District Accreditation

A Framework for Excellence and Coherence

One District. One Vision. One Plan.

CABE/CAPSS Convention | November 20, 2026 | Groton, CT

Presenters

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Topics for today's discussion

1. To what degree is your district aligned?
2. NEASC Accreditation and the board of education
3. What District Accreditation is, and what it adds
4. The CAPSS–NEASC cohort
5. Hearing from Cohort 1 superintendents
6. The Standards: a framework for excellence
7. A natural vehicle for strategic planning
8. Cohort 2: how to get involved, and what it costs

Questions are welcome throughout, with time for Q&A at the end.

Something to think about

When every school rises together, every child gets an excellent education.

What your community wants to know

Families

"Will my child receive a great education in any school in our district?"

Residents

"Are our schools a wise investment of our tax dollars?"

Local businesses

"Will our graduates be ready for work, college, and life in our community?"

Questions to consider together

1. What would we most like every family to be able to say about our schools?
2. How could one shared plan help us tell our community where the district is headed?
3. Whose voices (families, students, local businesses) would we most want to hear along the way?

Turn to a neighbor and talk it over. There are no wrong answers.

To what degree is your district aligned?

Turn to the people around you: board members and administrators together



Same experience?

Would a student who moves from one of your schools to another school within your district find the same expectations and the same quality of learning?



Same direction?

Do your schools' improvement plans point in the same direction as your district's strategic plan?



Same words?

Could every board member and administrator in your district name its top priorities, in the same words? Are those priorities student-centered?

Where is our district most aligned? Where is it least aligned?

NEASC Accreditation: a mark of excellence

Voluntary

Schools and districts choose to take part, showing a commitment to self-reflection, transparency, and growth.

Independent peer review

Experienced volunteer educators from other New England schools review the work and visit in person.

Research-based Standards

Five Standards that reflect best practices in transforming students' learning experiences, K–12.

Continuous growth

An ongoing cycle of reflection, planning, and progress, not a one-time inspection.

Beyond test scores

State accountability focuses largely on test results. Accreditation looks at the whole district and every school in it: their culture, teaching, supports, and resources.

NEASC Accreditation is "a recognized and highly regarded symbol of quality and accountability to the public."

A globally recognized standard of excellence since 1885, and the oldest regional accreditor in the United States

What does it mean for the board of education?

“The school board is accessible to everyone in the community and is accountable for the performance of the schools in the district.”

National School Boards Association

“Board of education members are ultimately responsible for the quality of public education in their community.”

NEASC Commission on Public Schools, Accreditation Handbook

Assurance of excellence in every school

Accreditation assures residents that the board’s educational policies and plans are sound.

A clear picture of every school

The Self-Reflection gives members a detailed understanding of each school and where change is needed.

A strategic plan to support and follow

The district’s Priority Areas become a multi-year plan, with progress you can track.

Continuity across terms of office

A long-term framework that newly elected members can step into and carry forward.

What does it mean for your community?

Families

- Assurance of a quality educational program in every school
- The same high expectations from school to school, K–12
- Confidence for colleges reviewing graduates' applications
- Credits more readily accepted if a family moves to another district

Residents and taxpayers

- Evidence that tax dollars support programs that a neutral third party (the visiting team) has judged worthwhile
- Clear information on the schools' strengths, needs, and long-range plans
- Accreditation matters to homebuyers and can affect property values

Local businesses and employers

- Graduates with durable skills practiced in every grade
- A voice in the district's vision of a learner and its plan
- Strong schools that attract families and employees to the area

How District Accreditation works, and what it adds

District Accreditation allows a district to align its practices across all of its schools with the Standards for Accreditation.

Every school, K–12, takes part in one shared process guided by a committee drawn from each school and the central office.

WHAT IT ADDS

K–12 coherence
Common goals, language, and expectations in every building

A K–12 vision of a learner
Durable skills practiced in every grade

Every school, one standard
The same high expectations, so every student benefits

School-by-School	District Accreditation
Often, only the high school is accredited	**Each school is accredited across the district**
A separate cycle for each school	**One cycle for all district schools together**
A Self-Reflection in every building	**One district Self-Reflection**
Separate visits for each school	**One Collaborative Conference and one Accreditation Visit**
A growth plan for each school	**One set of Priority Areas in a district strategic plan**
Each school has standalone membership dues	**All additional schools have discounted dues at a group rate**

Districts across New England are already on the path

Connecticut

North Stonington
New Milford
Brookfield
Goodwin

and CAPSS-NEASC Cohort 1, below:

Maine

Falmouth
York

Massachusetts

Fairhaven
Manchester-Essex

New Hampshire

Sanborn Regional
Windham K–8

Vermont

Addison Central
West River

Cohort 1

Colchester	Ledyard	Seymour	Vernon
Granby	New London	Somers	Waterbury

Began in 2026 and now in the Self-Reflection year. Cohort 2 is forming now.

The CAPSS–NEASC partnership and Cohort 1

Financial assistance

Help with NEASC dues and visit fees

Free professional development

CAPSS sessions on District Accreditation and the vision of a learner

A network of districts

Cohort training sessions with districts doing the work together

Cohort 1: the journey so far, and what's ahead

We are here



2025
CAPSS and NEASC launch the partnership

Jan–Feb 2026
Districts apply; eight are selected

Mar–Apr 2026
Candidacy visits

June & Oct 2026
Cohort training sessions

Fall 2026
District Self-Reflections begin

March 2027
Regional training, hosted in a cohort district

Fall 2027–Spring 2028
Collaborative Conference Visits: three districts in fall, five in spring

2029–2030
Decennial visits and NEASC Accreditation

CAPSS

NEASC

Hear from Cohort 1 superintendents

(or any superintendents considering District Accreditation)

"This cohort model will further unify our district, align current practices, and support a shared vision for continuous improvement across all schools."

Cheri Burke
Superintendent of Schools, Granby Public Schools

"District Accreditation will serve as a catalyst for a culture of continuous improvement that bridges the gap between our middle and high schools."

Darren Schwartz
Superintendent of Schools, Waterbury Public Schools

"We believe that District Accreditation is the key to unlocking true K–12 coherence."

Cynthia Ritchie
Superintendent of Schools, New London Public Schools

Superintendents in the room: we would love to hear your "why."

1. Why did your district choose District Accreditation, or why are you considering it?
2. What is the Self-Reflection showing you about your district, or what do you hope it will show you?
3. What would you tell your board of education if it were considering District Accreditation?

Board members and others: your questions are welcome, too!

The Standards: a framework for excellence

STANDARD 1

Learning Culture

1.1a
Socially and emotionally safe environment

1.2a
Core values, beliefs, and vision of a learner

STANDARD 2

Student Learning

2.2a
Written curriculum for all courses

STANDARD 3

Professional Practices

3.1a
Current growth/improvement plan

3.6a
CTE advisory and program review

STANDARD 4

Learning Support

4.1a
Intervention strategies for learners

STANDARD 5

Learning Resources

5.1a
Site and plant support learning

5.5a
Physically safe environment

The Standards reflect best practices in transforming students' learning experiences, K–12. The district and each of its schools align with every Foundational Element; where one is not yet in place, it becomes a Priority Area for Growth. The 32 Principles of Effective Practice are aspirational areas for possible future growth.

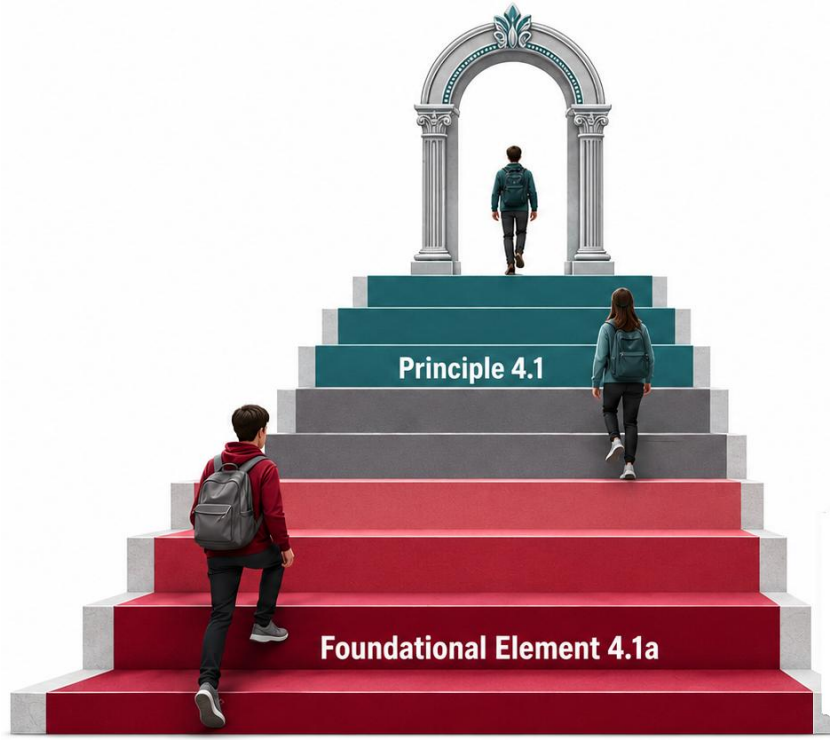
The Standards as a lens for your district

“How well are we aligned with these Principles?”

Every school and the central office ask the same questions, with the same evidence and the same rubric, so the district sees itself as a whole.

One continuum for every school and the district

Not yet evident	Initiating	Developing	Implementing	Transforming
	Thinking about it	*Working on it*	*Living it*	*Shifting the paradigm*



PRINCIPLE 4.1:
All students receive appropriate intervention strategies to support their academic, social, and emotional success.

Foundational Element 4.1a:
The school has intervention strategies designed to support learners

Climb with purpose

The Foundational Elements are the starting point. The Principles show where to climb next, and that climb becomes your strategic plan.

Your strategic plan: consultant-led or District Accreditation?

Consultant-led plan		NEASC District Accreditation
Designed by an outside firm	→	✓ **Adapted to fit your district**
The consultant's framework	→	✓ **Research-based Standards**
Ends with the contract	→	✓ **A ten-year cycle of support**
You get a plan	→	✓ **A plan plus NEASC Accreditation**

NEASC Accreditation: a globally recognized standard of excellence since 1885

The path, and how the board of education takes part

1 — 2 — 3 — 4

YEAR 1

Self-Reflection

An honest look at practice in every school, using the Standards as a lens

YEAR 2

Collaborative Conference

A visiting team of volunteer educators helps confirm Priority Areas for the district strategic plan

YEAR 3

Put the plan to work

Priority Areas become the district's strategic plan

YEAR 4

Decennial Visit

The visiting team returns to acknowledge growth, and every school can be awarded NEASC Accreditation

Board of education

Members, families, students, and staff share their perspectives

Board of education

Learn what the district found and where it plans to grow

Board of education

Support the plan and follow its progress

Board of education

Celebrate the results with the community

Cohort 2: key dates and how to get involved

Late Oct 2026	CAPSS announced Cohort 2
Nov–Dec 2026	Online network session for superintendents; regional roundtables
Dec 2026	Applications available
Jan 22, 2027	**Applications due**
Feb 2027	Districts selected and notified
Mar–Apr 2027	Candidacy visits
June & Oct 2027	Cohort 2 training sessions

What we ask of the board of education: support the decision to apply, budget for dues and visits, share your perspective, and follow the plan's progress.



Applications due

January 22, 2027

Applications open in December 2026.

1. **Start the conversation**
   The superintendent and the board of education talk about whether District Accreditation fits the district's goals.
2. **Learn more**
   Superintendents can join a CAPSS network session or regional roundtable. They can also ask NEASC for a virtual meeting to discuss District Accreditation possibilities.
3. **Invite NEASC to your board**
   NEASC is happy to present to the board of education.
4. **Apply by January 22, 2027**
   Cohort 2 applications open in December 2026.

What it costs

Candidacy
$1,000 application fee; no dues until candidacy is accepted

Annual dues
High school dues, plus about half the usual rate for each of the other schools

Visits
Two visits: Collaborative Conference and Accreditation Visit (district covers the team's accommodations and travel)

More value for less: one Self-Reflection and one set of visits, and each school can be awarded NEASC Accreditation.

Every school beyond the high school

About 50%

savings on annual dues for all additional schools

About $1,030 a year per school with District Accreditation, compared with about $2,020 for a school accredited on its own

High school dues are unchanged.



For cohort districts

CAPSS and NEASC provide financial assistance with NEASC dues and visit fees, plus free professional development from CAPSS.

We look forward to the possibility of working with you.

Q&A

We are happy to:

- Meet with your superintendent and board of education
- Hold a virtual meeting about your district
- Present to your board, families, and community groups
- Answer any questions along the way

neasc.org/district-accreditation (materials and information)

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