Self-Reflection Report ☐ Make available Parts 1 and 2 of the Self-Reflection Report for review by professional staff ☐ Professional staff vote to accept Part 2 ☐ Self-Reflection committee completes other parts of Self-Reflection Report ☐ Professional staff gives input regarding Priority Areas for Growth in Part 3 ☐ Leadership team completes Part 3 of Self-Reflection Report ☐ Complete entry of Self-Reflection Report and evidence ☐ Submit press release on completion of Self-Reflection ☐ Principal submits the Self-Reflection Report by clicking on the Mark Report Complete button in the portal

March to May 2027	☐ Contact the Collaborative Conference visiting team chair to discuss topics on the Self-Reflection and Chair's Collaborative Conference Checklist ☐ Make preparations for the Collaborative Conference Visit ☐ Host Collaborative Conference Visit
April to June 2027	☐ Chair submits draft of Collaborative Conference Report to NEASC staff liaison ☐ NEASC staff liaison reviews the draft and discusses it with the chair; the chair sends the revised draft to the principal; the principal reviews for factual accuracy and other concerns and communicates with the chair; the chair prepares the final Collaborative Conference Report ☐ NEASC office sends the completed report to the principal within six weeks of the Collaborative Conference Visit
June to October 2027	☐ The leadership team develops the School Growth/Improvement Plan ☐ School begins implementation of School Growth/Improvement Plan ☐ The principal distributes the Collaborative Conference Report and School Growth/Improvement Plan to the school board, central office administrators, faculty, and public
Nov 2027 to Dec 2027	☐ Implementation of School Growth/Improvement Plan
January to March 2029	☐ Complete School Summary Report
March to May 2029	☐ Host Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit
June to October 2029	☐ Work with the team chair to finalize the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Report ☐ Receive final Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Report and distribute to school community and release publicly
November to Dec 2029	☐ Notification letter is sent to the principal, superintendent, and board chair about NEASC action on the report

Sample Schedule for Fall 2029 Schools

March 2026	☐ Submit Application for Accreditation
April 2026	☐ Receive a letter from NEASC with the date for the CC and Decennial Accreditation Visits ☐ Attend Accreditation Seminar (principal and Accreditation Coordinators) ☐ Draw up a budget for CC visit in Fall 2026
August 2026	☐ Finalize selection of Accreditation Coordinators and steering committee
September 2026 to October 2027	☐ Solicit interest in the Self-Reflection committee ☐ Select members of the Self-Reflection committee ☐ Schedule a date for a visit by the NEASC staff liaison ☐ Administer required NEASC parent, teacher, and student opinion surveys
November 2027	☐ Begin work on School and Community Summary, Self Reflection process, and collection of evidence
December to June 2027	☐ Share School and Community Summary with professional staff ☐ Distribute opinion survey data ☐ Collect and analyze data ☐ Begin plans for the Collaborative Conference Visit ☐ Accreditation Coordinators contact NEASC staff liaison to update progress ☐ Draw conclusions based on analysis of evidence; write Self-Reflection Report ☐ Make available Parts 1 and 2 of the Self-Reflection Report for review by professional staff ☐ Professional staff vote to accept Part 2 ☐ Self-Reflection committee completes other parts of Self-Reflection Report ☐ Professional staff gives input regarding Priority Areas for Growth ☐ Leadership team completes Priority Areas for Growth section ☐ Complete entry of Self-Reflection Report and evidence in the portal ☐ Submit press release on completion of Self-Reflection ☐ Principal submits the Self-Reflection Report by clicking on the Mark Report Complete button in the portal

August to October 2027	☐ Contact the Collaborative Conference chair to discuss topics on the Self-Reflection and Chair's Preliminary Collaborative Conference checklist ☐ Make preparations for the Collaborative Conference Visit ☐ Host Collaborative Conference Visit
October to November 2027	☐ Chair submits draft of Collaborative Conference Report to NEASC staff liaison ☐ NEASC staff liaison reviews the draft and discusses it with the chair; the chair sends the revised draft to the principal; the principal reviews for factual accuracy and other concerns and communicates with the chair; the chair prepares the final Collaborative Conference Report ☐ NEASC office sends the completed report to the principal within six weeks of the Collaborative Conference Visit
Nov 2026 to January 2028	☐ The leadership team develops the School Growth/Improvement Plan ☐ School begins implementation of School Growth/Improvement Plan ☐ The principal distributes the Collaborative Conference Report and School Growth/Improvement Plan to the school board, central office administrators, faculty, and public
January to June 2028	☐ Implementation of School Growth/Improvement Plan
March to August 2029	☐ Complete School Summary Report
September to Nov 2029	☐ Host Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit
Dec 2029 to March 2030	☐ Work with the team chair to finalize the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Report ☐ Receive the final Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Report, distribute it to the school community, and release it publicly
February to April 2030	☐ Notification to principal, superintendent, and board chair about NEASC action on the report

Step 2 – School Self-Reflection

The Self-Reflection phase and related data collection inform the school's plan for growth. It should be viewed as a research and reflection step to help the school sharpen its vision and action steps for continuous improvement.

Survey and Evidence Collection

Before beginning the Self-Reflection, the school will conduct an online survey of students, parents, and the members of the professional staff. The survey provides external perspectives to help assess the school's alignment with the Standards for Accreditation. NEASC will provide the complimentary survey tool. This survey data is used as evidence during the Self-Reflection phase.

The professional staff will collect other existing evidence for the Self-Reflection to assess the school's alignment with the Standards and provide documentation for the Self-Reflection Report. As evidence is gathered and discussed, the Self-Reflection committee may change, evolve, alter, or refine its conclusions. Use the *Self-Reflection Guide* with key questions to help discuss and develop the Self-Reflection Report.

School and Community Summary

The steering committee is responsible for writing the School and Community Summary.

Self-Reflection Report

The steering committee and Self-Reflection writers begin by reviewing the parts of the Self-Reflection Report and looking at evidence. Once the evidence has been thoroughly deliberated and conclusions have been drawn, the Self-Reflection committee writers typically focus on writing Part 2 *Current Conditions* section of the Self-Reflection Report. The steering committee determines the individuals or groups assigned to write the other sections of the report.

Complete instructions can be found in the Self-Reflection Guide:
neasc.org/resources-public-schools

Self-Reflection Checklist

The steering committee should use the following checklist to ensure the appropriate materials are prepared and finalized. This checklist should be reviewed with the chair of the Collaborative Conference visiting team to confirm that all materials are available and meet the needs of the Collaborative Conference visiting team members.

If the Self-Reflection materials are not available for timely distribution to the members of the Collaborative Conference visiting team or are of a quality that precludes their effective use by the team, the Collaborative Conference will be postponed or canceled.

School and Community Summary

- ☐ School and Community Summary copied and pasted into the portal
- ☐ Core values, beliefs, and vision of a learner copy-pasted into the portal

Self-Reflection Report

- ☐ Part 1 – A Look Back
- ☐ Part 2 – Current Conditions (the five Standard narratives, and CTE reports, if applicable)
- ☐ Part 3 – Priority Areas for School Growth/Improvement Plan
- ☐ All parts completed and added to the portal

Other Documents to hyperlink in the portal

(or provide to the visiting team as a folder in a shared drive)

- ☐ Letter of welcome from the principal
- ☐ NEASC opinion surveys (student, faculty, family)
- ☐ Defined criteria for success (such as rubrics) for the school's vision of a learner
- ☐ Program of studies
- ☐ Bell and daily class schedule
- ☐ Master schedule of all classes
- ☐ Complete staff list with roles
- ☐ Floor plan of the building
- ☐ List of emergency phone numbers (school, local hospital, emergency services, etc.)
- ☐ Address of the school and hotel for GPS directions

Step 3 – Collaborative Conference Visit

The Collaborative Conference Visit is a step in the accreditation cycle to help gather information about the school's current conditions and help the school apply its Self-Reflection findings to developing the School Growth/ Improvement Plan.

The purpose of the Collaborative Conference Visit is to gather information about the current conditions of the school, to collaboratively review and refine the school's Self-Reflection findings and the identified Priority Areas for Growth and improvement, and to support the school in developing its goals for growth. The Collaborative Conference visiting team will check the school's alignment with the Foundational Elements. The school will be scheduled for a Collaborative Conference Visit commensurate with the season of its Decennial Accreditation Visit date. Schools can choose from an available time window and give input on when their Collaborative Conference Visit is scheduled.

The Collaborative Conference visiting team will work with the school to ensure that the identified goals for growth reflect the Priority Areas that have the most significant impact on student learning and that there are no obvious omissions or other needed improvement areas.

Collaborative Conference Visit Outline

The Collaborative Conference visit will take two days, and the team will consist of six visitors for comprehensive schools and approximately ten for districts and CTE schools. The team will include a chair and an assistant chair and four to eight other educators representing NEASC. The first day of the Collaborative Conference Visit will comprise a school tour, classroom visits, and meetings with representative groups of various stakeholders, including the Self-Reflection committee, principal, superintendent, with central office administrators, faculty members, including classroom teachers, other personnel as requested, students, and parents. The second day is typically reserved for the team to complete the report and prepare for the debrief with the principal at the visit's end.

The school will pay the Collaborative Conference Visit costs, including meals, soft drinks and snacks, hotel rooms, hotel conference room, and travel expenses.

Collaborative Conference Report

Following the Collaborative Conference Visit, the school's NEASC staff liaison sends the draft Collaborative Conference Report to the principal, who will have ten school days to review it and give feedback. Once the Collaborative Conference Report is finalized, the liaison sends the report to the Commission on Public Schools, which reviews the information, renders a decision about the school's continued Accreditation (or Candidacy), responds to the school with any additional questions or concerns, and provides feedback. While the school will receive the final report several weeks after the Collaborative Conference Visit, it may require a few months before the Commission reviews it and provides its response, as it meets three times per year. *Therefore, the school should begin developing its School Growth/Improvement Plan after completing the Collaborative Conference Visit.*

Ratings for the Foundational Elements will be included in the Collaborative Conference Report. Specific feedback and Next Steps for the Priority Areas for Growth will be provided during the Decennial Accreditation Visit.

Required Elements of the Collaborative Conference Visit

- Tour of the school building
- Classroom visits* (at least 90 minutes)
- Meeting with the Self-Reflection committee** to discuss the Self-Reflection Report
- Meeting with a representative group of students
- Meeting with a representative group of parents
- Meeting with a representative group of teachers
- Meeting with CTE personnel (if applicable)
- Meeting with central office administrators
- Meeting with building administrators
- Meeting with department leaders or other school leaders
- Meeting with student support professional staff, such as the nurse, library/media specialist, school counselors, and special education personnel

Note:

All meetings should have a duration of 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the school bell schedule. Visiting team members may be asked to attend different meetings at the chair's discretion during the same block of time.

**All classes in the master schedule underway during the time of the classroom observations must be made available to the members of the visiting team.*

***May select members of the committee, depending on how the school structures the Self-Reflection process.*

A sample schedule is available on the NEASC website:
neasc.org/resources-public-schools

Chair's Preliminary Collaborative Conference Visit Checklist

The chair should use the following checklist during planning with the school to ensure that the appropriate materials are prepared and finalized and that all necessary plans for the Collaborative Conference visiting team are in place.

1. The level of understanding of the faculty, staff, students, and community of the Accreditation process and the purpose of the Collaborative Conference Visit
2. Completion of all Self-Reflection materials
 - a. accessed at the NEASC online portal
3. Collection, availability, and access to evidence through hyperlinks within the Self-Reflection Report, through a folder in a shared drive, and at the school
4. Review the Collaborative Conference Visit schedule (prepared by the school)
 - a. students to lead facility tour
 - b. meeting with the Self-Reflection committee – 30 minutes
 - c. small group meetings with students, parents, teachers, student support faculty members, the nurse, the school leadership team, central office administrators, and members of the CTE professional staff (if applicable)
 - d. ensure parents for the parent meeting are not employees of the district or school board/committee members
 - e. ensure there is a concrete plan and a schedule for classroom observations and that *all classes in the master schedule during classroom observation time are made available to the visiting team*
5. Arrangements for technology use during the visit, including any laptops that may be needed, Wi-Fi access, and assistance as necessary
6. The visiting team workrooms at the school and hotel. Discuss items such as:
 - size, location, and furniture
 - supplies
 - name tags for school
 - easel with paper and markers
 - a complete master schedule is available in the school workroom
 - access to the curriculum documents
 - large flat screen monitor or LCD projector with screen (in both locations) and printer (at the school only)
7. Arrangements for lodging, all meals, snacks, and soft drinks
8. Parking at the school
9. Explicit plans for reimbursement of travel expenses
10. Press releases about the visit
11. Next steps after the visit

Step 4 – School Growth/Improvement Plan

The purpose of the School Growth/Improvement Plan is for the school to outline a vision for continuous improvement and growth with specific, measurable goals targeting Priority Areas for Growth identified by the school through the Self-Reflection. Schools may use an existing district or state model template for the plan, and it can be similar to or integrated with an existing school improvement plan if it meets the criteria set forth for the School Growth/Improvement Plan.

Elements of the School Growth/Improvement Plan

The School Growth/Improvement Plan is developed using the Priority Areas identified in the Self-Reflection phase and refined based on feedback in the Collaborative Conference Report. The plan can include other school or district initiatives. Each goal in the School Growth/Improvement Plan should be evidence-driven, based on identified gaps, growth opportunities, and the school's desired direction for learning. The plan should demonstrate how achieving each goal will impact and improve student learning through increasing alignment with the Standards. The action steps for each goal should be the method(s) designed for creating and communicating informed collaboration to achieve it. (View references and School Growth/Improvement Plan templates.)

The School Growth/Improvement Plan should include:

- statement of need (what you hope to address)
- measurable goals that can be adjusted after assessment and reflection with at least one goal focused on curriculum, instruction, or assessment, i.e., student learning, and aligned with the school district's strategic plan, if there is one in place
- a school response for each goal, indicating the following:
 - rationale, including educational research and theory of action, that is, how this will address student needs
 - measures of success and outcomes, including process and impact benchmarks
 - alignment with the NEASC Standards for Accreditation
 - action steps
 - person(s) responsible for each action step
 - timeline
 - budget
 - resources necessary to achieve action steps
 - methods to measure both outputs and outcomes of each goal and the evidence required to show progress on and completion of the goal

Plan Review and Implementation

The school leaders must allow faculty members to give input during the development of the School Growth/Improvement Plan and then provide feedback on the draft version of the plan. The draft and final versions of the School Growth/Improvement Plan must be shared with the superintendent.

When the School Growth/Improvement Plan is complete, the school submits it to the Commission office. The school will implement its plan over the next 12–18 months.

Step 5 – School Summary Report for the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit

The School Summary Report will be prepared by the school before the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit and copied and pasted into the NEASC online portal. The report's purpose is to provide updates and additional information related to what has happened at the school since the Collaborative Conference Visit. The sections of the report include the School and Community Summary, Foundational Elements, Reflection on Priority Areas, Reflection on the Principles, The School as a Learning Organization, and Planning for the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit (See Decennial Visit Handbook).

Step 6 – The Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit

Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation visiting team sizes are no longer based on student enrollment; rather, team size will be based on the school's needs and the scope of the work to be reviewed. The visit is designed to increase focus on observing student learning and lesson implementation, the school's Priority Areas for Growth with validated Next Steps, and any additional recommendations.

Overarching principles of the visit

The primary purpose of the visit will be to determine the school's growth and improvement on its identified priorities, not necessarily improvement on or alignment with every Principle in the Standards. The visit will be organized primarily based on observing and discussing the school's Priority Areas for Growth.

The visiting team will employ a growth mindset in meetings, interactions, and debriefs with school personnel. The spirit of the visit will be based on trust, inquiry, collaboration, and support. The visiting team will place a substantial emphasis on observing learning and teaching practices through classroom observations and talking with teachers and students about their work.

The visiting team will look for:

- any changes in alignment with the Foundational Elements
- progress made in implementing the School Growth/Improvement Plan and possible Next Steps regarding the Priority Areas for Growth
- other areas of change or growth that the school has identified and on which it wants feedback
- the school as a learning organization based on the 4Cs framework: Conceptual understanding, Commitment, Competency, and Capacity

Decennial Accreditation Visit Checklist

The steering committee should use the following checklist to ensure the appropriate materials are prepared and finalized.

- I. School and Community Summary section
 - ☐ If necessary, update the School and Community Summary and copy-paste it into the School Summary Report in the Accreditation portal.
 - ☐ If necessary, update the core values, beliefs, and vision of a learner/learning expectations and copy-paste them into the Summary Report.
 - ☐ Provide a hyperlink to the School Growth/Improvement Plan.
- II. School Summary Report
 - ☐ School Summary Report completed
 - ☐ School Summary Report reviewed by faculty
- III. Other documents to hyperlink in the School Summary Report or provide to the team through a folder in a shared drive
 - ☐ Letter of welcome from the principal
 - ☐ Program of studies
 - ☐ Bell and daily class schedule
 - ☐ Floor plan of the building
 - ☐ List of emergency phone numbers (school, local hospital, etc.)
 - ☐ Address of the school and hotel for GPS directions
- IV. Coordinate with the chair
 - ☐ Selection of students and/or facilities manager to lead the facility tour(s) on Monday
 - ☐ Small group meetings or observations connected to Priority Areas for Growth
 - ☐ Classroom visits and teacher or student conferences for Monday and Tuesday
 - ☐ Chair's Preliminary Visit Checklist

Please refer to the Decennial Visit Handbook for further information.

Chair's Preliminary Visit Checklist

(conducted before the Decennial Accreditation Visit)

Use this checklist to ensure that the appropriate materials are prepared and finalized and that all necessary plans for the visiting team are in place.

- ☐ The awareness of the faculty, staff, students, and community of the Accreditation process and the purpose of the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit
- ☐ Completion of all materials
- ☐ Collection, availability, and access to evidence, e.g., hyperlinks, folder in shared drive, etc.
- ☐ Meeting with school board/committee members - virtually on Sunday night or in-person
- ☐ The visiting team schedule (prepared by the school and the chair)
 - selection of students to lead facility tours on Monday or tour with the facilities manager or head custodian
 - Priority Area meetings
 - Priority Area observations
 - classroom visits
 - looking at student work
 - meeting with students
- ☐ Arrangements for technology use during the visit, including any laptops that may be needed, Wi-Fi access, and assistance as necessary
- ☐ The visiting team workrooms at the school and hotel. Discuss items such as:
 - size, location, and furniture
 - supplies
 - name tags for school
 - easel with paper and markers
 - a complete master schedule is available in the school workroom
 - access to the curriculum documents
 - large flat screen monitor or LCD projector with screen (in both locations) and printer (at the school only)
- ☐ Arrangements for lodging and meals for members of the visiting team
- ☐ Parking at the school or transportation to and from the hotel
- ☐ Explicit plans for reimbursement of travel expenses
- ☐ An overview of how the Decennial Accreditation Report is developed
- ☐ The school's responsibility for the distribution of the final report
- ☐ Press releases about the Decennial Accreditation Visit to the school

Step 7 – Accreditation Decision and Continuous Improvement

Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Report

Following the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit, the school's NEASC staff liaison sends a draft Decennial Accreditation Report to the principal, who will have ten school days to review it and give feedback.

Once the Decennial Accreditation Report is finalized, the liaison sends the report to the Commission on Public Schools, which reviews the information, renders a decision about the school's continued (or initial) Accreditation, responds to the school with any additional questions or concerns, and provides feedback. While the school will receive the final report several weeks after the Decennial Accreditation Visit, it may require a few months before the Commission reviews it and provides its response, as it meets three times per year. *Nevertheless, the principal is expected to distribute the report to various stakeholder groups within 60 days of receipt of the final report, as follows:*

- superintendent of schools
- school board/committee
- the faculty
- state department of education
- the school community
- appropriate news media

Revised School Growth/Improvement Plan

The school develops a revised School Growth/Improvement Plan based on the feedback and recommendations from the Decennial Accreditation visiting team. The revised School Growth/Improvement Plan is due no later than one year after the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit.

Continuous Improvement and Progress Reports

The reflection, planning, and implementation process is cyclical and does not end with the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit. Schools should actively monitor evidence, assess progress, identify changing priorities or school needs, and adjust plans for continuous growth and improvement.

Schools will update the Commission about the implementation of and progress on the revised School Growth/Improvement Plan one, three, and six years after the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit. More information about the follow-up process, NEASC events, and resources will be provided to the school following the Decennial Accreditation Visit.

Resources and Samples

Collection of Evidence

Evidence is essential to the Accreditation process. Schools are encouraged to use existing evidence in the Self-Reflection process to be as efficient as possible. Schools that have existing review of student work protocols, classroom observation protocols, professional learning communities, department meetings, and other existing structures are encouraged to use these to facilitate the gathering, analysis, and curating of evidence.

Self-Reflection Evidence Collection

School: _____

How to use this form:

1. Paste a shared-drive link beside each item.
2. Set sharing to "Anyone with the link can view" and confirm in an incognito window.
3. If a document does not exist, write "Not available" or "Under development" in the link field; don't leave it blank.
4. Use the "Additional evidence" block at the bottom for anything else the school would like to share with the visiting team.

School Wide Documents

Student and Family Handbook	Link:
Program of Studies	Link:
NEASC Survey Results	Link:
Daily Bell Schedule	Link:
Map of the school building	Link:

Standard 1: Learning Culture (supports FEs 1.1a, 1.2a)

1.2: Written core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of a learner

[Link:](#)

Standard 2: Student Learning (supports FE 2.2a and the vision of a learner)

2.1: Specific and measurable criteria for proficiency in the vision of a learner

Reports to students and families on progress toward the vision of a learner

[Link:](#)

2.2, 2.3: Access to written curriculum documents for all courses, departments, and grade levels

[Link:](#)

2.4: Agreements on shared instructional practices or shared beliefs of learning for your school

[Link:](#)

2.7: A sample of assessments to illustrate the variety across the school

[Link:](#)

2.8: School-wide revision, retake, or reassessment policy for student work

[Link:](#)

Standard 3: Professional Practices (supports FE 3.1a)

3.1: District strategic plan

[Link:](#)

3.1a: School growth or improvement plan

[Link:](#)

3.2: Current year's professional development schedule and structured collaboration time

[Link:](#)

3.2: Educator growth and evaluation plan or system

[Link:](#)

Standard 4: Learning Support (supports FE 4.1a)

4.1: Tiered support plan (MTSS)	Link:
Staff list with FTE (counseling, health, library, special education, EL)	Link:

Standard 5: Learning Resources (supports FEs 5.1a, 5.5a)

5.4: Long-term capital plan	Link:
5.4: Technology plan	Link:
5.5: Safety plan	Link:

Any additional evidence you would like to share with the team, please place in an electronic folder and provide the links below:

Additional Evidence Folder for Standard 1	Link:
Additional Evidence Folder for Standard 2	Link:
Additional Evidence Folder for Standard 3	Link:
Additional Evidence Folder for Standard 4	Link:
Additional Evidence Folder for Standard 5	Link:

Student Work

Student work is essential to the Self-Reflection and Collaborative Conference process and should be incorporated into the evidence collection. Student work collected should include:

- Work from each grade level
- Work from each department
- Work from each course level, e.g., developmental, college prep, honors, AP, etc.
- Work that reflects the school's vision of a learner
- Work that reflects the Principles and Descriptors in Standard 2 – Student Learning

The Student Work Set Cover Sheet (See next page) asks for information that helps the visiting team understand the sets of student work submitted in light of the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of a learner, as well as the local context. Each teacher submitting a set of student work should complete a cover sheet and ensure that each set meets the expectations outlined on the cover sheet.

The teacher's reflection is an essential part of the review of student work, as it puts student work into context. In the reflection, teachers should identify how much the student work represents proficiency. In addition, teachers should indicate which of the Principles and Descriptors in the Standards for Accreditation are evident in the student work.

Discussions about Student Work

A review of student work can be organized to inform the visiting team's inquiry concerning student learning. Such a review could be in the form of a teacher-led conference during which a discussion about a selection of student work can be facilitated. Alternatively, students can lead discussions about a portfolio or several pieces of work, or a combined format can be employed through which both teachers and students discuss the same pieces of work with the team.

Student Work Set Cover Sheet

Teacher / Course / Grade / Level
Type of assignment (e.g., homework, group work, essay, test, project, etc.)
Skills and knowledge (e.g., learning expectation, essential question, curriculum standards, etc.)
Describe the activity or assessment and context (or attach unit or lesson plan/overview)

Attach:

1. Handout(s) given to students
2. Assessment criteria, such as a rubric
3. Three examples of student work
 - including work that is developing, meeting, and exceeding expectations
 - scoring and feedback to students

Identify the relevant Standard 2 Descriptors of Effective Practice:

Reflection

- To what extent does the student work set represent students' proficiency?
- To what extent does the work set reflect elements of the Standards for Accreditation?

Sample School and Community Summary

ABC High School is 25 miles south of the state capital, Metropolis. ABC's population is 25,900. Small service-oriented businesses dominate the local commercial economy and have replaced large factories and two manufacturers. The median household income in ABC is \$86,570, with an unemployment rate of approximately 4.7 percent. The latest census reveals that 6.2 percent of families fall below the poverty level, and 19.3 percent of students come from families classified as economically disadvantaged. The town comprises 5.2 percent African American, 2.4 percent Asian, 6.9 percent Hispanic, 0.5 percent Native American, 80.9 percent White, 0.1 percent Native Hawaiian, and 3 percent Multi-race/non-Hispanic.

The school's enrollment is 1117 and serves students in grades 9-12, along with a transition program that services some students until they are 22. The population has declined by almost ten percent over the last ten years. The district has three elementary schools for students in grades PK-5 and one middle school serving grades six through eight. Some students in town attend a local vocational technical high school or one of the five private or parochial elementary, middle, and high schools in neighboring towns. The school comprises 5 percent African American, 2 percent Asian, 6 percent Hispanic, 0.5 percent Native American, 83.4 percent White, 0.1 percent Native Hawaiian, and 3 percent Multi-Race/Non-Hispanic.

The average per-pupil expenditure for the 2020 fiscal year was \$14,393 compared to the state average of \$17,575. The school receives over 50 percent of its revenue from the state. The operating budget for the 2021-2022 school year was initially proposed in February 2021. The proposed budget contained a 3.5 percent increase but had to be reduced to 2.3 percent. Local assessments spent on schools were 53.04 percent of the total budget. Federal, state, and local revenue resources supplement the budget.

The dropout rate was 0.8 percent, and the graduation rate was 92.9 percent. The student attendance rate for the 2020-2021 school year was 92.1 percent. Many graduates pursue post-secondary education and attend higher education institutions. The postgraduate plans of the class of 2020-2021 include 69 percent of students attending four-year colleges, 14 percent attending two-year colleges, 3 percent pursuing career education, 4 percent pursuing the military, and 1 percent taking a gap year.

Students have many educational opportunities. The school offers a diploma-granting program through an evening school, which delivers adult education courses to residents. The high school is near XYZ Community College, Purple State University, and Water College. In 2012, the school began participating in a dual enrollment program with Eureka College. Currently, 364 students have earned dual enrollment credits. Some high school teachers have been trained, and students can take four classes on-site at the high school. Offerings will be expanded over the next two school years. Approximately 26 percent of students are enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

The school has undertaken several initiatives to enhance every student's educational opportunities. A significant initiative fosters business/community higher education partnerships supporting student learning. For example, each fall, all senior students participate in the Credit for Life Fair, where they are given a future scenario and decide how to spend their money. In the College Essay Project, the English and school counseling departments collaborate to help students with college admissions. This program culminates with a visit from various admissions officers, who offer seniors specific feedback on admissions essays. Other initiatives include the mentoring/advisory program, the alum association, career pathways, dual enrollment, credit recovery, and winter and summer schools to help struggling students.

ABCHS recognizes students' accomplishments through the Honor Roll, Kiwanis Awards, Math Olympiad, Pride Awards, Underclassman Awards, Senior Scholarship Awards, Poetry Out Loud, Oratorical Competition, National Honor Society, various academic honor societies and exams, and scholarships.

References for the School Growth/Improvement Plan

- Connecticut State Department of Education. Turnaround Office. Retrieved January 2019 from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Turnaround/Turnaround-Office>
- Hanover Research/ District Administration Practice. Best Practices for School Improvement Planning, October 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Best-Practices-for-School-Improvement-Planning.pdf>
- Maine Department of Education. <https://www.maine.gov/doe/home>
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Planning for Success in Massachusetts. (October 2015). Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/>
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on International Education. ACE Learning. Retrieved from <https://www.neasc.org/ace>
- New Hampshire Department of Education. New Hampshire's Story of Transformation. Retrieved from <http://www.education.nh.gov/transformation.htm> Pipkin, Cameron. (September 2015). Retrieved from <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2015-09-09-how-to-craft-an-effective-school-improvement-plan>
- Rhode Island Department of Education. School Transformation. Retrieved from <http://www.ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/Accountability/SchoolTransformation.aspx> Thomas/Leaders Building Leaders. (September 19, 2016). Retrieved from <http://leaders-building-leaders.com/2016/09/19/establishing-school-improvement-plan>
- State of Vermont Agency of Education. Education Quality Assurance. Retrieved January 2019 from <https://education.vermont.gov/vermont-schools/education-quality>

Sample School Growth/Improvement Plans and Templates

- NEASC Growth Plan Template. Retrieved from neasc.org/resources-schools-public
- State of Vermont Agency of Education. Retrieved January 2019 from <https://education.vermont.gov/documents/edu-cfp-eqa-cip-template-2018-2019>

New England State Departments of Education

A copy of the final Decennial Visit Report should be sent to the appropriate state department of education official:

Connecticut	New Hampshire
Kenneth Imperato, Planning & Assessment Coordinator Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction P. O. Box 2219 Hartford, CT 06145-2219	Marjorie Schoonmaker Facility Management New Hampshire Department of Education State Office Park South 101 Pleasant Street Concord, NH 03301-3860
Maine	Rhode Island
Edwin Kastuck, Ph.D. School Approval State Department of Education 23 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333	Stephen Osborn, Chief Accelerating School Performance Rhode Island Department of Education 255 Westminster Street Providence, RI 02903-3400
Massachusetts	Vermont
Stacy Jackson, Program Coordinator Center for District and School Accountability Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) 75 Pleasant Street Malden, MA 02148-4906 sjackson@doe.mass.edu	John Fischer, Deputy Commissioner Transformation and Innovation State Department of Education 120 State Street Montpelier, VT 05620

Substantive Change Policy

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission, within sixty (60) days of occurrence, any substantive change in the school that has a negative impact on the school's ability to align with any of the Standards for Accreditation or part(s) thereof. The report of a substantive change must describe the change and detail its impact on the school's ability to align with the Standards. The following are potential areas where there might be negative substantive changes that must be reported:

- elimination of fine arts, practical arts, and student activities
- diminished upkeep and maintenance of facilities
- significantly decreased funding
- cuts in the level of administrative and supervisory staffing
- cuts in the number of teachers and/or school counselors
- grade level responsibilities of the principal
- cuts in the number of support faculty or staff
- decreases in student services
- cuts in the library/media center staffing
- increases in student enrollment that cannot be accommodated
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees
- changes in the student population that warrant program or staffing modification(s) that cannot be accommodated, e.g., the number of special needs students, vocational students, or students with limited English proficiency

Reports of positive substantive changes are not required but may be submitted to the Director of the Commission at the discretion of the building principal.

View additional NEASC and Commission policies on our website at:
www.neasc.org/membership/policies

Glossary

Accreditation Coordinators

Working with the principal, the Accreditation Coordinators, typically teacher-leaders, are responsible for leading the Accreditation process with the support of the steering committee. Ideally, the Accreditation Coordinators guide the process from the Self-Reflection through the Decennial Accreditation Visit.

Collaborative Conference Report

The Collaborative Conference Report will summarize the school's alignment with each of the Standards for Accreditation, provide commendations and recommendations, and ensure that the identified improvement goals reflect the Priority Areas for Growth that have the most significant impact on student learning and that there are no obvious omissions or other needed improvement areas.

Collaborative Conference Visit

The purpose of the Collaborative Conference Visit is to gather information about the current conditions of the school, collaboratively review and refine the school's Self-Reflection findings, and support the school in developing Priority Areas for Growth for its School Growth/Improvement Plan.

Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Report

The Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Report will summarize the school's alignment with each of the Foundational Elements and Principles in the Standards for Accreditation and implementation of the School Growth/Improvement Plan. The report will provide the school with commendations, next steps, and recommendations to guide the revision of the School Growth/Improvement Plan and help the school further align with the Standards for Accreditation over the next 3-6 years.

Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit

The Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit allows the visiting team to assess the school's progress in implementing the School Growth/Improvement Plan and its alignment with the Standards for Accreditation. The purpose of the Decennial (or Initial) Accreditation Visit is to assess how the implementation of the School Growth/Improvement Plan is proceeding and to be present to observe firsthand the day-to-day workings of the school.

Descriptor of Effective Practice

The Descriptors of Effective Practice (Descriptors) guide schools in identifying the common areas for successfully implementing each Principle of Effective Practice in the Standards for Accreditation. The Descriptors are not exhaustive, but they help the school increase its alignment with the Principles, serving as an effective template. Schools may use additional, equally valid paths to align with the Principles of Effective Practice.

Dispositions

Dispositions are the patterns of behavior and thinking necessary for success in and out of school; for example, dispositions could include persistence, flexibility, empathy, courage, and accuracy.

Foundational Elements

The Foundational Elements are the most basic conditions necessary for alignment with the Standards for Accreditation, and member schools are expected to meet all of them. Each Foundational Element is drawn from one of the Principles in the Standards. These elements must be in place for a school to meet the needs of students. If any Foundational Element is not fully implemented, the school must include it as a Priority Area for Growth in the School Growth/Improvement Plan

Knowledge and Understandings

Knowledge and understandings represent the essential knowledge and big ideas or enduring understandings students will learn in their classes.

Knowledge includes the topics, information, and facts that are essential for students to be able to recall or access.

Understandings are the capacities to marshal skills and facts wisely and appropriately through effective application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation

Learning Organization

A learning organization consistently facilitates and prioritizes the learning of its members and is continuously evolving. Schools whose cultures, structures, and processes facilitate ongoing student, adult, and organizational learning are working toward becoming learning organizations.

Principle of Effective Practice

The Principles of Effective Practice (Principles) in the Standards for Accreditation reflect high-quality desired practices, and express the essential values, concepts, practices, and structures used to guide the evaluation of the quality of school programs, services, and commitments.

Priority Area for Growth

The Priority Areas for Growth (Priority Areas) reflect the Standards with which the school needs to align to improve student learning, achievement, and well-being. The Priority Areas for Growth should reflect the school and district priorities on which the school is working and on which it wants to focus further attention.

School Growth/Improvement Plan

The School Growth/Improvement Plan outlines a vision for continuous improvement and growth with specific, measurable goals and action plans targeting Priority Areas identified by the school through the Self-Reflection and Collaborative Conference Visit.

Self-Reflection Committee

The Self-Reflection committee, in conjunction with the steering committee, is charged with completing the Self-Reflection Report to determine the school's level of alignment with each of the Principles of Effective Practice in the Standards for Accreditation and identify strengths and areas for growth for each Standard. The committee members typically focus on Part 2 *Current Conditions* that comprise narratives for each of the five Standards, while following a process of evidence-gathering, discussion, decision-making, and writing. The Self-Reflection committee is expected to engage the entire school community, including all educators, students, families, and other stakeholder groups.

Self-Reflection Report

The Self-Reflection committee, some members of the steering committee, and other members of the professional staff write the school's Self-Reflection Report, which includes three parts: Look Back, Current Conditions, and Priority Areas for the School Growth/Improvement Plan. The Self-Reflection Report is the basis for the Collaborative Conference Visit.

Specific and Measurable Criteria for Success

The essential criteria by which a student can demonstrate proficiency in a particular skill or disposition.

Steering Committee

The steering committee includes at least the school principal and two faculty members serving as Accreditation Coordinators but usually includes additional faculty members. It oversees all aspects of the Accreditation process and completes some parts of the Self-Reflection Report, e.g., the *School and Community Summary*, Part 1 *A Look Back*, and Part 3 *Priority Areas for School Growth/Improvement Plan*.

School Summary Report

The School Summary Report will be completed by the school before the Decennial Accreditation Visit and includes seven parts: School and Community Summary, Core Values, Beliefs, and Vision of a learner, an update on the status of the school's alignment with the Foundational Elements, an update on the status of the school's progress on its Priority Areas for Growth, changes in the ratings of the Principles of Effective Practice since the Collaborative Conference Visit, and Capacity for Continuous Growth as a Learning Organization, and the school's updated School Growth/Improvement Plan.

Transferable Skills

Transferable skills are the essential skills students need to confront new challenges both in and outside of school. These skills cross disciplines and apply in multiple contexts. For example, transferable skills include creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration.

Vision of a Learner

The vision of a learner is a holistic description of the transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for students to attain by graduation.

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 Public Schools

The NEASC Commission on Public Schools, in partnership with its members, strives to ensure that all students experience an equitable, high-quality education necessary for their future success and well-being.

We will accomplish this mission through a cycle of continuous improvement and growth that includes:

- quality, research-based Standards for Accreditation
- an inclusive, collaborative process of Accreditation
- an inquiry-based process of self-reflection
- valid and reliable feedback and assessment through peer review
- ongoing monitoring and professional support

Resources

Accreditation resources are available on our website at www.neasc.org

Contact us

New England Association of Schools and Colleges
1115 Westford Street, Third Floor
Lowell, MA, 01851 USA

Phone 781-425-7700

Staff contacts: www.neasc.org/our-team