



NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES  
Commission on Independent Schools

# Principles, Policy, and Practical Steps for a Substantive Change Report\*

\*Examples of substantive changes may include adopting a new mission, purpose, or admitting exclusively different students (e.g., changing from a traditional school to a therapeutic school), adding a division (e.g., elementary school, middle school, high school, post-graduate), adding a residential or homestay program, adding or removing enrollment of a sex (e.g., single-sex to coed), adding a new local campus that will serve current students, and changing ownership for a proprietary school. The merging of two or more schools is also a substantive change but is addressed under the Merged School Policy.

## **Introduction**

A school already accredited by NEASC may find itself substantially changed from the time of its most recent accreditation review. The following protocol must be followed to ensure the change supports the school's educational mission and aligns with the NEASC-CIS standards for accreditation and school improvement without going through a complete, comprehensive self-study and visiting committee process.

## **Principles**

1. NEASC recognizes the dynamic nature of its member schools and that school communities go through major, sometimes rapid, changes, significantly altering the nature of the students they enroll or the educational experience of the students.
2. NEASC will preserve the flexible, supportive nature of its accreditation process to ensure that schools have the opportunity to maintain their accredited status through substantive changes without creating unnecessary work or expenses.
3. NEASC will maintain the integrity of its accreditation process. Substantive changes will require evaluating the changes using the two sets of benchmarks that apply to all NEASC accreditation processes, namely, the school's mission and the NEASC-CIS standards for accreditation and school improvement.
4. Upon notification from a school of a substantive change, the school's accreditation will automatically extend to include the change.
5. NEASC requires the school to file a Substantive Change Report by a requested deadline, typically after one full year of the substantial change.
6. Upon review of the report, the Director of the Commission may require either only a staff visit or a Focused Visit and a written report for submission to the Commission.
7. The Commission may require additional steps upon review of a Focused Visit Report.
8. If the effect of the substantive change is such that the general nature of the entire school is radically changed, NEASC reserves the right to require the whole school to submit itself to a complete evaluation. This requirement would be required only in exceptional cases and after in-depth discussions between the school and NEASC.
9. The Commission may, at its discretion, expedite the schedule described above and may take steps to assure a school's alignment with the NEASC-CIS standards.

## **Policy**

A school that has undergone a substantive change to the nature of the students it admits or the students' educational experience must provide the Commission with a *Substantive Change Report* after completing one year of the substantive change. Receipt of this report may be followed by a staff visit or, if determined by the Director of the Commission, with a focused visit and a written report presented to the Commission, which will determine if further action is warranted.

Examples of substantive changes may include:

- Adopting a new mission
- Adopting a new purpose
- Admitting exclusively students with different educational needs (e.g., with a change from a traditional school to a therapeutic school)
- Adding or removing a division (e.g., early childhood for three and four-year-olds, elementary school, middle school, high school, post-graduate)
- Adding or ending a residential or homestay program
- Adding or ending enrollment of a sex (e.g., single-sex to coed or co-ed to single-sex)
- Adding or closing a proximate local campus that serves current students
- Relocating the school community to a new campus and facility
- Matters of incorporation that alter a school's governance (e.g., from a not-for-profit to a for-profit school)
- Increases or decreases in funding that may profoundly enhance or critically limit a school's resources and ability to adhere to its mission

The merging of two or more schools is also a substantive change but is addressed under the Merged School Policy. The addition of a new campus that will serve students not currently enrolled may be considered a separate entity and must be reviewed under the "Other Entities Policy."

When in question about whether a change is substantive or a matter of degree, the Commission should be consulted.

### **Practical Steps**

The practical steps involved in extending accreditation to include a substantive change are as follows:

1. A school will notify the NEASC office of the change in its Annual Report or at any time throughout the year.
2. NEASC will supply the school with a Substantive Change Report form as applicable. The report must be submitted by the requested deadline, typically after one full year of the substantial change.
3. Following receipt of the report, a staff visit or one-day Focused Visit from the Commission may be scheduled. If a Focused Visit, the visitor or visitors will submit a brief report to the Commission that will be used to determine if an extension of the school's accreditation is to be confirmed or revised.
4. The Commission will consider the Substantive Change Report submitted by the school and the report of a Focused Visit. There are two possible outcomes:
  - a. The school's accreditation status is confirmed to extend to the substantive change

b. The school's accreditation status is confirmed to extend to the substantive change with a Special Progress Report required to address specific issues cited in the Focused Visit Report.

5. Once the Commission makes final approval, the substantive change will be incorporated into any further accreditation or required Progress Reports.

### **Preparing the Substantive Change Report**

The Head of School is responsible for submitting the completed Substantive Change Report to the Commission. The process the school undertakes should neither be comparable to a self-study nor as time-consuming. Most of the required documents, for instance, will be copies of items already in use within the school.

While the Head of School has the overall responsibility for submitting the report, other members of the school community should actively collaborate in the process, including members of the school's administration, faculty, and staff.

Completing the Substantive Change Report will consist of the following primary elements:

1. An identification of how the change supports the school's mission and admissions practice.
2. A rating of how a school meets each of the standards. (Suggested indicators do not need to be utilized. They are in an initial or decennial accreditation process unless a school finds this process useful.)
3. Requested documents or supporting materials.