NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

NEASC Commission on Independent Schools

Manual for
School Improvement

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Introduction to NEASC Accreditation

Accredited schools commit themselves, above all, to their students. Their entire reason for being, usually boldly captured in their mission statements, is the educational formation and development of children and young people. Adults in NEASC schools should constantly seek the most effective ways to achieve this goal.

The accreditation process, therefore, begins with internal conversations about the school's purpose and educational work with students and expands to discussions about the school and its future. Who are the students we serve educationally? How do our students learn most effectively? How do we know we are effective today, this school year, and as a foundation for future schooling after they leave us? Do we reach all of our students equally well? Is our faculty really engaged with the most up-to-date research and evidence-based practices in their field? Do they understand how students are motivated? Do both adults and students understand how to set goals and measure progress? Do we strive for our students' physical, social, and emotional well-being? Does our faculty understand balancing rigor and high expectations with compassion and appropriate support? Are our students reaching their hopes and achieving their potential? Is our school as healthy, safe, and secure as possible? Is our school institutionally viable? Is its mission sustainable?

By agreeing to common standards and undertaking peer review with fellow educators, NEASC member schools ask the most critical educational and institutional questions, constantly reviewing their current responses and seeking objective perspectives. Accreditation begins with informal conversations around these questions and progresses to formally reviewed documentation of current practices and strategic plans.

While improving any school should be a steady journey, achieving accreditation requires reaching designated milestones along the way. Careful organization, thoughtful self-reflection, and comprehensive evidence demonstrate the achievement of NEASC Standards. Through the reflective and iterative practice of accreditation, the early conversations should evolve into innovation, aspirational vision, and long-term planning. This Manual for School Improvement distinguishes the perpetual goals of accreditation and school improvement from the specific requirements of its achievement and intends to guide schools through the questions to stimulate sustainable, constant advancement.

The Standards

NEASC Standards intend to set a bar for demonstrating genuine achievement and, simultaneously, to inspire creative, forward-thinking. Schools meeting the objectives of the Standards understand the importance of both accomplishment and determination. An accredited school, for example, is a safe place, always determined to be safer. An accredited school provides professional development for faculty and staff and endlessly seeks to improve its quality and effectiveness. An accredited school is operationally viable while constantly reinforcing and ensuring its sustainability.

NEASC Standards are phrased in general terms like "sufficient," "appropriate," "comprehensive," and "adequate," and the interpretation of these terms should be read in the context of the school's mission, vision, core values, and daily practice. For instance, schools working with children with special needs will have high staff levels (or low student-to-faculty ratios). Schools offering outdoor leadership programs in the backcountry will require specific faculty training that might be entirely unnecessary in other schools. "Sufficient" for one school or activity may mean very different things in

another context. The importance of mission cannot be over-emphasized when interpreting the meaning of the Standards' language and the capacity of a school to meet the Standards.

NEASC Standards require schools to demonstrate adherence to the Standards' understanding, implementation, and future planning for improving upon the Standard and to honor and respect the diversity of an independent school's mission, students, and approaches to education.

NEASC Standards expect schools to understand that the education of youth and the operation of a school requires adherence to the highest objective standards. We say this, however, knowing that objectivity without understanding can be punishing and understanding without objectivity can be misguided and careless. A capacity to maintain this balance is one hallmark of an excellent head of school, a classroom teacher, and a school entering its Self-Study.

Reliance on sound judgment and reflective practice remains a strength of NEASC Accreditation. "Standardizing" reflections and good judgment, however, is a challenge. Evidence to support the Standards is derived from narratives, opinions, observations, analyses, and data-driven surveys. To illustrate how a school ensures the "Safety" of its students, for instance, it will provide objective evidence — completion of a required number of health and fire inspections — and descriptive evidence—faculty and staff accounts of their daily practices or actions taken during an emergency. In providing evidence that a school has "Sufficient Resources," it will present financial statements, on the one hand, and responses from the teachers about how their classroom and technology needs are met on the other. The Self-Study, in this regard, is a quantitative and a qualitative project. No formula dictates the percentage of any Self-Study containing a particular proof or confirmation; the intent should be to present the most helpful and accurate evidence. Even the opinion of a single individual has value in a Self-Study, but in responding to a Standard, a school should seek to provide a "preponderance of evidence."

Few days pass in any school when the faculty and administration are not confronting novel or unusual circumstances. "Standards" in an accredited school should demonstrate a school's characteristic approach to analyzing, deliberating, and working through challenges and opportunities. Accreditation is as much about how a school manages unique events and personalities as it is about carefully planned and regularly executed programs.

Standards vs. Indicators

NEASC Accreditation documentation is divided into "Standards" and "Indicators."

- The Standards state the overall goal.
- The Indicators are key components of each Standard.

The Standards state the overall goal and are generally uniform across all schools unless a school is proprietary (for-profit), has a residency program, or a homestay program. These aspects of a school require a school to respond to additional Standards. In contrast with the Standards, the indicators are their components and should be understood as "suggested."

The term "Indicator" is chosen deliberately; it points to a larger aim. Think of indicators as trail markers or navigation buoys. A school can decide to be guided by them or pursue the same ends of the Standard on a different path. In some schools, additional or alternative indicators may be used to demonstrate a Standard has been met. This is often the case with some NEASC collaborative accreditations and with the "Editions" that are used with some faith-based schools. In still other schools, specific indicators may not be relevant. In either case, the school should discuss the

reasons for including or excluding a particular Indicator as part of its response to a Standard.

Commonly, schools choose to work sequentially through the Indicators, making appropriate responses to each. However, in the long run, it might be far more helpful to prioritize the Indicators under a Standard around their meaningfulness to the school and its school improvement efforts and synthesize the collected information, writing one concise, comprehensive, and holistic response.

In this context, schools will aim to build their Self-Study responses around the most telling details and compelling examples rather than attempting to bludgeon the Standard into submission with extensive narration for each Indicator.

Mission

Finally, a note on mission. Most schools possess two general goals: The first is to nurture abilities, encourage interests, inspire talents, foster a sense of purpose, and provide outlets for personal expression as students develop and mature into the persons they are capable of becoming. The goal is to help young people discover who they are and the potential they possess. The writer Glennon Doyle wrote:

> *"The voice I heard that day was my own — the girl I'd locked away at ten years old, the girl I was before the world told me who to be — and she said, 'Here I am. I'm taking over now.'"*

The second goal is to equip them with the discipline, habits, skills, knowledge, understanding, ethical awareness, and sensibilities to take their roles as family, friends, citizens, productive members of society, and sometimes leaders. And to know what is right and good and worthwhile. Whatever life-path, profession, or vocation students choose, schools should prepare them for the station they are at and the stations they will next pass through. They should aim to help their students acquire the emotional and social ability to navigate triumphs and tragedies, to bring curiosity and imagination to challenges they encounter, to guide their actions with good sense and wisdom, to possess the character, commitment, and compass to direct their energies to what is of the greatest pursuit and value.

In whatever words a school chooses, these twin goals must be found in their mission. And if schools are moved to help their students strive for these, they will know what it means to be "mission-driven."

The Standards

FOUNDATION STANDARDS

Standard 1   Enrolled students align appropriately with the mission.

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

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

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

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

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

PROGRAM STANDARDS

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

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

Standard 9   Commitment to excellence distinguishes the program.

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

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

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

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

STRATEGIC PLANNING STANDARD

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

Guide to Assessing the Standards

Given that we are all teachers and administrators, it is difficult not to think of the Assessment of Standards as something of a "report card" for the school. This is truly not its purpose. We urge schools and Visiting Teams to look at its actual intent: *distinctly formative, not summative*. It is aimed to focus the school and the Visiting Team on each Standard in ways indicating both achievement and aspiration, the twin objectives for accreditation.

NEASC experience indicates that discussions around the Assessment for each Standard are often among the most valuable in the process. The ratings (SM1, SM2, SU1, or SU2) are meant to create a certain "finality" about the current state of the Standard in a school, and, thus, most importantly, to help the school see clearly what it is achieving and where it needs to strengthen its approaches. Giving equal attention to every element of school practice at once is impossible. The Assessment of Standards is intended to help a school focus its effort and planning on critical areas.

The four levels of Assessment are deliberately phrased as gradations of the same three qualities:

Understanding	Implementation	Planning

As is said repeatedly, the final measure of each of these is the experience of the students. Where the students' experiences are, or may be, compromised, then the school and the Visiting Committee should consider rating the Standard "unmet."

Discussion and debate about the level of a school's meeting or not meeting a Standard should be based on an understanding of the language of the Standard in the context of the school's mission. And equally importantly, this should always be supported by concrete evidence, observation, and reflection. During discussions, all competing points of view should be heard. Importantly, these discussions should not be endless and must come to a conclusion. Knowing when to "call the question" is as much an art as a science, and it is essential for schools writing their Self-Studies and Visiting Teams drafting their reports. It is not necessary for the Self-Study or Visiting Teams to come to a unanimous conclusion. If there are minority voices, it is reasonable to include them in the reports while indicating the scope of the discussion. Still, a single rating must be decided.

Schools seem to view the Assessment from a range of perspectives. Some, apparently, would like to be seen as meeting all Standards at the SM1 level for fear that any lower level will be perceived as "weakness" rather than "candor." Others, apparently, possess a level of humility that prevents them from rating any Standard at the "SM1" level. Also, schools have blind spots and may genuinely not see issues a Visiting Team may note easily. It is not unusual for Visiting Teams either to raise or to lower a school's own assessments. NEASC has observed as many as six or seven such changes one way or the other in a single Visiting Team Report.
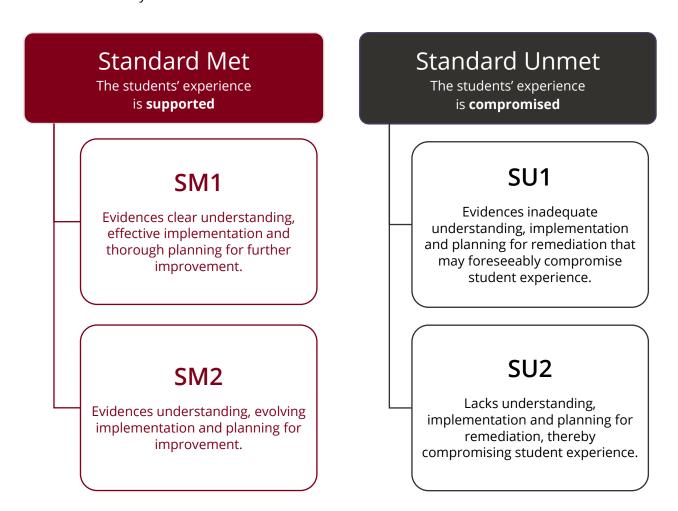
NEASC strongly advises schools and Visiting Teams to use the Assessment as a springboard to worthwhile discussion, to help clarify and focus critical questions, and to celebrate a school's outstanding strengths. An accredited school will, by definition, achieve each Standard. Some schools may take longer than others, and some Standards — Health and Safety, for instance — may require immediate remediation. For NEASC Accreditation, the value of the Assessment rubric is to channel the discussion to a decision, inspiring changes when necessary, and recognizing achievement when merited.

The Assessment is one crucial component of the entire process, and, as with all the other components, its purpose is school improvement.

Assessment of Standards

Standards should be assessed through the lens of student experience.

The fundamental test is whether or not students are supported. When a Standard is "Met," student experience is reasonably whole, positive, and creative. When it is "Unmet," students are — or may be — adversely affected. While some Standards have more direct or immediate student effects, every Standard ultimately makes itself felt in the lives of a school's students.

Standard Met — The students' experience is **supported**	Standard Unmet — The students' experience is **compromised**
SM1 — Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.	**SU1** — Evidences inadequate understanding, implementation and planning for remediation that may foreseeably compromise student experience.
SM2 — Evidences understanding, evolving implementation and planning for improvement.	**SU2** — Lacks understanding, implementation and planning for remediation, thereby compromising student experience.

During the Self-Study, schools rate themselves on every applicable Standard.

During a visit, the Visiting Team also rates the school on every Standard. When the Team's ratings differ from the school's rating, the Team will explain its conclusions.

Guide to the Standards

THE FOUNDATION STANDARDS AND INDICATORS

FOUNDATION STANDARD

1. Enrolled students align appropriately with the mission.

Some independent schools, for instance, traditional New England town academies, with few exceptions, admit every student who seeks enrollment from the surrounding public school districts. Most independent schools, however, have a selective admissions process, limiting the eligibility and acceptance of applicants. This process is informed and guided by the school's mission, seeking to admit those students who are "a good fit."

A good fit is defined differently by different types of independent schools. Still, in every school, the admitted student should have the potential to benefit from its mission, find purpose in the school's education, thrive in its culture, and know the necessary resources will be available to serve the student's learning needs. In this Standard, a school is asked to reflect on all aspects of its enrollment management and admissions processes. Then, a school will demonstrate that its enrollment processes align with its mission.

1.a. **The school's enrollment and admissions process align with the mission, core values, and cultural context of the school.**

> The Indicator asks a school to provide evidence they are firmly grounded in its actual practices and foundational documents (statement of core values, philosophy of education, profile or vision of its graduates, claims about expectations promised to parents, and even the essence of its motto if it has one).

In addressing this Indicator, a school should study its admissions and enrollment practices. It should look carefully at the marketing and public statements it promotes in the public's eye about the students it seeks to admit and the outcomes it promises. How do these practices and public statements align with its mission?

The following questions might generate discussion:

From a careful analysis of presently enrolled students and alumni records over an extended period, for example, five to ten years, can the school say with assurance that its mission has appropriately informed the attraction, selection, and admission of students who are a good fit for the school and who have benefitted to a high degree by their education and time at the school? A school might ask if it can see evidence of its mission in the lives of its graduates. For instance, if a school's educational mission emphasizes leadership, is there evidence that its graduates pursue leadership roles and responsibilities?

Does the school provide ample information for prospective students and their parents to understand the characteristics or profile of the student the school seeks in its admissions process, helping them assess and determine that the school may be a good fit for their child and no less, that for some children, it may not be a good fit? In other words, for some children, the school may not meet their needs, and perhaps they would be better served in a different school. For instance, if a school cannot adequately serve students with exceptionalities, whether gifted, with special needs, or

even "twice exception," is that information provided openly to prospective parents in the admissions process so they can look for a better fit? Does the school make clear whether it accepts enrolling students' IEPs and specific accommodations or program modifications?

In its admissions process, does the school make clear to parents of prospective students its mission-aligned expectations for them around compliance with school policies, relationships with teachers, cooperation with the administration, participation/volunteering in school activities, financial and fundraising obligations, etc.?

Does the school have a means of regularly evaluating its admissions marketing with internal and external constituents to determine its coherence with the school's mission, core values, educational philosophy, culture, etc.?

Does the school engage its faculty and staff in its admissions and retention processes to learn from them about the experiences of current students who were admitted successfully in alignment with mission and who are thriving academically, socially, and emotionally? Does the school engage the faculty and staff in its admissions and retention processes to learn from them about experiences with students who have proven unable to benefit satisfactorily from the school's mission and how the school might improve its admissions processes and programming?

Does the school have evidence its admitted students can speak about their experience in the admissions process and how it allowed them to see the personal impact the school's mission and core values would have on their education?

If a student either withdraws or is asked to leave the school — including for disciplinary reasons — does the school have adequate practices and procedures to affect a reasonable transition for that student to a more appropriate educational setting?

1.b. The school identifies and addresses current enrollment trends and influencing factors.

> This Indicator asks the school to examine admissions trends and the key factors influencing those trends. How is the school planning to either leverage or ameliorate those factors?

Some questions to consider:

- Does the school collect quantitative data to analyze student demographics and trends by age, grade level, sex, distance from home to the school, household income, race, ethnicity, and any other relevant characteristic?

- Does the school survey current parents' satisfaction with their enrollment decision and experience with the admissions process?

- Does the school ask parents who chose not to enroll their children their reasons for doing so?

- What two or three key factors most influence parents' choices to enroll their children in the school?

- What two or three key factors most influence students' choices to desire enrollment in the school?

- What enrollment trends (over the past three to five years) does the school observe with its

students and families?

- What is the school's strategic enrollment advantage that its competition cannot meet?

- What enrollment threats may impact the school in the near future, and how will it counter these risks without compromising its mission (i.e., the opening of a charter school, a new local public school, or another independent school)?

- What recent enrollment opportunities are waiting to be tapped?

- Are there essential program changes the enrollment trends indicate as necessary?

- What is the school's plan to respond to an unexpected catastrophic loss of enrollment, say, 20% or more?

- Does the faculty and the governing body/board understand the realities of the school's enrollment and their responsibilities to recruitment and retention?

- How is the school strategically addressing enrollment vis-a-vis its competition?

- Are students involved in the admissions process, and if so, how?

- What active role do faculty play in the admissions process and decisions?

- Is the school strategically adjusting its staffing in line with its mission to meet increases and decreases in enrollment?

- Does the school use agencies, and if so, what role do they play?

- If the school accepts applications from international students, how is their English and general preparation level accurately and truthfully assessed?

1.c. Enrolled students are appropriate for the mission and their learning needs can be fully met by the school's program and personnel.

> This Indicator asks a school to address how its admissions and retention processes are aligned with its mission and appropriately respond to students with learning needs.

An accredited school should accept students who are appropriate for its mission and should not accept those who cannot fully benefit from it. When the parents of students with learning needs, learning differences, or learning disabilities approach the school for admissions, the school should know its ability to serve the students with its curriculum and programs. Likewise, for admitted and enrolled students, a school must have faculty and staff who are knowledgeable and experienced to deliver the curriculum and programs to these students. This ensures successful outcomes and students who achieve.

In the admissions process, a school should be transparent about its assessment tools, resources, and capacity to serve its students' intellectual, physical, social, and emotional needs. Not all schools need to have the resources internally. However, if not, they need to offer access to external resources for the students, for example, through Special Education services provided by the Local Education Authority (public school district) or outsourcing to other trusted, quality educational providers. Once admitted, schools should also have reliable procedures to monitor student progress.

Beginning in the admissions process and consistently throughout a student's time at the school, parents should receive regular, meaningful communication about their children's progress and any accommodations or modifications made to their curriculum and programs.

1.d. The admissions and enrollment management policies and practices align with the school's beliefs and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

> This Indicator asks a school embracing DEIB to consider whether its beliefs and commitment to equity, the diversity of its student community, and the practice of accepting and respecting students "as they are and who they are" informs and determines enrollment policies and practices.

Schools might begin their reflection by reviewing the school's student anti-discrimination statement and other DEIB statements and institutional commitments. The school should also know whether it receives direct or indirect federal funding and if, legally, this may have a bearing on its admissions practices and processes, similar to its effect on higher education concerning the use of race in admissions. Then the school should ask:

- Do the school's student anti-discrimination and DEIB statements align with the school's mission, core values, and educational philosophy?

- Are these statements presented clearly and compellingly in the school's marketing materials?

- Do they inform the school's enrollment management policies and practices?

- Do they guide the school's admissions practices from a parent's first inquiry to the final admissions decision?

- Have they brought about the removal of barriers or mitigated practices in the admissions process that prospective students and their parents may perceive to be racist, ethnically insensitive, culturally offensive, or exclusive in any way?

- Do they meaningfully influence retention strategies and decisions?

The school might also ask:

- Does it have accessibility practices in place to facilitate the practical and formal elements of the admissions and enrollment process for the parents of prospective students from diverse backgrounds and cultural experiences or who are not English speakers?

- If the school enrolls boarding students, does it address issues and concerns about sexuality, gender, and gender orientation in its admissions processes that may be relevant to a student's dormitory placement?

- Does it have regular practices to access and evaluate the alignment of its admissions and enrollment management policies and practices in light of its DEIB beliefs and commitments?

- Does the school consistently seek feedback about its admissions processes from marginalized student populations and those traditionally and characteristically underrepresented students in the school community?

A school might also ask if it is transparent with prospective students and parents of students about areas it does not seek diversity or practice inclusivity. For instance, a self-described girls' school with a mission to provide a girls' education can decide not to admit students of other genders. But in doing so, it should be clear in its marketing and admissions practices. A faith-based school that serves students of a particular religious affiliation can likewise specify that it prioritizes in its admissions processes students of that affiliation. However, again, it should be clear in its marketing and admissions practices and, most importantly, how that prioritization aligns with its mission.

1.e.   The granting of student financial assistance aligns with the mission.

> This Indicator asks a school how it allocates financial assistance as a component of the admissions process aligned with its mission. School financial assistance is usually either merit-based or need-based. Both kinds can be used to admit students who are a good fit for the mission and will benefit from it.

Is financial assistance allocated in collaboration with the admissions office? Does the school use financial assistance to attract and retain students who fit the mission well? Does the school have enough financial assistance to meet the needs of all the qualified students who apply, and if not, how does it ensure it distributes aid to students who will benefit most from it?

Ample student financial assistance allows many schools to create a community with diverse socio-economic, opportunity, geographic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. For some independent schools, the practice of equity hinges in no small measure on sufficient financial assistance and its strategic distribution. It enhances opportunities for students who may never have considered attending the school and provides the means to stay enrolled. A school can use this Indicator to reflect on its policies and practices for granting student financial assistance and how they can support the school's practice of equity. It asks schools to consider the factors used to allocate and distribute financial aid. Is it only calculated financial need? Or does it weigh, in addition to calculated need, institutional goals to increase diversity with underrepresented and traditionally marginalized students? And if there is a greater need for financial assistance than funding available, how are priorities determined, who is involved in those decisions, and how is this communicated to families?

1.f.   The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Following a comprehensive discussion of Standard 1, the school should understand its strengths and its areas for potential growth. For this Indicator, a school is asked to outline, in as much detail as necessary, plans for improvement and growth. If the school has a long-range or strategic plan, referencing goals and timelines within that plan would be appropriate.

Required Materials

A. Current marketing and enrollment management plans

B. Link to an online admissions application

C. Parent tuition agreement

D. Statement of financial aid policies and procedures

E. Non-discrimination policy (may be included in other materials)

- o NEASC requires all students to be treated fairly and equitably.

- o The missions of independent schools may be gender specific.

F. Parent and student handbooks with date of most recent revision

FOUNDATION STANDARD

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

The governing body/board understands its essential role. It demonstrates that understanding through information gathering, the study of issues and areas of Board concern, decision-making, observable behaviors, documentation (i.e., board minutes, reports, long-range plans, head of school evaluations processes), and its own self-reflection and assessment.

Accredited schools are governed by a spectrum of organizations ranging from boards of trustees to advisory boards, from multi-level authority structures to one person. This Standard refers to that body (a single individual or many) that bears primary and essential responsibilities for the school's mission and viability. If these duties are carried out or shared by more than one group, this Standard refers to their collective responsibilities and behaviors.

Schools with complex governing structures should explain in the Self-Study the lines of authority and how the various structures effectively serve the governance of the school.

This manual uses the terms "board" or "governing body" interchangeably.

2.a. With consideration of best practices and legal requirements for nonprofit boards in state of incorporation (if applicable), the governing body/board understands and carries out its responsibilities to the school's:

- **mission**
- **value proposition/educational quality**
- **fiscal integrity**
- **support for the head of school**
- **long-term planning, with a minimum of a three-to-five-year horizon**

> This Indicator asks the governing body to examine its understanding of its responsibilities and provide evidence of how it carries these out with respect to its bylaws and consideration of best practices.

The Governing Body of an accredited school is clear about its defined responsibilities. The board of a well-governed school carries out these defined responsibilities with careful attention and respectful adherence to its constitution and bylaws and for nonprofit schools to any state regulations.

However, "good governance" is not limited to following bylaws and state regulations. For example, most bylaws will indicate that the governing body has a responsibility to hire, evaluate, and support the head of school. But best practice specifies what that support might entail; for example, a commonly held best practice is that a board neither engages in the school's day-to-day operations (the head of school's domain) nor creates a "back channel" for parent or faculty communication with gripes and grievances (typically, the head of school's responsibility). Bylaws tend to be fixed. Best practices, guided by bylaws, grow dynamically, correspond to the context and culture of the school and its board, and are perfected over time.

The governing body should reflect on its responsibilities and best practices for how it ensures the school's:

- Fidelity to its mission in all aspect of its program and operation

- Value proposition retains a strategic advantage in the school marketplace

- Educational quality, measurable qualitatively and quantitatively

- Fiscal integrity

- Appropriate support for the head of school

- Other areas under the board's supervision, including its own requirements and practices for transparency, accountability, and, when needed, confidentiality in the board's conduct of its business

The governing body might consider how it documents its discussions about the school's mission, defining the school's value proposition, and the quality of the outcomes the school guarantees to the students and their parents.

The governing body might consider how thoroughly it understands the school's finances and has in place appropriate procedures such as an annual audit or a third-party independent review of operations to assure itself and the community that effective financial monitoring and internal controls are established and carefully followed.

The governing body might consider how closely it collaborates with the head of school to provide a thorough, regular, and mutually understood assessment of professional goals, progress on strategic initiatives, and the development of relationships within the constituent community. The governing body or board of an independent school should understand that the head of school is its only reviewed employee; all other administration members, faculty, and staff report to the head of school.

2.b.   **The governing body/board accurately identifies and addresses significant opportunities and issues.**

> This Indicator asks that boards consciously and frequently reserve time to discuss what lies ahead in both the most local and the broadest ways.

Foreign policy may result in significant changes in the international student market. Local politics may dictate whether or not a school can develop a parcel of land. Technology initiatives may carry major implications for school programs. While no one expects a board to be master prognosticators, a board has a fundamental responsibility to use appropriate data and analysis to look toward the future. A board should aim to:

- Understand enrollment trends and directions

- See evolving issues likely to confront young people

- Project the school's financial future

- Discuss broader national and international events

- Imagine where the school and its social context are headed

This Indicator does not ask that schools know which tech company or app will revolutionize social media. It does ask that Boards demonstrate that larger questions about the future always be part of the board's deliberations and play an appropriate role in policy.

2.c.   The governing body/board undertakes its leadership role in the development, review, and updating of the school's strategic plan.

> The Indicator asks the governing body to consider its leadership in each phase of planning: initiating development of the plan, regular formal review, and strategic updating.

The governing body has direct responsibility for guarding the school's mission from inadvertently or intentionally drifting. It has the same direct responsibility for advancing the school's mission. This responsibility is translated into its leadership role with long-term and strategic planning.

NEASC accredited schools do not expect the governing body to write the school's strategic plan any more than the head of school should write the school's strategic plan. Long-range and strategic planning is a process that involves the entirety of the school's stakeholders through phases from beginning to end. However, it is the governing body's role to provide leadership throughout the process. Even when this role involves hiring a planning consultant, the governing body does not dispense with this primary responsibility.

2.d.   The governing body/board seeks a balanced membership, representing the school community's diversity and key areas of expertise, interest, and abilities.

> This Indicator asks the governing board to reflect and document how it ensures a representative diversity of the school community, including experience, expertise, interests, abilities, and informed perspectives.

NEASC recommends that boards establish specific guidelines for the board members' diversity, expertise, interests, abilities, and informed perspectives. Establishing this structure can be very helpful when openings occur by creating priorities for vetting and invitations. There are some obvious general responsibilities, professional and personal experiences, or connections to the school a board should consider. How the board should represent the school community's diversity in other respects — point of view, gender, age, race, ethnicity, etc. — may be less obvious. Discussing the "balance" of these categories in the context of actual individuals who might serve will remain a continuing obligation of the full board.

The school may wish to consider individuals who are:

- Past parents
- Alumni
- Individuals of notable achievement
- Individuals from the local community and/or other constituencies important to the school

- Individuals with an ability and interest in financially supporting the school

- Individuals with particular professional experience: finance, law, medicine, facilities, education, skills emphasized in the school's program such as performing or visual arts, specific athletics, international travel or relations, government service, volunteer not-for-profit activities, etc.

- Individuals whose personal qualities and perspectives are likely to contribute to the positive and creative energy of the board

- Current parents

- Students, where applicable

NEASC recommends that a diverse board can provide essential leadership to the school and that schools should be wary of creating a board heavily weighted toward one or two general categories, i.e., parents, alumni, "wealthy donors," or "just people we know."

2.e. The governing body/board uses effective policies and procedures to identify, select, and mentor new members.

> This Indicator asks the board to reflect on and document its process for regularly discussing and promoting new board membership, ensuring possible members are always under consideration and vacancies on the board will be readily filled when they occur.

Maintaining a board's wisdom, creativity, and commitment depends on a reasonably steady influx of new members. Identifying the needs of the board, generating a "pool" of candidates, deciding who among them and how these individuals should be vetted, inviting them on to the board, and ensuring they are thoughtfully mentored remains a fundamental board responsibility. While a few schools may be able to select from a large number of potential board members, most schools find the group of those who are qualified, able, and willing to serve will be relatively small. Whatever the size or depth of this "pool," thoughtful discussion and transparent processes are essential.

NEASC strongly recommends that boards have a written protocol for each step in this process:

- Identifying potential candidates

- Deciding who should be vetted to understand their capacity and potential commitment to the school

- Deciding when to invite them on the board, who should ask them, and how this invitation is to be presented

- Establishing a clear and mutually understood mentoring system

What is essential in this process is that the board regularly and specifically discusses board membership, ensuring new members are always under consideration and actively engaging with potential new members well in advance of inviting them.

It should be noted in this context that many schools find it difficult to recruit effective and committed board members. The importance and challenge of doing so cannot be overstated, and a

board without a "waiting list" of qualified members (and some schools do maintain such a list) would be well advised to keep "board membership" as a persistent and regular theme in discussions.

2.f.   The governing body/board appropriately and effectively communicates decisions and actions to the school community.

> To fulfill this Indicator, the board should provide specific examples of various kinds of communication and of the decisions that motivated it. Examples of decisions the school's board would choose not to communicate are also helpful to establishing the board's understanding and action.

The "school community" includes current parents and families, the local and broader community in which the school exists, faculty, staff and administration, and, where appropriate, students. Deciding to whom, how, and how often to communicate with various constituencies will always be a matter of judgment and wisdom for the board. Many internal board decisions (i.e., how to rebalance an investment portfolio, whether or not to hold a board retreat, what new members are under active consideration) would not and, in some cases, should not be communicated beyond the board.

Other decisions — the search for a new head of school, the board's investigation of a serious complaint or breach by a current or past faculty member, the construction of a new facility, and progress on a strategic plan — should be actively communicated.

NEASC recommends that boards talk openly and regularly about their own communication with constituencies beyond the board room and that all communications from the board be coordinated with the head of school, without, however, being a head of school communication.

Effective communication is an ongoing board responsibility and remains a key responsibility. In general, any issue that will, or has, affected the public perception of the school, any issue that directly affects students, faculty, staff, or families, any issue that bears on the school's health and future, and any issue that speaks to the school's identity and character should be communicated.

2.g.   The governing body/board manages its own leadership transition effectively.

> This Indicator asks a board to reflect and provide evidence about how a transition in board leadership will be managed long before it occurs, considering a board's bylaws and best practices. It is possible that this particular Indicator may not be relevant at the time of a school's Self-Study. But it will be relevant at some point.

The Chair's role, like that of the head of school, is vital to the board's success. The Chair sets the tone, helps the board understand its responsibilities, and manages the many discussions and often challenging work that builds an effective board. In some schools, Board Chairs serve many years — sometimes decades — and, in others, there is a defined and limited term in office. At some point, all schools will undergo a change in board leadership, and it is best practice to anticipate this event long before it happens and to understand how the transition will be managed.

Candidly, this is a topic of some angst in many schools because, again, like the head of school, matters of personality, ability, sense of humor, interpersonal skill, and history with the school will

come into play. Boards are very human organizations and depend on the mutual respect, understanding, and humane perspective of those who manage the transition. A leadership transition can be seamless, positive and creative for the entire school if managed well. But it must be acknowledged that, at times, feelings can be hurt, and some sense of injustice can linger when a transition is not as smooth as one might hope.

Boards are composed of volunteers who come together willingly to offer their talent, treasure, and time to the health and future of the school. No standard exists that could lay out all that needs to happen on an individual board when a transition is on the horizon. In terms of accreditation, NEASC can only observe the importance of leadership and note where such transitions seem to be unfolding reasonably or where additional attention needs to be paid.

2.h. The governing body/board plans for head of school transitions.

Occasionally, it may be necessary for a governing body or board to take action — sometimes relatively swiftly — around the head of school. When a head of school falls ill, or a family emergency takes him or her out of the community, or when the board determines it can no longer support the Head either for specific behaviors or an accumulation of unfortunate events, the necessity for clear, forthright and rapid communication with all constituencies is imperative. Schools, particularly in an age of instant communication, need leadership and clarity at moments that might stress the community. It would be worthwhile for a Board to ensure that its own "rapid response" is in place and fully functional. This response plan might be nothing more than a bi-annual "check" that such a system is in place and that all folks on the board understand how the chain of communication, and command, might work.

Of course, as mentioned in other parts of this manual, it is impossible to plan for every contingency. The fundamental concept here is that a board has a process for rapid, effective, and dependable communication among its members and with all the elements of the school's constituency.

In some for-profit schools (i.e., where the owner is also the head of school) and many religious schools, the board does not employ the head of school. These Boards need to articulate their relationship with the head of school and be sure the lines of authority within the school are transparent and well-understood.

Being part of a good and helpful Board always requires good judgment and will involve thoughtful balance. A Board too disengaged risks losing sight of essential goals; a Board too engaged weakens the head of school and can demoralize the community. There is definitely a "Goldilocks Zone" of effective Board work and good Boards understand that assessing and rebalancing their level of engagement with the school is an ongoing and unending responsibility.

2.i.   The governing body/board effectively assesses its governance practices.

The boards of NEASC accredited schools should perform an annual board assessment or performance evaluation that includes questions directed to individual board members and to the board's collective work. This assessment can be accomplished with a single instrument. A variety of templates to perform this work are readily available online or through independent school organizations. The questions below are also an approach to board assessment. The key to any assessment is regularly established times, at least annually, devoted to examining and discussing

governance practices that result in improved board leadership and governance practices. Generally, a quality board assessment should ask:

- Does the board state clear annual and long-term goals?

- Does the board establish specific measures of progress?

- Are board meetings well organized, and is time used productively?

- Is there adequate preparation for each meeting?

- Are board meetings enjoyable, and do members look forward to them?

- Do board members know one another?

- Is the current board committee structure effective?

- Does the board fully understand the financial reality of the school?

- Is the board maintaining healthy relationships among its members? How is it doing this?

- Does the board devote time to issues in the community of the school that may affect its future?

- Is the relationship between the Governing Body and/or Chair of the Board and the head of school effective and cordial?

- If the board is working with a new head of school, does the board have clear goals and expectations for itself in the transition?

- Is the board fulfilling its responsibilities to and communicating effectively with the community of the school — parents, alumni, and the "wider" community?

2.j.   The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Following a comprehensive discussion of the Standard, the school should have a sense of its strengths and areas for potential growth. For this Indicator, a school is asked to outline plans for improvement in as much detail as possible. If the school has a long-range or strategic plan, referencing goals and timelines within that plan would be appropriate.

Required Materials

A. Current governing body/board roster indicating length of service

B. Current bylaws

C. Minutes of two recent meetings

D. Governing body/board self-evaluation instrument

E. Head of school evaluation process/instrument

F. Corporate status as a tax-exempt institution, if applicable

G. Conflict of interest policy with an annual member disclosure statement

FOUNDATION STANDARD

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

This Foundation Standard stands at the heart of the school's ability to support its mission and the programs delivering it. The Standard includes finances, facilities, technology, and advancement. An accredited school should be able to demonstrate that it has sufficient financial resources and the capacity to generate sufficient resources to maintain the school for the foreseeable future, but at a minimum, the next five years.

NEASC Accreditation asks schools to report the totality of their annual budgets with enough transparency to establish their viability. This means, specifically, that total annual revenue should meet or exceed total annual expenses. NEASC strongly recommends against borrowing next year's tuition or other income (gifts, endowment draw, etc.) to pay this year's bills. If borrowing or income from next year's tuition is required to meet this year's annual expenses, repayment provisions must be demonstrably within the school's future capacity, and the school should provide evidence it does not plan to continue this practice in coming years. Failure to repay such borrowing and continuing to do so annually all too easily results in a school falling further behind yearly. This practice defines "non-sustainability."

NEASC accreditation must be founded on accurate information demonstrating the school's ability to meet financial obligations. Such demonstration includes contingency planning that accounts for reasonable scenarios around major facility maintenance or replacement, enrollment down-turns, investment declines, or other factors specific to the school (i.e., a lease that may or may not be terminated; a local ordinance that may restrict future growth; a relationship with a parish or religious order that may be revised, etc.).

The school's leadership may and, in many cases, must actively consider other indicators of a school's relative financial health. A responsible governing board will, as appropriate, maintain a detailed understanding of the school's financial strengths and weaknesses.

Specifically, NEASC Accreditation expects a school to demonstrate its ability to meet the totality of its obligations, not the sum of its assets. In this regard, schools should also closely monitor any gifts, loans, or other financial arrangements and expenses that are "one-time" events. Schools should plan as precisely as possible for these "unusual" expenses or sudden but unique increases in income and should never build "one-time gifts" into their operating budgets — as tempting as that sometimes may be. Such gifts/bequests may deliver a school from an annual deficit, but the school has a responsibility to look beyond the year in question. If a gift, a loan, or an endowment draw allows the school to operate for "one more year" what is the plan for the year(s) after this one?

While many schools perform audits each year of operation — and these are the most reliable way for a non-profit organization to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and viability — NEASC Accreditation requires these documents at the Five and Ten-Year Reports. Also, schools must complete the Annual Report and include the budget information requested yearly.

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

3.a. The school allocates, manages, and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support and advance its mission.

> This Indicator asks a school to reflect on and provide clear evidence that it has the financial resources to support and advance its mission.

A school's budget is one of the clearest practical expressions of its mission. Financial assistance, faculty compensation and professional development, program support and evolution, facilities maintenance and construction require the school to establish priorities and make decisions. Suppose a school's mission is the personal development of individual students, and the budget supports a staff and faculty capable of responding to each student. In that case, the resources are supporting the mission.

If a school's mission includes students with special or particular needs and it employs a faculty with the experience and education to support such students, its resources are sufficient to reflect this mission. If a school's mission includes assertions about the importance of "state of the art facilities" and the facilities are, in fact, obviously magnificent, then the budget supports the mission. If a school's mission includes "an inclusive community from all walks of life" and financial aid does, in fact, bring these students to campus, then the mission is supported. Conversely, notable issues in a particular area would indicate resources are not "sufficient" to support or reflect the mission.

3.b. Based on Annual Report Data and/or other reliable studies, the school accurately identifies current and long-term financial realities and challenges and has a capacity to respond to fiscal emergencies or unforeseen circumstances.

For this Indicator, the school should create three to five-year budget projections with narrative explanations based on trends and reasonable predictions about enrollment and tuition, financial aid, salaries and expenses, predictable increases in health-care costs, and a reasonable plan for contingencies. This Indicator is tied to the Board's planning for the future but requests schools to provide specific planning documentation.

3.c. Tuition and other revenue adequately support the school's stability and long-term financial sustainability.

> This Indicator is specifically about a school's stability and long-term sustainability. It asks the school to analyze and present figures indicating the role of tuition revenue in the school's total financial picture.

A graph of total expenses and the various components of revenue to meet those expenses would be one way — along with the numbers — to present this information. There is no "measure" for the percentage of total revenue that tuition should provide. Schools differ widely, ranging from tuition that accounts for nearly 100% of total revenue to much less than 50%; however, schools must be clear about the role tuition plays in the revenue of the school and should articulate the trends observed and predicted in the upcoming three to five years.

3.d. The school maintains a system of documented internal controls, Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), as applicable, and complete financial transparency as a matter of legal compliance and ethical practice.

> This Indicator asks a school to review and provide evidence of its documented financial practices and internal controls and how it ensures their effectiveness.

NEASC Accredited schools with appropriate internal controls maintain the highest levels of financial integrity and reduce the risk of theft, embezzlement, and fraud. Internal controls and Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) ensure transparency and accountability. Internal controls allow a school to plan for the future with accurate and timely accounting records. They allow the school leadership and the board to monitor the school's operations carefully and to set and achieve financial goals accurately. They ensure the school is in compliance with all state and federal laws regulating its operations. They safeguard the school's assets and, ultimately, they guarantee the students' education will not be compromised or cut short because of financial mismanagement.

3.e. The school's facilities appropriately support the students and programs.

> This Indicator asks the school to document the facility's capacity to support the students' learning, curriculum, and programs.

If a school states that it has "small classes and individual attention," but the facility does not contain enough classrooms for this kind of program, then it must present plans to remedy this situation. If a school has a "highly competitive athletic program" but inadequate field space, cramped locker rooms, and few buses to carry students to games, it should have active plans to improve its facilities. Similarly, suppose a school's mission calls for "frequent community gatherings" and has at least one space where various kinds of all-school meetings can comfortably occur. In that case, it may be supporting its students and programs very well. The school might like more of these spaces and have plans to create them, but its current facility may be appropriate to its mission.

Most schools have a list (sometimes very long) of facilities to construct, improve, renovate, raze, or replace. Accreditation asks schools both to assess current realities and to envision the future. Facilities are a critical component of planning. This Indicator encourages schools to reflect on and evaluate their facilities as they currently exist in terms of the school's mission, student experience and needs, and the support they provide the faculty and staff.

3.f. The school undertakes appropriate and effective facilities planning to address needed, intended, and/or desired improvements and maintenance.

> This Indicator asks the school to include facilities planning (indicating the schedule and needed actions to maintain or improve the current facility) as a component of planning.

Some schools maintain a separate Facilities Plan, and some fold this work into a Strategic Plan. This planning can exist in several forms but should refer to elements such as the following (this list is not intended to be all-inclusive):

- State of current electrical, plumbing, and heating systems

- Schedule for needed repairs or replacement as necessary

- Roof, siding, windows, etc., and structural elements

- Walks, driveways, pathways

- All safety equipment: fire extinguishers and equipment, elevator inspections, etc.; door locking equipment, video safety cameras

- Furniture and fixtures, theater seating

- Landscaping, fields, ponds or water elements, playgrounds and playground equipment

- Athletic facilities — gym/field house, rink, pool, squash courts, exercise area, training room, waterfront equipment

- Any specific athletic equipment or areas — ski hill, crew facilities, and equipment, climbing walls, fencing or gymnastics equipment and areas, etc.

- Visual and performing arts facilities (including music studios, practice rooms and performance spaces, areas and equipment for painting and drawing, sculpture, clay and pottery, kilns, photography labs, drama and dance facilities, lighting equipment, wood and metal shop, printing shops, jewelry-making spaces and equipment, etc.)

- Science facilities and labs, particularly storage for chemicals and lab equipment

- Technology, in all its complexity of software, hardware and infrastructure, communication equipment

- Vehicles and other related equipment — trailers, crew trailers — groundskeeping equipment, mowers, chain saws, etc.

- Maker spaces and "creative areas"

- Fencing and enclosures where needed

- Signage

3.g. **Technology infrastructure adequately supports both the educational program and institutional operation.**

> This Indicator asks a school to review its technology infrastructure specifically in light of the school's mission, core values, educational program, and the strategic goals of its operation.

In the last twenty-five years, and more recently during the pandemic, most schools have expended enormous amounts of money to create technology infrastructure. If any realm in education defines a "changing landscape," it is this one. "Technology" is a vast, intriguing, expensive, and often confounding reality for schools. Many technologies have created stunning advances, staggering possibilities, and previously unimaginable resources for schools.

"Infrastructure" refers to staffing as well as wired and wireless technology and computer equipment. The sufficiency of the school's infrastructure depends on its educational philosophy, current

resources, and its particular reality — a boarding school benefits from an electronic locking system on its dorms. A science department brings water flow and erosion to life with a graphic simulator. The football or field hockey coaches use multiple simultaneous video feeds to record and help their students see and improve their play.

Schools should use this Indicator to reflect on how well its technology infrastructure supports its educational program and operations with a focus on the student experience.

3.h. The school's development/advancement program identifies short- and long-term goals and strives to achieve them.

> NEASC does not establish benchmarks or goals for school advancement. But this Indicator asks schools to reflect on and report their accomplishments, their methods for achieving them, and their approaches to assessing past success and how they will measure future successful efforts.

Independent school development programs span an enormous spectrum from practically non-existent to highly professional offices with directors leading dozens and dozens of staff. Many independent schools would feel fortunate to raise $100,000 in a single year. Others might experience despair if they failed to raise $10,000,000.

Accreditation asks that schools evaluate their advancement effort in terms of their mission and goals, their resources, their history (especially with successful fundraising and campaigns), and their institutional realities—age of the school, number of living alums, average age of alums, average amount of annual gift, annual support of the parent community and so on. Raising revenue and resources beyond tuition dollars using techniques from bake sales to massive capital campaigns is a fact of life and a hallmark of a not-for-profit independent school.

Those experienced in the field advocate for a thoughtful understanding of the realities of fundraising and the approaches — and hard-won knowledge — that underlie its practice. Such observations can be both helpful and sobering. NEASC counsels that it is beneficial for boards and Heads of School without much experience to seek professional advice and assess a school's institutional realities openly and realistically. More than one head of school and board has foundered on the shoals of unrealistic expectations, inadequate planning, and rash execution. Effective fund-raising often takes incremental steps and countless conversations. It has been said, for instance, that the "effective fundraiser" is standing on the shoulders of an effort that preceded them by decades.

3.i. The school stewards its resources using best practices for environmental sustainability.

> This Indicator asks the school to consider how it demonstrates a commitment to environmental sustainability.

If applicable, discuss how the school's infrastructure is energy-efficient and explain any recycling initiatives. Overall, is the school taking any steps to actively minimize its ecological footprint? In addition to the learning environment, does the curriculum seek to develop a sense of environmental responsibility in students?

3.j. **The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.**

Required Materials:

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

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

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

FOUNDATION STANDARD

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

This Standard focuses on the policies and procedures around hiring, referencing, and structuring the faculty and staff. Issues of professional development and faculty evaluation are included under Standard Ten. The purpose of this Standard is to help the school ensure that it uses thoughtful, thorough, and responsible approaches to hiring and organizing the faculty and staff.

4.a. The faculty and staff are qualified and well-suited for assigned roles and responsibilities.

> This Indicator asks a school to reflect and provide evidence of the process that leads up to its hiring decision or the decision about how best to deploy a faculty and staff member in their assigned roles and responsibilities. It asks if they are based on a solid foundation of reputation, proven ability, and demonstrated or documented qualifications.

NEASC recognizes that such achievements as graduate degrees, particular expertise in athletics, the arts, or other endeavors carry very different meanings within the context of different school missions. Some schools seek faculty with highly specialized advanced study at the Ph.D. level. Others seek staff with expertise or state licensure in elementary education, secondary education, or Special Education. Some schools require a religious commitment as a criterion of hire. Still, others seek faculty and staff with alternative — even highly unlikely — paths to the classroom.

"Qualified and well-suited" takes on vivid meaning in the context of the school's mission, educational philosophy, and the student population it serves with its cultural background, abilities, interests, prior opportunities, and maturity. An essential qualification for all faculty is a fundamental commitment to and understanding of the students with whom they work and experience in the areas for which they bear responsibility.

The reality of many hiring decisions, of course, will be founded on best judgment. One forms an impression, collects information from various sources, and, at some point, those offering employment in a school trust their instincts and reasoning, believing they have seen and understood a person's competence and compatibility for a position accurately. It seems as much a conscious as a subconscious decision and is often affirmed rationally only afterward.

4.b. Faculty are hired with an awareness of their commitment to the mission of the school and are provided with an orientation process that supports their assimilation into the school's culture and core beliefs.

> This Indicator asks a school about the role of the school's mission throughout and beyond the hiring process. While many teachers and staff can teach within their discipline or area of expertise, this Indicator asks about their suitability or adherence to what should fundamentally drive, motivate, and inspire.

The essential questions here revolve around the school's mission:

> How is the mission of the school considered when selecting candidates?
> When candidates are being interviewed?
> When announcing a new hire to the school community?
> When orienting, onboarding, or inducting in the educational philosophy, core beliefs, and culture of the school?

This Indicator asks the school to reflect on and discuss the preeminence of the school's mission in the following;

- The advertising and posting of positions

- How arrangements are made for candidates visiting the campus

- How visits to campus for candidates are organized and conducted

- Who conducts interviews

- The nature of the questions asked in the interviews

- The nature of the questions asked of references

- Who makes final hiring decisions

- The plan for orienting new faculty and staff

- In the mentoring or induction process for new faculty and staff

- When observing and evaluating in the initial years

- Opportunities new hires have for self-reflection on their own alignment with the mission, culture, and core beliefs of the school.

4.c.   Personnel policies and hiring practices align with the school's beliefs and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

> This Indicator asks those making the hiring decisions how they intentionally balance the many factors that may go into recruiting and hiring faculty, staff, and administrators with the school's commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Hiring "the right people" — those capable of meeting the student's needs, the school's goals, and the expectations of the school community — remains one of the most critical responsibilities of a school.

4.d.   There are sufficient numbers of qualified faculty and staff to support the mission of the school and the needs of the students.

> This Indicator asks the school to reflect on and provide evidence that it has a sufficient number of qualified faculty and staff to meet the objectives of the mission, the needs of the enrolled students, and to be sustainable given the school's financial resources.

This Indicator has two separate but integrated intents: it asks the school to make a reasoned assessment of staff size from the perspective of mission and based on the needs of the students. The "number of faculty and staff" in a school is likely, along with the number of students, one of its most significant manageable variables. It depends on such decisions as the number of separate courses and classes the school intends to offer, the number of students in each class, limits the school might place on class size, the intent of the program, the needs of the students, and the financial resources of the school. Accreditation does not dictate particular or uniform requirements for a faculty size any more than it does for suitable class sizes.

4.e. The school has specific, inviolable procedures to check the legal and professional background of all employees and of the other adults who may come into regular contact with students.

> This Indicator asks the school to describe its procedure for ensuring criminal background checks and professional background checks of all employees.

NEASC accredited schools require criminal background checks for all adults employed by the school. This requirement is not optional. While it is true that formal background checks may not reveal all that one would like to know about a job applicant, it is one of the foundations for serious consideration. Many organizations conduct such reviews, and NEASC strongly recommends that schools develop working relationships with one or more of them. NEASC also requires that the school conduct personal background checks through direct conversation and/or correspondence with former employers, school counselors or advisors, or faculty and with other individuals who have known the applicant personally and in-depth.

NEASC recognizes that many schools will employ a number of faculty and staff who have worked at the school for a long time. While long-time colleagues have proven themselves responsible and trusted by their behavior and demonstrated commitment, the school should conduct a background check for every employee on a regular schedule rather than simply at the time of hire. NEASC encourages schools to review their state's requirements regarding the frequency of background checks for all employees.

4.f. Faculty and staff compensation, benefits, and the work environment adequately allow the school to attract and retain qualified and well-suited personnel.

> In this Indicator, the school is asked to review the school's trends over time in awarding compensation to administrators, faculty, and staff.

Without looking at any one individual's total compensation (all forms of pay and benefits an employee receives), how has compensation served to attract and retain qualified and well-suited personnel? Anecdotal evidence and recent patterns in faculty and staff recruitment and turnover should be discussed.

4.g. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Following a comprehensive discussion of the Standard, the school should have a sense of its strengths and areas for potential growth. For this Indicator, a school is asked to outline plans for improvement in as much detail as possible. If the school has a long-range or strategic plan, referencing goals and timelines within that plan would be appropriate.

Required Materials

A. Current employee roster, including roles and responsibilities, length of service, and professional qualifications

B. Organizational chart(s) and/or protocols setting out lines of communication and areas of responsibility

C. Examples of each type of faculty/staff/administrative contract

D. Faculty handbook(s)

E. Faculty code of conduct or similar document (if separate from faculty handbooks)

F. The list of materials that the school consistently maintains in its personnel files. The following are recommended (do not include medical records or I-9 Forms):

- Employment agreement or contract

- Position description with role and responsibilities, unless included in an employment agreement

- Signed receipt of employee policy handbook

- Summary of most recent or current criminal background check

- Signed performance evaluations

- Resume with references and/or letters of recommendation

- Copy of teaching or administrative credentials (if required)

- Official copies of all transcripts

- IRS W-4 Form

- List of emergency contacts and next of kin

FOUNDATION STANDARD

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

NEASC provides a detailed document, the *NEASC Commission on Independent Schools Health and Safety Considerations*, that schools should review annually. The Considerations are intended to help a school establish a culture and climate around health and safety that characterizes ("permeates" is the language of the Standard) every aspect of school life. Given the complexity of schools and the multiplicity of school activities, writing a single document covering all contingencies in all situations would be impossible. And it would, by its length, likely be impractical.

The *Considerations* list numerous issues, protocols, and situations that demand attention. But the document is far from covering every issue where safety is a concern. Every time students are in school (in a classroom, lab, studio, or practice field); every time they travel to and from school, to an away game, to an international service opportunity; every time they go to football or crew practice, saw a board to build a set, climb a ladder to wash a window, or cross the street on a dark and rainy night, issues of health and safety are raised. Social media can help build a community and create in every student's phone, and fingertips, the potential for improper relationships or worse. School can — and should be — enjoyable, spontaneous, enthusiastic, and creative. To be so, the adults on campus must think constantly about health and safety issues. Students must feel physically and emotionally secure, and the school should provide evidence of the work to build this kind of trust within the community.

The six Indicators here are founded on the principle that schools can consciously and actively create a culture where students and faculty know that safety is everyone's responsibility. While no amount of list-making will cover every possible contingency, schools can do a great deal to create an essential climate and culture where respect, thoughtfulness, and care are boldly evident in every classroom, hallway, field, studio, and on every trip.

5.a. School leadership embodies and cultivates a culture of health and safety within the entire school community and understands its accountability for the health and safety of the community.

> This Indicator asks the school's leadership to reflect on the health and safety of the culture their words and actions have created. How do they embody in their leadership the ethos they desire to foster in the school? The leadership should provide evidence of its intentionality and how it demonstrates accountability to the community and its constituents.

The leadership and administration of a school set a tone and establish by their words and actions what is and what is not acceptable. If the head of school is alert to the sometimes subtle signs of prejudice or bullying that are not overt, or if the Head speaks directly and with the right inflection to kids who need understanding, and correction, those actions go a long way to building or weakening the culture of the school. Understanding begets understanding. Respect begets respect. Civility begets civility. It isn't magic.

Folks who know schools see the culture and feel the climate of a school community within minutes of walking on campus. Is there a sense of purposefulness and belonging? Is there a sense of

dedication and commitment to one another and the values that bind the community together, defining its daily interactions? Are people unafraid, candid, open? Are they trusting and trustworthy? Does one find humor, fun, and playfulness, even among the most senior students and faculty? A healthy school community is joyful. A safe school community is peaceful.

The leadership and administration lead, shape, and develop the school culture — healthy and safe or otherwise. And they know without question they are accountable for the culture that permeates the school and the kind of climate that transpires daily. If the culture is not healthy or safe, they know they are responsible, first and foremost. It is their job to make it so. They answer to the board, to parents, to faculty, to students. It is the voice of leadership that speaks for the community.

Still, in practical matters, "school leadership" extends to many throughout the community. Every teacher, coach, and activity leader exercises enormous influence on their cohort of students and their colleagues. Simply stated, the leadership in schools, which is, really, a relatively small group of people working and living and laughing and creating together, establishes an ethos that either promotes or hinders growth and flourishing. "Group dynamics" in schools are creations; the more intentional and positive they can be, the safer and healthier the schools will be.

5.b. The school understands its responsibility and commitment to each student's well-being and sense of belonging.

> This Indicator asks the school to reflect on its responsibility to ensure each individual student feels and knows they are welcome, accepted, and respected for who they are — neither less than nor greater than but equal to all others. It asks the school to evaluate its commitment in words and actions to the well-being of the individual students entrusted to its care.

Schools can keep students from physical risk and ensure the security of the facilities from unwanted individuals. But we know physical safety and security, while critical, are not enough. Students, like all individuals, have social and emotional needs that must be met. When a school is secure from outside risks, and the students' physical, emotional, and social needs are considered and respected, the students enjoy a sense of well-being that carries over into the energy and focus they devote to their studies, their involvement in activities, and the quality of their relationships with other school community members.

Many students find their social and emotional needs are met at school through a confident sense of belonging with their peers, the care and encouragement of the adults directly involved in their education, and, more broadly, the respect they are given by the whole school community. Students who have a strong sense of belonging regardless of their diverse backgrounds, talents, abilities, and likes and dislikes will often refer to the school as a family. They will speak of their friends, not narrowly referring to a few but widely of many.

5.c. The school's culture of health and safety reflects the intentions of each of the following sections in the *NEASC Commission on Independent Schools Health and Safety Considerations* document:

- **physical and emotional safety of students**

- **information and data management**

- **student behaviors and discipline**

- **faculty and staff health training, policies, and procedures**

- **communication**

- **facilities**

- **the crisis response plan (shared with local fire, police, and EMT offices)**

NEASC recommends that schools use the *Considerations* in two distinct ways. The first is a reminder to administrators, faculty, and staff of the many health and safety issues that exist in a school community. We advise schools to distribute, either electronically or in printed form, the document to all administrators, faculty, and staff and to spend time annually simply going over the list and the changes and additions that will come in successive editions of this booklet. Just reminding the school community of the paramount importance of health and safety and the reality that it includes planning, preparation, monitoring, training, and constant vigilance helps create the climate and the culture in a school where the necessity to keep safety as "job number one" is understood and practiced daily. And hourly.

Secondly, the *Considerations* can help guide the work of the school's Health and Safety Committee or other groups, meetings, or individuals who regularly and vigilantly focus on health and safety. In every school, the viability of programs and approaches depends on individuals demonstrating their care and commitment. Little ensures the health and safety of a community more surely than a few folks who are reliably persistent on the topic.

Humor, skits, drills, new information, questionnaires, thoughtful relationships with local emergency personnel — all these contribute to a sense that the school genuinely cares about health and safety, and individuals with this role can make an enormous difference to the culture and climate of the school. A school "Safety Officer" or a "School Safety Team", by whatever title the work might be undertaken, is often the key to an effective approach for the entire community.

Ultimately, individuals must care deeply that safety is everybody's responsibility. And these individuals — through force of personality, imagination, knowledge, persistence, and commitment — are the heart of building this climate and culture. Individuals charged to look for physical issues (e.g., a broken railing, a pothole, a leaky pipe, a dark crosswalk, a loose manhole cover, kids who roam off campus, a loose swing, a missing sign, an icy stairway) and who have the authority to correct them are crucial. Faculty and staff attentive to the emotional concerns of young people — tears in the hallway, anger on the field, silence when there was once a bubbly personality, unexpected rudeness — and that have the skill and insight to recognize when events need following up are essential.

A health-conscious culture knows the importance of every individual on campus. And it knows, too, that those in a school with responsibilities other than their assigned job are often vital to the school's health. Those who maintain the grounds see kids outside the classroom or dormitory. Those who clean the buildings see kids when faculty may not be around. Those who serve in the food service encounter the kids when their 'guard' may be down. The Head's Assistant hears folks who don't really want to tell the Head what's on their mind but want "somebody" to know. The nurse may spend hours with a student who comes with a headache or a stomachache that is only a diversion. Real health and safety are about what people take seriously and frequently how they act among themselves when nobody else is watching.

One way, and likely the best, to address this Indicator is for the school to include in its considerations a "health and safety officer, administrator, or standing health and safety committee." The school will find the terms "annual" and "accurately, regularly, and address" are key to this Indicator. The school should then reflect on and provide evidence for each of the seven sections.

In doing so, the school should create an approach to health and safety that sees what needs to be seen and a commitment to doing what needs to be done. The school understands that some issues need near instantaneous action and some others need considered, long-term approaches. It takes perhaps two years to plant and cultivate a healthy grass field. But a field with a sudden, ankle-breaking rut needs somebody with some stone or dirt this moment. It might take a year of planning to design and implement a course on the history of racism in America, but a student yelling racial epithets needs to be confronted at the time. And how that confrontation may unfold requires a sometimes subtle understanding of human cause and effect that might have taken years to develop.

We are hardly the first to believe we live in an "age of anxiety." But without question, we do live in one. Heightened sensitivity — sometimes very much for the good and sometimes unnecessarily self-absorbed — is simply a fact of life. Unremitting texting and social media can spread rumors and worse through a six-hundred-student school in minutes — perhaps seconds. The unbearable reality of school shootings — regardless of the nearly infinitesimal statistical probability of their occurrence — puts everyone on edge.

Health and safety, too, are helping kids and adults remain calm and develop perspective. The vast majority of events in schools are not traumatic or dangerous, and most rooms, fields, and trips are entirely safe. Fun and light-heartedness remain one of the great strengths of school life. A "culture of health and safety" identifies and fixes what can be fixed, figures out what can wait until tomorrow, and what, too, isn't quite as creepy as it might first appear. Adults have to be adults in a healthy and safe school and part of that responsibility is helping younger folks develop a longer view. Impatience may be the most dangerous emotion on the highway, and it is often less than helpful in school.

5.d. The school assures that it meets the NEASC required Child Protection Requirements for schools:

- **comprehensive due diligence in screening and hiring including background and reference checks**

- **documented policies and procedures that ensure the safety and welfare of all students**

- **appropriate and clearly outlined response if children are harmed, at risk of harm, or if allegations of harm to children are made**

- **clearly defined leadership responsibilities for child safety and reporting**

- **child protection training for all adults who work with students**

- **child protection, including online safety, is included in the formal learning program for students**

- **clear codes of conduct govern appropriate and acceptable behaviors for adult interactions with children and children's interaction with other children**

- **compliance with the legal, ethical, and cultural expectations and requirements regarding child abuse within the jurisdiction in which the school operates**

This Indicator is less comprehensive than the one above it, although it is by no means any less important. It asks the school to provide evidence for each of the seven NEASC Child Protection Requirements elements.

5.e. The school has a risk management process with qualified personnel to accurately and regularly identify and address any area(s) warranting immediate and/or long-term attention.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence of its risk management process and describe how it moves from the identification of a risk to its remediation. The evidence should include who is typically involved, their competency, and the frequency with which the school assesses different areas of security, safety, and health.

Every NEASC accredited school regularly assesses and addresses possible threats to its security and risks to the safety, health, and well-being of its students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This process may take many forms and include many individuals, including first responders, state and local inspectors, the school's insurance risk manager, and contracted experts.

5.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

> For this Indicator, a school is asked to outline plans for improvement in as much detail as possible.

Following a comprehensive discussion of the Standard, the school should have a sense of its strengths and areas for potential growth. If the school has a long-range or strategic plan, referencing goals and timelines within that plan would be appropriate.

Required Materials

A. Current crisis management plan/protocols, including up-to-date communications and contact information.

B. Compliance Documentation, including:

- current fire inspections for each facility

- food service certification (i.e., cleanliness, safe handling, health inspection)

- medical facility inspection as required (state and local requirements vary)

- as required by state or locale, any additional necessary testing
  (i.e., water at the tap, radon, asbestos, carbon monoxide)

- schedule of fire drills and lockdown/campus emergency and safety activity — both completed for the most recent year and planned for the current one

- documentation around individual activities where specialized health and safety considerations are necessary (i.e., waterfront and pool areas, sports practices and

games, field trips and off-campus trips, international travel, and immunizations)

- policy on the acquisition of current student health records

- statement from the head of school that the school's emergency plan is complete and has been submitted to the appropriate local officials

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

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

FOUNDATION STANDARD

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

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

The additional accreditation responsibility for proprietary schools is to provide evidence assuring the school places the welfare of students and the achievement of its mission above profit. NEASC does accredit schools that are not organized to comply with the requirements of the 501(c)(3) designation. Still, such organizations must clearly and unambiguously demonstrate their adherence to every Accreditation Standard.

6.a. **The owner and governing body share the values and mission of the school and are committed to long-term growth.**

> The school, in short, is expected to show by a description of the owner(s)' demonstrated care for the students and their school that the core values and mission of the school are their priority.

Provisions for financial aid, support for leadership and faculty, program development, dedication to proper facilities, and long-term commitment to the school's growth and evolution are paramount. A proprietary school should have existed for three to five years, minimally, to apply for accreditation and/or should provide documentation — contracts, written commitments, demonstrated financial responsibilities — giving clear evidence of the long-term investment in the school and commitment to its growth and development.

6.b. **The owner/governing body establishes and maintains policy-making processes with provisions for the participation of all stakeholders, as appropriate.**

A healthy school requires the engagement of the governing/advisory board, administration, faculty, staff, and, where appropriate, students, in decisions, establishing priorities, and developing policies, protocols, and expectations in the school community. Such participation and engagement are necessary for a positive culture and the effectiveness of the mutual commitment that builds true learning. Transparency around decisions, clear assessment procedures for administration, faculty, and staff, and a general understanding of the priorities and direction of the school all contribute to the achievement of the Standard.

6.c. **The school establishes and follows policies applicable to ownership that address conflicts of interest and provide protection against malfeasance by persons exercising control over the school.**

The school should provide clear guidance and signed "Protection Against Conflict of Interest"

statements for all individuals who might potentially use their positions in the school for personal or other gain that would compromise the experience of the students and the fairness of school decisions. This guidance and these statements should be expected from all members of the Board and each member of the administration with financial management responsibility.

6.d. There is a clear description for legal and tax purposes of the school's form of organization and a clear organizational chart that defines the roles and responsibilities of the school's owner/governing body, administration, faculty, and staff.

The school should articulate in writing the administrative and governance structures, expectations, lines of responsibility and communication, and clear job descriptions for the adults in the community. This description should be clear and unambiguous about the school's various responsibilities and lines of authority.

6.e. One person is designated as the chief administrator (Head, Principal, President, etc.) of the school; this person may be the owner.

It is imperative that the head of school, by whatever title they are known, possesses clear responsibilities and authority that encourage thoughtful decisions and dependable outcomes. No school can afford to have decisions by a head of school "second-guessed" or overridden by ownership or Board of Trustees/Overseers. The rule "he/she who has responsibility must also have authority" should apply. "Muddy" lines of responsibility and decision-making undermine trust, confidence, and morale and will only create a culture of mistrust.

6.f. The designated chief administrator is evaluated on an annual basis.

There are many effective instruments and processes that may be used for an annual review of the head of school, but they all share some elements in common:

- A discussion between the head of school and the Board/Owner about goals and an agreement about processes to reach them.

- A mutually understood set of measures for evaluation based around behaviors and activities rather than outcomes (i.e., did the head of school take all appropriate steps to ensure the enrollment for the upcoming year rather than "enrollment dipped by ten students...")

- A mutually understood assessment process (i.e., who will be interviewed and by whom, what observations will be made, how will these observations and statements be reported — by whom and to whom), and what other data or information will be collected?

- A mutually understood and followed process for the follow-up to the evaluation process — who is privy to the assessment outcomes and who participates in specific discussion?

- What public statements may or may not be made — and to whom and by whom — about the process and its results? (i.e., how will both positive and potentially critical information be shared?)

- An agreement that the process is intended, above all, for improvement and positive next steps.

6.g. **The governing body/board includes at least a third of its members who represent the public interest and have no contractual, employment, or personal financial interest in the institution. Public representatives should be free from present or potential conflicts of interest.**

It is critical to a healthy for-profit/proprietary school board that individuals with no contractual or personal financial interest be present, and their perspectives appropriately be considered in decisions. Faculty members, for instance, may well serve on such boards, but there must be individuals from the public — parents and/or others with valuable perspectives — who contribute to decisions. NEASC requests that at least a third of the membership should come from the public.

Additionally, the owner(s) may not serve as both Board Chair and head of school. This would be unacceptable in a non-profit school and is equally unacceptable in a for-profit/proprietary school. The functions, for all the reasons stated in the Governance Standard, must be separated to ensure balanced and reasonably objective leadership.

6.h. **The school has a provision for thoughtful, deliberate and transparent leadership transition. This is particularly important when the school leader and school owner are the same person.**

For some proprietary schools, leadership transitions can be difficult. A "founding head of school" and the Board who serves this school should work together thoughtfully and deliberately around issues that may be both difficult and emotional for all. While there are no "hard and fast rules" about such transitions and understanding, and it would be impossible to write a comprehensive Standard, NEASC recommends that boards and heads in proprietary schools consider the following:

- What is the mission and culture of the school?

- What leadership characteristics most complement and strengthen the mission?

- What role will the outgoing head of school play when he or she has "officially stepped down?" Will they be advisory? Continue on the Board? Be available for consultation?

- Does everyone agree?

- Does the head of school continue to have a financial interest in the school?

- What is that interest?

- How will a search be organized?

- Are there other family members with an interest or authority in the school?

- How will information about the transition be communicated? What is the timing?

- What role will the outgoing head play in the transition and communication?

6.i. **The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.**

Required Materials

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

1. Reasonable assurance that the school has the assets available to sustain operation of the school for the foreseeable future (which includes a current asset-to-liability ratio).

2. Assurances that the school has the systems in place to manage its finances appropriately. This could include:

   - tax returns for the organization, or its parent company or owner, for the most recent fiscal year

   - internal trial balance for most recently closed fiscal year

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

   - Should this involve a parent corporation, this corporation can give the school a copy of its annual audited statement for the corporation, and then separate financial documents (budget, P&L, etc.) for the school itself. Occasionally, schools are audited independent of the parent corporation.

   - Should the parent corporation refuse to submit an audit, it must provide a letter from its auditor assuring that the school appropriately addresses the concerns noted above about the school.

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

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

THE PROGRAM STANDARDS AND INDICATORS

NEASC independent school accreditation can often be perceived as focusing primarily on quality admissions practices, enrollment management, board governance, financial sustainability, hiring and staffing practices, and assurances of safety protocols and child protection; in other words, the "institutional matters." These areas are given priority in the Foundation Standards for good reasons. They distinguish independent schools and contribute to their daily viability and long-term sustainability. However, in a school that puts the child's education at the center of its mission, they are not the most important. They simply come first.

A school's teaching and learning are of the highest importance.

As a school undergoes its Self-Study and reflects on the Program Standards, it should consider them in the context of applying to all students at all levels, from prekindergarten through graduation. There is no specific standard for preschool programs, which NEASC defines as programs meeting the needs of three-year and four-year-old children. Likewise, there is no standard specifically for middle school or secondary school. Keep in mind that NEASC accredits only programs for three-year-old preschoolers through postgraduate. It does not accredit, approve, or certify in any way programs for children under three years of age. In a school's Self-Study, evidence from all levels should be provided to ensure a school is meeting the standards.

PROGRAM STANDARD

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

The essence of an independent school lies in its mission — its reason for being. Mission distinguishes independent schools. Parents choosing independent schools for their children do so with the clear understanding that the school offers an essential opportunity for their children that is not available in a public school. Typically, public schools are designed to serve students within a designated area (a school district, for instance) and in their establishment were thought essential for an informed electorate in a democratic society. In practice, they often champion attainment of a state prescribed core curriculum, workforce readiness, social mobility, the reduction of inequalities, and the formation of a common culture.

While mindful of state educational mandates, independent schools can encompass all of these values and more. Or they can pursue defined or specific educational purposes (or for many independent schools, religious purposes) and limit enrollment to particular populations of students. Because they are generally independent of public funding, state compliance mandates, and often mercurial legislative and public policy trends, they generally enjoy untethered academic liberty, classroom autonomy, and visionary excellence that serves their enrolled students effectively.

7.a. Mission permeates the school's culture and climate.

> This Indicator asks if the school's mission permeates the school's culture and climate. The school's mission — its essential reason for existing — should imbue the enduring culture of an accredited school and be manifest in the transitory climate of an accredited school, one apprehended primarily by the intellect, the other by the emotions.
> "Culture" is enduring or generally constant, composed of the spoken, written, and behavioral artifacts that signify meaning and identity to the school community.
> "Climate" is an ephemeral quality of experienced feelings that may change quickly and unexpectedly like the weather.

It is vital that independent schools state their missions explicitly, unambiguous, and compellingly, ensuring that their public declarations align with the actual practices in the school and, still more, to the educational advantage of the students who attend the school.

- A school with a mission to develop innovation in its students must ensure that its programs promote and cultivate new ideas, and that its students notably demonstrate creativity and ingenuity.

- A school with a mission to serve a religious faith and tradition must ensure its programs promote that faith and tradition with fidelity and that its students intellectually ascent to it and freely act on it.

- A school with a mission based on a philosophical approach to learning and cultivating the intellect must ensure its curriculum and programs promote and consistently practice that approach with authenticity to its origins and core values.

- A small school with a mission to develop the individual talents of its selective students in a supportive environment must provide such an environment with teaching practices that genuinely bring out its students' unique abilities and skills.

- A school that defines itself as single-gender must ensure that it possesses the understanding and unparalleled opportunities and advantages that a single-gender education should provide.

- A school with a mission to serve students with particular special needs or exceptionalities must ensure it remains at the forefront of teaching methods that are effective with its students' learning.

It is, in fact, relatively simple to write an educational mission including terms like "rigor," "creativity," "service learning," "commitment to others," and that oh-so-tired "excellence in education." The real challenge is creating specific approaches, curriculum content, programs, and formative student experiences that bring these abstractions to life meaningfully with the students and faculty.

In its Self-Study, a school needs "to live inside its mission" to be confident that it defines daily practices that serve its students and "get outside its mission" to evaluate its consistent relevance to a broader community or school marketplace. It lives inside its mission as it reflects on and discusses its essence within the school community. Like a suit of clothes fitting properly to the person and the person's intended activities, a school needs to consider how well the mission fits with the school's program, curriculum, and teaching practices — comfortably or uncomfortably, usefully or not usefully?

What about the students? How well does it fit with their needs? With the school's extracurricular activities? With the professional growth and development opportunities the school provides its faculty and staff? With the experience of the students in a school's residential program? With the kind of culture that permeates the school and the climate of the school on any given day?

A school "gets outside" its mission when it brings a critical eye, in the best sense of the phrase, to the fit of the school's mission and its present relevance. Some schools have a classic, ageless mission that always wears well. Others have a progressive mission, which may mean they are updating and revising it from time to time. Still other schools will need to see if they have not outgrown their missions, the school changing so much it needs to be tailored to its new purposes. It simply may no longer be attractive to students and prospective parents. Now is the time to look in the mirror. Time to look at what other schools are doing with mission. Alternatively, it may be time to reaffirm that the mission has precisely the right fit: "You're perfect!"

Research has demonstrated that "a positive, optimistic, respectful, creative, trusting, and energetic climate and culture are essential to effective learning." Indeed, independent schools have differentiated themselves by each of these attributes and more. Accredited independent schools rate highly in respecting each student's inherent dignity, inspiring their students' curiosity, developing their individual interests, heightening their engagement with even the most abstract subject content, and providing exceptionally rich and expansive core knowledge curricula. They excel at holding all students to equal expectations consistent with their abilities, balancing the teachers' autonomy in the classroom with the students' self-agency to direct elements of their education, and above all, giving students an unmistakable sense of community and belonging. Of course, no independent school is perfect in all these respects. Nevertheless, research has proven they are notable hallmarks defining the experience of most independent school students.

In providing evidence for this Indicator, it is worth pondering and discussing the distinctions between a school's culture and its climate. For example, if culture is the history of expectation, experience, and practice around a head's fireside chats with the community, then we could say that the climate is the atmosphere of the school community coming out of these meetings.

Here is another example: A school is known for working with kids who have struggled in their previous schools. The culture expects meetings where teachers and students will be honest and direct — some might think it is "brutally honest." For decades, the school culture has established a set of expectations around school meetings where people "call it as they see it." The culture is the deep set of expectations around what happens in this school. The climate is the feeling these meetings generate. "Sometimes, it takes us a couple of days to process," a school head said, "But that's the point. We process, and all get stronger because of that common effort."

Culture is the long tradition of "how we do things here," and climate is "how we feel when we do what we do here." Climate, typically, has a high degree of intentionality. It is created over time by the deliberate efforts of individuals like the walls of the Grand Canyon sculpted almost imperceptibly for eons by wind and water. Whether or not folks in schools are precise in their language about culture and climate, research and experience have established their central role in a good school. Positive school cultures reinforce the traditions, values, beliefs, and expectations of a school community. Events can change the climate of a school temporarily, but they should not alter the culture.

7.b. The school annually assesses the mission's relevance.

> This indicator asks a school to give practical evidence that the entire faculty and staff and trustees or advisory body discuss, reflect upon, and, when necessary, argue and reason together over the school's purposes.

Standard 7 asks schools to reflect on their reasons for being and, even more importantly, how their particular missions do, or do not, meet the current educational needs of the students they enroll and inspire these students' aspirations for the future. NEASC advises schools to recognize that missions are complex, usually far more so than the brief and necessarily compact language of a "Mission Statement." Mission statements summarize a school's central intentions but may fall short of describing the deeper human enterprise and invigorating culture the school aims to accomplish.

This Indicator asks schools to gauge how widely and deeply understood the mission is among the faculty, the trustees, the parents and, importantly, where appropriate by age and maturity, the students. It is key to look particularly at students for whom the mission has been clearly "successful" and those for whom it may have been less so is key.

This discussion should take place regularly and, in one form or another, daily. From time to time, but at the very least annually, the mission statement should be read aloud for faculty, trustees, and students, and its meaning dissected. Schools may find that the depth of their mission supports the same statement for years, perhaps decades. Conversely, they may decide that any number of changing circumstances require revision not only of the statement but also of the underlying intentions.

A school enrolling a variety of academic abilities may find itself increasingly called upon to meet the needs of children with true learning challenges. A school with a religious tradition may find fewer and fewer traditional students. A school that was once 300 students may find it now has ninety-five, and the programs it once offered must be refocused. A school with enormous resources may find that elements of its history require it to rethink its approach to student independence or faculty assessment.

7.c. The school effectively communicates the mission to faculty, students, families, and the larger community.

An accredited school gives evidence through meeting minutes, recorded discussions, and/or survey data that this discussion has occurred regularly and no less than annually, and that appropriate actions around this discussion have ensued. While NEASC accredits schools with an enormous range of missions and philosophies, all NEASC Accredited Schools must demonstrate that their missions serve the best interests of the students enrolled and foster an open, democratic, and welcoming society.

When the Visiting Team is on campus, they will talk with all constituents — faculty, administration, students, trustees, and parents — and ask them, from various perspectives, what the school's mission truly is and how it manifests in the community. They will seek to confirm the Self-Study's expression of a consistently understood and executed mission. It is not necessary that everyone express the mission in the same precise language but that there is reasonable consistency. They will listen, too, for frustration, "disconnects," misperceptions, or outright disagreement. These

differences of opinion, or knowledge, might be signs of a healthy and vigorous community contending with high aspirations, but they could also range into miscommunication, discontent, and dysfunction.

The Visiting Team intends to hold up a "mirror" and report on their independent observations. Their objective is to help the school re-enforce, create, or discover, as needed, the harmony around mission that underpins and guides a healthy school.

7.d.   Internal and external communications genuinely reflect the mission and core values.

> This Indicator encourages schools to remember that how things are said and what is said are inextricably bound together. Kindness or its absence, respect, or intolerance for different opinions, for instance, can either warmly enhance or painfully compromise a clear message about what will be acceptable and what will not in a school community.

Accredited schools strive to align all communication with their mission statements and core values. If the school's mission calls for "openness and honesty" in all dealings, then it has a responsibility to demonstrate both qualities in its communications. If a school intends to be reliable, trusted, and respected, then the qualities of its communications — the diction, tone, and examples it chooses to express — matter earnestly.

Schools should provide examples of both internal and external communication (e.g., memos from the dean of faculty to the faculty, letters by the head of school or the board chair to the parents, fund-raising brochures, or pages from the school's website). Particularly in an age of near-instant communication, it is sometimes easy to let the desire for immediacy substitute for a more thoughtful and well-crafted approach that expresses the school's mission and values.

7.e.   The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials:

A.   Current mission statement

B.   Other guiding documents, if applicable

- o   Statement of core values/beliefs/educational philosophy

- o   Statement of vision

- o   Value proposition

- o   Vision/Profile of the Graduate

- o   Statement of a school's beliefs and commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, or equivalent

PROGRAM STANDARD

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

The purpose of every accredited school is the healthy development of its students, "the kids," as we say colloquially. This Standard speaks directly to the quality of the faculty's relationship with the students and of the students among themselves. These are complex realities, observable in their full measure only over time and in various contexts.

For instance, teachers can, and often should, be "demanding" of students. How helpful a demand might be in the short or long run should be a continuously contemplated question. How demands are made is such a question. How an observer might evaluate demands is another. A demand can be made in stentorian tones. It can also be manifested in a relationship where doing less than one's best just feels unacceptable.

A demanding teacher can be engaging, encouraging, enthusiastic, and empathetic. A demanding teacher can also be demeaning, didactic, derogatory, and dispiriting. A teacher seen as demanding by one student might be "pretty interesting" to another. Student assessment of the quality of demands made upon them can be helpful and also problematic. An "unfair" demand when one is twelve may resonate ten years later as the most important lesson one learned in school. An "engaging" teacher for a junior in high school may prove disappointing in the long run when a student discovers the course lacked rigor.

"Inspiration" and "support" — the key terms in this Standard — require considerable discussion to assess fairly and helpfully. Teaching and learning is often a balancing act between the rigor imposed by the content level of the curriculum, the pace of the teacher, and finding the personal and cultural relevance to the students at this point in their lives. The art of this balance is figuring out what will be most helpful to students who live upon a long continuum of interests, abilities, motivation, and curiosity. A teacher must be engaged equally by the subject and by the student. This constant wondering about the quality of engagement contributes to the fascination of teaching and learning. And to the complexity of its assessment.

"Inspiration" and "support" are tools for analysis but not absolute states. They lie at the heart of the ongoing purposes of accreditation and also at the center of the challenge of accreditation.

Accreditation requires schools to reflect, discuss, research, test, and implement evolving assessments of the quality of the relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves. Some of these will be informal — "How was class today?" "How did that field trip really work out?" "Are you caught up on your reading assignments?"

Some assessments are formal: the annual review of faculty by a principal or department chair, the written student assessments of courses and teachers, and submitted lesson plans.

Each accredited school should write a narrative response to this Standard, including comments on the Indicators. In sum, the Standard asks: "How do we strive to inspire our kids?" "How do we support each student's personal growth and development equitably?" "How do we respond to each student's voide and active engagement in learning?" Specific examples from the experience of students and faculty should make up the bulk of the narrative.

This Standard is not a "checklist." It is intended to provide a school the opportunity to discuss the character of its approaches to its students in light of the goals of "inspiration" and "support."

8.a. The school recognizes, values, and nurtures the unique reality of every student at each stage of development.

Students in accredited schools deserve appropriate formation for developing their persons and inherent abilities. Schools should seek to recognize, value, and nurture their students' positive interests, aspirations, unique talents, and most basic realities—emotional, social, and physical. This consideration asks the school to reflect on how faculty and staff demonstrate an understanding of their students and how well do they exercise their capacity to support them on their developmental journey.

Faculty and staff might also reflect on the factors that can eventually contribute to a students' self-actualization and capacity to live a full and meaningful life in society. These factors might include matters of self-identity: race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and practices, political convictions, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and the circumstances of family life.

- How do faculty and staff observe, assess, and document individual students' abilities, talents, and interests at different developmental stages?

- Do faculty and staff help students assess their own abilities, talents, and interests at different stages in their development?

- Does the school create personalized learning plans with short and long-term goals that address individual students' strengths, weaknesses, skills, and knowledge?

- Are personalized learning plans regularly reviewed and discussed with students and their parents or guardians?

- Do faculty and staff provide individual students with personalized learning environments or experiences?

- How do the faculty and staff set the highest possible expectations for students while providing the right balance of inspiration, encouragement, and support so students can successfully achieve those expectations?

- How are optimism and hope expressed?

- How do teachers and administrators address students needing correction, redirection, or a change of behavior?

- Do behavioral policies and procedures reflect the unique realities of the students at different stages of their development?

- If students have specific health needs or learning challenges, do all persons who have "a need to know" in the community understand their role in support of the individual students?

8.b. The faculty and staff regularly monitor each student's social and emotional development.

> This Indicator requires schools to demonstrate that faculty understand age-appropriate student behaviors and that the school regularly and consistently finds ways to observe, evaluate, and support the students' social and emotional maturity, including regular

> reporting to the student's parents or guardians, and as beneficial, to the students themselves.

An accredited school is committed to educating the whole child and must have reasonable and accurate ways of monitoring the various aspects of their development. Students' academic, artistic, or athletic development may be more objectively assessed than social and emotional development. Yet, with the number of resources currently available to measure a student's social and emotional growth and maturity and the keen observations of the faculty and staff, regular attention should be given to each student's full and integral development.

This Indicator addresses the school's capacity to confront and address, as necessary, behaviors that are "outside the norm" of what is age appropriate. Some schools will rely on classroom teachers to regularly monitor individual student's social and emotional development. Other schools will take a team approach with trained professionals, teachers, and members of the school's leadership team.

Because NEASC accredits schools enrolling students from ages three to late teens, and sometimes beyond, who fall on a broad spectrum of maturity and intellectual abilities — from "gifted" to "challenged" — this Indicator speaks to the importance of understanding, assessing, and creating approaches, programs, and social and emotional learning practices (SEL) that strengthen the emotional and social growth of the students.

8.c. **The school understands and responds to the realities of the students' social and emotional experiences outside the school.**

> This Indicator asks the school to assess how aware are faculty and administration of the social and emotional experiences students have outside school, both positive and negative, that may have a bearing on their focus, engagement, and demeanor in school.

It also asks about how proactive the faculty and staff are in responding to the impact of negative social and emotional experiences of students outside of school that may have direct consequences inside school.

Some questions to consider:

- When in school, do students speak about closely identifying with or belonging to particular groups or associations outside of school? Do these groups and associations provide for the student's positive or negative social and emotional development?

- Does the school know if students have a supportive network of family relationships and friends? Does the school know if students are loners or withdrawn from social relationships outside school? If loners, is this intentional, caused by family pressures, demands, or needs, or because of healthy but unique interests unlikely to be shared by other students?

- Does the school understand and respond to students whose home lives appear to contribute to emotional immaturity or an inappropriate and unhealthy social maturity?

- Does the school understand the structures of their students' homes, particularly if, through conversation, adults are meeting the students' emotional and social needs?

- Does the school know if students are living in two homes and if this is an emotionally secure or insecure situation?

- Are students working a job to support the household income after — or even before — school?

- Does the school respond constructively when young students are left alone for several hours or overnight by themselves?

- Does the school know if students have parents or guardians who have chronic mental or physical illnesses, are absent for long periods of time, or are incarcerated?

- Does the school know if students lack necessities like sufficient or nutritious food, sleep, clean clothes, heat in the winter, sanitation, medical care, a place to study, and access to technology and the internet? How does the school act proactively for students who come to school lacking basic necessities?

- Are there reasons to believe students are experiencing violent or harmful disagreements among family members, substance abuse, sexual or physical abuse, exposure to pornography, the risk of trafficking, and other disturbances that may affect the students' social and emotional well-being?

- If they are international students, does the school effectively understand the social and emotional realities of their homestay experience in an American household?

Some students candidly and happily talk about their lives outside of school. Others hid their lives. Reluctance to talk about home life can result from feeling ashamed or sometimes fear. Understanding and appropriately embracing the total life experience of its students should be a goal for an accredited school.

In responding to this Indicator, schools should provide evidence of how they understand and respond to students' emotional and social realities outside of school.

- Does the school have an age appropriate social and emotional learning curriculum that can help students deal with the complexities of their lives outside school?

- Does the school create opportunities to speak empathetically with students about their lives, activities, and relationships outside school?

- Does the school talk privately with the parents about any serious incidents or patterns of emotional and social concerns students tell them about?

- Does the school ensure every student has an adult community member assigned to look out for their social and emotional well-being?

- Does the school schedule advisory periods into its master schedule?

- Does the school have a school-wide written assessment that can heighten faculty and staff's awareness of the students' social and emotional experiences?

- Does the school assign specific administrators or counselors responsibility to ensure constant discussion among faculty of their observations about students and plans of action, ensuring faculty understand the complexity of their students' social experiences?

In sum, is the school's awareness of its students' social and emotional experiences adequate to help children and young people who may face significant challenges in school and beyond the boundaries of the campus? This is often a large and complex subject for schools. Deciding when and how to intervene, or not, in a student's life at school or at home usually requires significant deliberation by appropriate school personnel.

8.d.   The school inspires and cultivates in its students the personal qualities valued by the school.

> This Indicator asks a school to reflect on the personal qualities that it values. Then it asks how the school inspires and cultivates the acquisition of these qualities in the lives of its students.

In independent schools' mottos, mission statements, core values, and educational philosophies we hear about the personal qualities a school desires to inspire and instill in its students. This list of attributes, characteristics, dispositions, habits, and virtues, often captured in Latin and frequently dating to the founding of the school, is almost limitless: courage, wisdom, integrity, compassion, honesty, respect, confidence, generosity, humility, faith, hardworking, collaborative, to name only a dozen. Others are more descriptive: leaders for the public good, socially conscious thinkers, purposeful citizens, life-long learners, active global citizens, saints and scholars, independent thinkers, righteous leaders, individuals with a growth mindset, entrepreneurs, and problem-solvers.

Many schools stress the student's habituation of personal qualities or character formation as much as the subject content of their curriculum.

As evidence, schools might consider narratives about how individual students were inspired by the school and how the cultivation of the school's valued personal qualities positively impacted the students' future endeavors or the lives of others. The school should explain, too, if it has in recent years changed the personal qualities it values, and if so, why?

8.e.   Students' perspectives and opinions are appropriately heard and addressed.

> This Indicator asks a school to assess how they listen to their students, respect their points of view, and how they respond appropriately.

This Indicator covers many school approaches and ages, and the term "appropriate" requires discussion and reflection, especially, as is often the case, a student's opinion is immature and not thoughtfully formed, or rises from the heat of strong emotions. The line between a juvenile student's outburst and an upperclassman's reasoned expression of concern requires faculty to develop a nuanced approach. An incendiary student newspaper article, a peaceful but persistent protest movement, an unsigned poster, or cruel graffiti in the hallway– and a thousand more examples of students expressing themselves through language and behavior — all require faculty to listen for content and tone and then respond appropriately, which at times also may mean not responding at all.

Schools should consider what formal and informal ways they hear their students. What channels are available for student expression? Many schools have student senates or councils that meet

regularly. Some survey their students about their classroom experiences. Some have designated times during chapel, school forums, and dorm meetings. Others have advisory programs or defined ways students can speak openly in small groups or individually with teachers and adult members of the school community. Classroom teachers may regularly design assignments that elicit student expression of their opinions or design projects that prompt students to take a stand on issues and concerns. Student voice may be solicited when a school considers new courses or extracurricular activities. Some schools have students on their school boards and included in the hiring process of new faculty. NEASC encourages student voice in the committee deliberations of the accreditation and school improvement process.

In a few words, the Indicator asks when students have a seat at the table and what importance a school places on their perspectives. It is important, too, that students know that they have been genuinely heard, even if they disagree or are not willing to accept the response they may receive from a teacher or administrator.

8.f. School culture promotes, supports, and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.

> This Indicator focuses on a school's culture and its many diverse elements: the expected behaviors, the institutional norms, customs, traditions, and habits, the people and objects that are honored or venerated, buttressed by foundational commitments and beliefs. The Indicator asks the school to provide evidence that its culture promotes, supports, and celebrates fundamental fairness and inclusivity.

The principal concept is that a school measures its culture by whether individuals are habitually greeted, accepted, and embraced by their peers, whether teachers impartially treat their students and justly conduct their classes, including participation and grading, and whether each student can access and take advantage of every available curricular and extra-curricular activity and program with a sense of unquestionable welcome and belonging. This does not mean a school cannot have tryouts for athletic teams, theater productions, or other competitive activities based on ability and merit. Still, students should know that if they try out, they will be treated fairly and without favoritism or prejudice. No less important is what a school's culture will not allow or tolerate for the sake of inclusion and equity, for instance, its rejection of bullying, harassment, hazing, blatant as well as subtle forms of discrimination, racism, ostracization, meanness, ridicule, hurtful teasing, unkindness, and shaming in all respects. This Indicator is not asking about a school's policies. It asks about the code of behavior embedded in the school's lived culture—the code that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, denounces all that undermines equity and inclusion.

Schools celebrate what they value and value what they cherish. Celebrations memorialize a school's ideals. In the course of a school year, many schools celebrate individuals, teams, activities, and events. This Standard asks about the school's culture of celebrating, how it helps advance and achieve equity, and how it demonstrates and prizes inclusion.

Schools are not perfect. This consideration asks a school to contemplate its strengths and challenges, noting its responses to events or incidents when students or faculty fall short of the goal. Schools that describe how difficult situations were handled rather than merely noting their success demonstrate their clear understanding of the term "promote" in this Indicator.

8.g. The school understands the unique needs of each student with a disability, including disability-based behaviors, and, within the United States, the rights offered to children with disabilities under IDEA.

> This Indicator asks a school to examine their support services for students with learning disabilities and learning differences.

Schools possess highly diverse support for students and families. How does the school effectively screen for learning disabilities? If parents have questions about a reported student interaction with faculty, how is that addressed? If faculty report concerning behaviors in class, what happens? If a child has ongoing counseling needs, how are they provided for and monitored? If students are having trouble in classes, how is this communicated, and to whom? How does the school assess whether or not support is adequate?

Also, where appropriate, schools should support parents' and students' entitlement to federally funded support administered by town or local services. In some communities, effective services for children and young people may be available that are not part of the school's capacity. Likewise, schools that develop effective partnerships with local social service providers and resources can be helpful to students and families.

8.h. The school inspires student engagement and belonging in the school community.

> This Indicator asks how schools motivate their students to be part of their community.

How does the school promote its students' full engagement? Research has shown that students who participate in the life of the school and its activities are most likely to do better academically and receive the full promise of a school's education. How are students introduced to activities and student organizations? How are students from less advantaged backgrounds given an opportunity, and the confidence, to participate in student activities that they may have little or no prior cultural knowledge? How are students of less material means given the resources and encouragement to participate in activities that typically require additional funds or equipment—sports equipment or musical instruments, for instance? How are students with no prior experience inspired to participate in sports at a learning level that has not been available to them or to try out for parts in plays without theater experience? How are students encouraged to participate in school debates, activism, and service activities? When students are encourage to participate, they recognize they are values members of the school community; this, in turn, leads to that treasured sense of belonging.

Accredited schools regularly reflect on their activities, programs, and traditions (academic, athletic, artistic, social, service, clubs, etc.) and closely consider the measure of their students' participation in the school community. This consideration is not about the variety or richness of the school's programs but the ways the school works intentionally with individual students, inspiring and enabling them to discover and develop their talents, abilities, and skills beyond the classroom — particularly latent talents they may not have known they had. This Indicator views the school community as both organized programs and more spontaneous school activities. Schools could reflect on this Indicator through an equity lens.

8.i. The school's practice of equity reduces the predictability of who succeeds and who fails by ensuring every learner has access to the resources they need when they need them.

> This Indicator asks a school to reflect on how it addresses the inequalities of incoming students — their material, opportunity, and experience deficits — without holding any student, given natural abilities, to lower expectations than any other. And, the Indicator asks how they meet those deficits once enrolled, setting students up for success and the capacity to achieve their full potential.

Students thrive in emotionally, socially, and physically safe learning environments. Within these safe environments, accredited schools provide equally high expectations for all students; that is, each according to ability, a curriculum of rigorous content, skills, and cultural relevance, engaging personalized instruction, well-prepared and highly competent professionally collaborative educators with sufficient autonomy and resources to produce the optimum learning outcomes, comfortable student-centered classrooms or learning environments, regular physical activity, and the necessary supports for those students who need additional help or accommodations.

However, some admitted students enter excellent schools with significant deficits or inequities. Unlike their peers, they may not have had the same opportunities — academically, socially, culturally, linguistically, and materially. Students unprepared in content knowledge, academic skills, and work habits too often lack confidence in their own abilities. They may feel like outsiders, embarrassed by their backgrounds or circumstances.

Students entering without comparable academic preparation as their peers may be assigned to lower-level courses without the possibility of attaining higher-level courses during their time in the school. Faculty and staff may implicitly hold lower expectations for these students. Some faculty may attribute a student's deficiencies to cultural background. Low expectations imposed on students can weigh heavily on their performance, following them throughout their academic careers. Learning deficits and low teacher expectations may inadvertently mark a student for failure.

The school might consider if the faculty and staff practice equity of access, opportunity, and choice by considering:

- Does the school provide supplemental resources for each student at the time of need?

- Do all students have the opportunity to take even the highest-level courses during their time at the school, or will they always be relegated to coursework based on their performance upon entering?

- Does the school ensure all students have the essential learning tools and supplies— backpacks, laptops, internet access at home, art supplies for artists, instruments for musicians, materials for science fair projects, the cost of fees for dual enrollment courses, APs, test preparation tutorials, and such? How does the school level the playing field for all students to reach their potential?

- Does the school provide "bridge classes" during the summer before entering the school for students with inadequate math or language preparation?

- Does the school provide enrichment classes and activities during the summer that are affordable to all students?

- Does the school ensure every student can cover the additional costs of field trips and participation in class trips?

- Does the school's practice of equity ensure that all students receive the necessary resources, opportunities, and advantages to succeed, reducing the predictability of who succeeds and who fails?

8.j. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials

A. Documents describing specific support services and programs such as:

- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

- counseling

- advisory program

- college guidance

B. Policies addressing the needs of neurodiverse students and those with disabilities, student support plans, and IEPs

C. Any additional documents describing the school's strategies and supports for students with needs, such as:

- Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework

- Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) plan

- Culturally and linguistically responsive practices

PROGRAM STANDARD

9. Commitment to excellence distinguishes the program.

"Excellence" defines the twin accreditation goals of "achievement" and "aspiration." It is a term aiming toward high goals that does not permit an absolute definition. We recognize excellence not in a single act but in acts or practices that are done repeatedly well. We might find ourselves in agreement with Aristotle that excellence is an art acquired by training and habituation. Therefore, excellence in a school's program, as in any human activity, is not fortuitous or by chance. Rather, it is a recognition that comes from years of doing what a school does best, was done intentionally, and delivers the desired results.

Excellence might be an inspirational goal or a hackneyed cliché. What school doesn't promise "academic excellence"? In the Program Standards, the term intends to set a high bar for the aspirations of the school's program as a whole and equally in every individual program: academic, social, emotional, athletic, artistic, spiritual.

A school enrolling students from largely economically deprived families may find "excellence" in high rates of retention and graduation and students who go on to college. A school with a population of significantly challenged students may find "excellence" in its graduates' independence and eventual self-sufficiency. A school that claims leadership is a hallmark of its program finds opportunities for its students to lead in the school and the local community and can speak confidently of those students who have achieved leadership positions beyond their years in the school. Excellence exists in the broadest context of achievement and practice.

To be helpful, this Standard must be read in the context of a school's mission, core values, educational philosophy, and, most of all, what we call "program." Program is the broad structure of practices, events, and activities at a school that brings the mission, core values, and educational philosophy to life or, we might say, into play. In sum, it is what the student experiences through our intentional design. The school's program includes but is broader than its curriculum. And its scope is undoubtedly greater than any individual program, such as the athletic or arts program. It is how, in practice, the purpose of the school is realized in the education of the students.

9.a. A relentless commitment to excellence, as defined by the school, inspires the program.

> This Indicator asks a school to provide evidence that its relentless commitment to excellence through observable practices inspire its program.

NEASC accredited schools are tireless in their commitment and pursuit of excellence. They are never satisfied with what's just "okay" or what's "good for most students." They drive themselves to do what is best for all students by doing what is best for each student. If education is an art, they practice their art constantly with an unwavering mind to perfect it. This means they must regularly reflect and discuss what practices, achievements, and accomplishments are genuinely excellent and how they will identify these as such.

Is the excellence of a school's teaching practices demonstrated by attaining certain scores on objective tests? Is it determined by expected behaviors that can be observed within the community: kindness, respect, honesty, for instance? Is excellence measured by the demonstrable progress of

students with severe disabilities? Is it observed by examples of innovation and creativity? Is it demonstrated by the quantity of food the students collect annually for the local food bank, the coats donated for the nearby homeless shelter, the number of students who win National Merit Scholarships, the academic competitions won, or state titles in sports? Is it evident by qualitative rather than quantitative measures; for instance, how a team consistently behaves after a victory or a loss? Is it illustrated by how kids characteristically support classmates with understanding in difficult circumstances? Is it seen by what a school chooses to honor and reward?

Acknowledging that not every practice of a school is perfect, the essential elements of this Indicator are the practices that the school believes most accurately represent its definition of "excellence."

9.b. The school's core values, beliefs, and educational philosophy inform and guide program planning at all levels.

> This Indicator asks schools to provide evidence that they translate the general and abstract language of its core values, beliefs, and educational philosophy into its program.

This means that planning at all levels, from classroom lesson plans to administrative planning, is aligned specifically and concretely with the school's foundational beliefs about education and the formation of youth. If one of a school's core values is "the pursuit of truth," "developing a growth mindset," "creating global citizens," or "following in the footsteps of Jesus," how precisely does the school plan and deliver its programs to reflect this value?

Key to this Indicator is the school's ability to demonstrate the impact and influence of its core values, beliefs, and educational philosophy on its program generally as well as narrowly within specific programs. The strongest Self-Studies report actual examples: for instance, how a school demonstrates that its core value of "honesty" has played a role in music rehearsals, soccer practices, or social service projects. A school might provide evidence of how its educational philosophy is reflected in its daily schedule, the prioritization of regular breaks for physical activity, creativity, or quiet reading, or its emphasis on global academic travel.

9.c. The students' personal identities, neurodiversity, experiences, and particular backgrounds are intentionally reflected in the program.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence that it knows its students' significant defining features and characteristics and has designed its program to reflect those features and characteristics.

The central tenet of this Indicator lies in a faculty's awareness and understanding of the commonalities and differences among its students and the school's capacity to incorporate those elements into its program. This Indicator is asking a school if it knows its students — not generically, but specifically — recognizing what characteristics, features, or differences of abilities define them as individuals and as groups, and then how the school designs and implements its program, not only for who and what they desire their students to become, but also so the students feel in the program's design and delivery they are known and respected for who they are. An excellent program will bear a true reflection.

9.d. **The school's current written curriculum, evidence-based best practices, and/or pedagogical research inform the program.**

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence that its program is informed by its academic curriculum, well-documented or accepted best practices, and educational, developmental, or psychological research. It also asks the school to provide narrative evidence that its written curriculum, evidence-based best practices, and/or pedagogical research inform its program and by doing so, contribute to its excellence.

One of the most intriguing aspects of work in education is the constant and ever-evolving pedagogical research, imaginative approaches, and new paradigms. Countless university courses, workshops and meetings, journals, websites, books, and online programs are available to every school with a computer in its library or offices. Readily available weekly summaries such as The Marshall Memo or The Educator's Notebook offer an array of advanced thinking and reflective practice on multiple topics.

Accredited schools encourage their faculty and staff to think broadly and deeply about their subjects, be restless scholars and curious about human development, and always keep themselves current on the larger issues impacting education and youth.

Educational research is often very good at asking intriguing questions and sometimes less effective in providing definitive answers, but what is important about this research is the constant stimulation it offers teachers to contemplate their ways of doing things, their perceptions of what is effective, and the possibilities for improvement that a new thought might bring. In many ways, a "spirit of inquiry" should characterize the educated mind and infuse the school's culture.

Evidence to support this Indicator should provide the "why" or objective reasons that a school does what it does in a way that can be communicated to its constituents. Why does the program introduce certain instructional practices and types of cognitive learning activities according to a set progression or in a particular grade? How does the curriculum, best practices, or research support this progression? If a school is a Waldorf School, a Montessori School, or identifies as Classical Liberal Arts, how does its particular curriculum inform its program?

A school might ask why it introduces certain experiential learning or critical thinking skills in certain grades and not others. What research, best practices, or developmental psychology support this? Why has the school designed its middle school program differently than its elementary school program? What research or best practices did the school use in determining these differences? Why is its early elementary school program different from its early childhood program? What kinds of learning experiences, opportunities, and activities does it provide its upper-level students that it does not provide its first- and second-year students, and why?

A school might provide evidence of what best practices and research support its Project-Based Learning, its emphasis on fostering global awareness or cultural competence, its approach to its students' special needs or learning differences, or the effectiveness of its Social and Emotional Learning. A single-gender school might provide evidence and anecdotes that its curriculum, knowledge of best practices, and relevant research support its program's distinguishing and significant features. A school designed with Flexible Learning Spaces might provide evidence of its effectiveness, supported by its curriculum, and informed by best practices or research. A therapeutic school might provide evidence of the primary research that supports the design and

development of its program.

While NEASC does not assert a particular educational philosophy or any body of research or best practices, it strongly supports the essential role pedagogical research and study play in program development and educational practice.

9.e. The written curriculum aligns horizontally and vertically.

> This Indicator, most importantly, asks the school to give specific evidence of its intentional thinking and planning around the progression of teaching and learning.

"Horizontal" curriculum alignment refers to the coordination of programs for students at the same general place in their education. It means that students taking "Algebra I" in a school with more than one instructor teaching different sections are held to the same expectations. It means, more broadly, that students in similar grades have generally equivalent experience. "Vertical" alignment refers to the progression of the curriculum from elementary to more advanced topics and expectations. These alignments are about grade levels: third graders moving to fourth grade and subject transitions; Introductory Biology moving to Advanced Placement or "honors" Biology. These alignments are about reasonable consistency for students in similar courses or grades.

While there is value in individual and even idiosyncratic teaching styles, a good school demonstrates age- or grade-level appropriate planning and develops a discernible "arc" to the curriculum. If the school believes, for instance, that learning to do independent research is fundamental to an excellent education, then this value should be clear at every grade level and throughout the program while reflecting changes in expectations and outcomes aligned to the students' developmental abilities. If a school believes helping students develop their creative spirit is vitally important, then all teachers should demonstrate how creativity is manifested explicitly in the planning and delivery of courses, artistic endeavors, and the individual students' progress as they move through their course of studies.

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9 f. Faculty have dedicated time to discuss the written curriculum and how to implement it effectively.

> This Indicator aims to promote a vigorous, continuous, and true commitment to seeking out the best curriculum and to strengthen and enhance the students' learning by dedicating faculty time to reflection on its effective implementation.

This Indicator inquires into the school's commitment to establishing dedicated times for the faculty to reflect on the written curriculum and discuss ways to improve instruction throughout the program. Dedicated times may be formal or informal. They may involve the faculty from one or more grade levels or one or more disciplines. They may include learning specialists, instructional coaches, academic deans, or teachers from other schools. The school might ask:

- Do the faculty talk with each other about the curriculum, the course syllabi, their lesson plans, and the instructional practices they have found effective? Or do faculty exist in individual silos?

- Are there attractive and comfortable physical places where faculty can engage in meaningful conversations — faculty rooms, department offices, lounges on campus where faculty actually enjoy meeting and talking to each other?

- Is time set aside for curriculum conversations, sharing new ideas, research, and evidence-based best practices, discussing the school's revered learning principles, candidly expressing what works and what doesn't, and congratulating one another on successes in the classroom?

- Is common planning time built into the master schedule as an indispensable element?

- Are professional development days designated for curriculum updating and review and the subsequent revision of lesson plans for effective implementation?

9.g. Faculty employ a range of assessment practices to appropriately promote learning, monitor growth, and consistently measure student progress.

> This Indicator asks for narrative evidence that the school's faculty employs various assessment practices to promote learning, monitor growth, and consistently measure student progress.

Assessment is central to understanding the effectiveness of the school's program. Schools should understand and use both "formative" and "summative" assessments and be very clear about the purposes of these approaches. Generally, "formative" assessment is used to understand student progress and guide next steps. "Summative" assessment is used to measure current achievement. The most concise distinction we know appears in The *Social Profit Handbook* by David Grant when he writes:

> *"When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative assessment; when the customer tastes the soup, that's summative assessment."*

NEASC recommends that schools make extensive use of formative assessments as these prove helpful to learning. "Summative" assessment has a place, particularly for the necessities of grading, but can be an "easy" substitute for the more profound educational progress in the formative assessment.

If a teacher asks a third-grader to explain primary colors and the teacher's genuine interest is the student's actual grasp of the concept, that is formative assessment. If the teacher assigns a grade to the student's description based on its accuracy in describing red, yellow, and blue, that may be a summative assessment.

The distinction lies in the purpose of the questions asked and the behaviors of both teacher and student that follow. Schools might also note, particularly in their vertical planning, that the frequency of summative assessment is likely to increase as students advance through the grades. The balance of these two fundamental approaches and the ways schools gather data, compile statistics, and use the techniques of analytics to make effective decisions should be constantly reviewed. Each teacher in school and the whole faculty should demonstrate thoughtful, clear, and articulate policies and procedures around assessment. Faculty should also strive to keep abreast of

research and modify approaches where applicable. Students and their families should understand the uses, purposes, and protocols for assessment in the school.

9.h. Educational media and technology enhance the instructional program and meet the needs of the students and faculty.

> The Indicator asks schools to think in some depth about the uses of technology and the potential to strengthen the educational endeavor of the school.

It is a cliché to note that few if any, innovations since the printing press have affected education as profoundly as personal computers and access to the internet. Schools should have written plans and protocols around all areas of technology, especially the use of cell phones, social media, and artificial intelligence, encompassing their academic, creative, social, and ethical benefits and risks. Schools should regularly and thoroughly review the ever-expanding repertoire of technologies and seek to determine which will enhance the teachers' instruction and students' learning and which will not.

The internet, social media, cell phones, and the endless array of gaming opportunities can change the fundamental reality of schools, families, society, and our self-perception and identities. This Indicator asks schools to discuss their approach to the vast world of technology within the context of their understanding of child and youth development, the social lives of students, and the goals and context of the many programs offered.

Some schools have made technology integral to all aspects of their educational programs. Others, like Waldorf Schools, have consciously eschewed student use of most or all technology. Accreditation does not require a particular infrastructure or an exhaustive understanding of available technologies. It does ask that schools consider the world of technology in light of excellence in their programs and demonstrate with evidence the effectiveness of current practices.

9.i. The school's international programs and partnerships (if applicable) are aligned with the school's mission and meet the needs of all engaged in or affected by them.

This Indicator refers primarily to the school's specific international programs. Some schools make trips abroad for briefer or more extended periods. Some schools establish service-learning projects. Many schools maintain long traditions of fascinating and valuable international exchange programs, sending students to and receiving them from other countries. Some schools are establishing "partnerships" with other schools with the goal of implementing their school's curriculum through faculty trained in or by the NEASC school.

In each of these events or programs, the school should demonstrate that the program enhances the mission of the school and that it meets the needs of all students, and adults, who participate or are affected. Schools should be wary of programs whose primary goal is financial gain.

NEASC notes that many schools engage with a variety of "Agencies" both to recruit from other countries and supervise students in those countries. NEASC urges schools to use "Agencies" wisely, not to be overly dependent on them (or rely on just one), and always to maintain independent supervision and contact with each international student and his or her family.

All schools with students in homestay programs must demonstrate their independent supervision and contact with each student. Agencies have their strengths, but schools should recognize these groups fall on a broad spectrum from highly responsible to "only talk a good game," with some schools seriously injured by disreputable entities.

9.j.   The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials

    A.   Current written curriculum/curriculum guide

    B.   List/examples of assessment tools/methods demonstrating longitudinal student progress

    C.   Documentation detailing any specific provisions for international students

    D.   List/examples of supporting resources essential to the delivery of curriculum

PROGRAM STANDARD

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

Accredited schools are committed to their faculty members' and staff's continuous professional growth. Professional development is part of the schools' culture. Every professional person seeks multiple ways to evolve and improve their effectiveness. Schools must encourage, support, and set aside time and resources for professional learning and development.

While it is helpful if schools possess financial resources to support multiple workshops or on-campus speakers, much professional development can be done economically and cost-effectively. A "professional development group" or a Professional Learning Community on campus can disseminate articles, spark thoughtful discussions, bring in an effective speaker from a sister school, suggest new techniques, or send a link to a fascinating Ted Talk or YouTube presentation. This Standard focuses on the school's commitment to an adult culture permeated by opportunities for professional learning and development.

Elements of this Indicator are also present in Standard 9, and schools need not duplicate information requested there; in some schools, combining elements of Standard 9 and 10 can be helpful.

The difference between Standards 9 and 10 is this: Standard 9 focuses on content that informs the program, and Standard 10 focuses on the school's commitment to professional development in all phases of working with students.

10.a. The school creates a safe and supportive teaching environment for faculty and staff that promotes collegiality, collaborative professionalism, and the collective belief of the faculty and staff in their ability to positively affect their students' education.

This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence the faculty and staff teach their students in a safe and supportive environment, an environment defined by an unmistakable trust of colleagues, a collaborative desire to encourage and foster each other's professional growth, and a confident faith in their collective efficacy to impact their students' learning and formation.

Teachers in accredited schools know they have broad autonomy to use the methods or approaches most effective for their students' learning. The school supports this freedom. However, teachers exercising this freedom do not exist in isolation. The school also establishes a demonstrably collegial culture that promotes the exchange of effective practices at all levels of the school and among faculty at all stages of their careers. In this context, teachers feel safe to experiment, take risks, or try innovative approaches, knowing they have their peers' encouragement and support.

Still, this encouragement and support is not blind. Teachers in accredited schools model collaboration built on strong professional relationships, a high degree of trust, and defined protocols for coaching, mentoring, formal and informal feedback, and, at timesco, means for candid, constructive criticism. Together, the teachers grow professionally. With the students' needs always at the heart of what they do, they share a common interest and investment in each other's learning and development.

They do so because they also share a collective belief that, as a whole, they can and will make a positive difference in their students' lives. They believe in the transformative nature of education, not as an abstract notion but as a power they possess as a faculty to impact the individual lives of their students. They believe in what they do together and are confident in the expected results.

10.b. Professional learning and development are determined by the needs of the students and informed by the personal and professional goals set by faculty and staff in alignment with the school's strategic planning.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence that its professional learning and development effectively addresses the students' present (or anticipated future) needs: intellectual, social, emotional, physical, artistic, and so on. It asks the school to provide evidence that its professional learning and development in planning, design, and implementation supports the personal and professional goals set by the individual faculty and staff. Lastly, it asks the school to provide evidence that its professional learning and development program aligns with its strategic priorities.

Planning worthwhile professional learning and development requires a thoughtful understanding of the school's mission, core values, beliefs, educational philosophy, and, above all, the needs of the students. Professional development may be highly theoretical or seemingly unrelated to a teacher's subject area. It may be formal or informal, individual or conducted in groups, as simple as sharing an educational article in an email or as grand as completing a graduate degree in education. But, at the end of the day, we know that it must somehow translate into improving a student's ability to acquire course content, a required skill, or develop a necessary behavior. This is its ultimate purpose.

Accredited schools also ensure that their professional development offerings or programs reflect and respond to the individual faculty and staff's current interests and annual professional goals. Often, this is based on an individual's years of experience in the classroom, knowledge of their disciplines, and aspirations for professional growth.

Effective professional development is no less aligned more broadly with the educational goals of the school's leadership and with the strategic direction and planning of the school's governing body or board. If a school, for instance, takes a strategic direction to be more inclusive, then professional learning and development may be needed to realize a more inclusive approach in curriculum design and classroom methods. All these essential features guarantee that a school's professional learning and development are relevant and meaningful. It is also worth noting that effective professional development usually does not require vast resources of time and money. Schools find creative approaches to supporting their faculty and staff's growth without using the limits of time and money as an excuse.

10.c. The school's beliefs and commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging support its professional learning and development.

However a school defines diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, it needs to set goals to achieve its desired outcomes. These goals and results should not be separate but rather integral to its professional learning and development. As the school reviews its approaches to DEIB, it should ask

how they influence and impact the faculty and staff's professional growth. Are they explicit elements? Do they shape the faculty and staff's annual professional goals? Will they lead to more effective teaching and student learning? Will they enable the school community to practice ways to create a greater sense of unity and belonging? The possibilities are endless.

10.d. The school's professional evaluation and assessment of all personnel assures the effective implementation of their responsibilities.

Educational research and experience have grappled with the conundrum of definitions for "effective teaching" since the beginning of time. This Indicator asks that the school provide evidence of its approach to these ever fascinating and often difficult questions. The goal "assurance of effective implementation" may be an ultimately elusive one, but the school should give evidence of structured and thoughtful approaches to its achievement.

Effective faculty and staff evaluation continues to be a significant challenge for many schools. An accredited school must have a reasonable approach to assess the work and professional contributions of each faculty and staff member. For faculty, these approaches should include collegial conversations about goals and methods for achieving them, direct and unbiased observations of faculty at work, and, where appropriate, incorporating various kinds of student and colleague responses. The assessment procedures should include an opportunity for discussion and reflection and might consist of subsequent goal setting and further discussion around implementing changes where necessary.

Doing all of this well is time-intensive and is likely why such procedures are sometimes given less attention than they should be.

NEASC does not dictate how frequently each faculty member should undergo a formal assessment. Effective schools create a variety of approaches ranging from the informal and conversational to collegial classroom visiting programs among cadres of faculty and the formal evaluations that include written self-reflection, discussion, classroom observations, and follow-up discussions.

The wisdom in this realm notes that professional development activity should be separate from employment decisions. This is a worthy goal but sometimes challenging and perhaps not always desirable in practice. Schools should be clear about the boundaries between growth in one's profession and faculty's continued employment or advancement. That being said, this boundary is likely one of the most complex and uncertain elements in the education profession. It is possible to manage it well, and the key, as with so much in education, is the expertise, trust, and honesty of the individuals managing the experience. Just as one can help students grow through honest feedback, high standards, and genuine humility, faculty can also evolve in their understanding and skill when undertaken in this spirit.

10.e. The school values and encourages research, reflective practice, and exploration of increasingly effective teaching practices.

This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence of the value it places on research, reflective practice, and the exploration of increasingly effective teaching practices.

It is one thing for a school to expect of its faculty and staff annual professional goals and to respond with appropriate professional development opportunities, and quite another to create a culture of learning among the faculty and staff that values and encourages their own research, intensive reflective practice, and the passionate exploration of how to teach one's discipline and one's students to achieve better results. Most schools value the idea of their students becoming life-long learners. This should be equally true of their teachers, if not more so.

Do the school's teachers and staff genuinely love learning and thirst for knowledge? Does a desire for understanding the human mind and how it learns to read proficiently and comprehend ideas, think mathematically, acquire and make sense of historical information, problem-solve human dilemmas, or develop social skills fuel an interest in related relevant research? Do the faculty and staff have a desire to consider how current research might directly impact the teaching of a particularly abstruse concept or unlock access to a skill for a student with learning difficulties? Do teachers conduct their own informal research in the classroom in an effort to perfect their teaching practices without compromising the outcomes of their students? Do the faculty have time and opportunities to engage in reflective practice regularly, even daily, or is it a rare occasion and only when scheduled and structured? Do the faculty invite their students to contribute to their reflective practice? Do the teachers visit and observe each other's classrooms as precious elements of their reflective practices? Does the school's professional culture support an openness to learn freely from and with each other? Does the school have a way to evaluate how its faculty's teaching and students' learning increase effectiveness through research and reflective practice?

10.f. The school defines clear lines of authority, the administration, faculty, and staff understand their roles and responsibilities, and communication among the school's constituents is clear and direct.

> This Indicator asks a school to be transparent about organization and decision-making within the school and to demonstrate that clarity exists among faculty, staff, and, where appropriate, students and parents.

Who decides what, where, and to whom one goes for a discussion and decision about which issues should be as widely understood as possible. "I know what my job is, and I know what I have the authority to decide and what I do not" are essential distinctions within a school community.

This Indicator does not make assumptions about what decisions should be made by whom within a school, but it requires that folks are as clear as possible about their roles. If a faculty member wishes to change a textbook, for example, does he or she have to discuss this with anyone? Faculty may, or may not, have absolute discretion about teaching materials. If a faculty member encounters a student in a questionable disciplinary situation, where and when does he or she have the authority to act? When is she sure she will be backed up if necessary? If a young faculty member is unsure what to do in a specific situation, is he sure where to find support?

Schools are largely composed of individuals making decisions. Many of these must be done quickly and effectively and often out apart from other adults. Does the school help all faculty and staff know which situations — and generally what kinds of responses — fall within their authority and when they may have to refer concerns to others?

This Indicator asks that the pathways (personal conversation, email, text, phone call) around decisions are clear and the folks know from whom to expect decisions and who has responsibility for what. Excellent schools are clear about who makes what decisions and who has responsibilities. Vagueness in either area can result in unnecessary confusion, miscommunication, or emotional upset.

10.g. The school's leadership, faculty, and staff regularly participate in NEASC peer review visits.

> This Indicator asks a school to provide evidence that its leadership, faculty, and staff are regularly participating on Visiting Teams and documenting with narratives the value of the participation to individuals and their professional learning and development.

Administration and faculty generally report participation on a Visiting Team as one of their most significant professional development experiences. This process — developed over many decades through the cooperation and collaboration of hundreds of schools — brings together faculty and administration from many schools in intense periods of observation, discussion, and reflection about the individual school being visited and the nature of the Standards.

The Self-Study and the visit are fundamental learning experiences for all who engage with them. NEASC Accredited schools expect their leadership and faculty to take active roles in the process. Schools contemplating and completing their Self-Studies should be sure some members of both administration and faculty participate on a Visiting Team before beginning the decennial Self-Study.

10.h. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials

    A. List of completed professional development opportunities provided to faculty and staff for the past three years

    B. List of current faculty, administration, and staff who have participated in NEASC Visiting Teams in the past five years

    C. Evaluation/assessment documents/protocols for faculty, administration, and staff

PROGRAM STANDARD

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

All schools exist in the context of families, alumni, and various local, national, and international communities. This Standard asks schools to contemplate this broader context from multiple perspectives.

- How do schools talk to and listen to parents and families, integrating them meaningfully into the life of the school?

- How do schools continue relationships with alumni, past parents, and families, drawing upon their best memories, connections, and appreciation for the school, its leadership, and faculty?

- How do schools engage with other educators, service and charitable organizations, and businesses in their local towns and cities?

An accredited school makes a significant effort to extend its mission to all constituencies and the wider world. Through its engagement with an ever-increasing circle of stakeholders, schools attract individuals, resources, and opportunities to enhance the student's educational experience. Attracting capital resources is usually under the school office of development or institutional advancement (See Standard 3).

11.a. The school equitably communicates and promotes a community of belonging for every family around their children's development.

> This Indicator asks schools to reflect on how communications occur and assess their equitableness and effectiveness.

The accredited school undertakes a significant responsibility to communicate with families. It regards families as hand-in-hand partners in their children's education. It creates effective communications and offers programs that give parents helpful perspectives on their students' development. These communications and programs build the parents' trust and confidence in the school. When parents know a school shares an understanding of their children's abilities and has their children's best interests at heart, families often experience a sincere sense of belonging in the school community. This sense of belonging is marked by common goals and aspirations for the students' development. When students experience this mutual commitment between the school and the parents, they, in turn, are often motivated to engage more with their studies and academic achievement.

By equitableness, the Indicator asks if the school considers the primary languages of its parent community, their level of education and literacy, their available means of communication, and their availability to participate in programs at the school in person. Equitable communication respects the needs of the parents. Do they speak and read English? Are they local, or do some reside on the other side of the world? Do the parents work evenings or care for children when schools may want to host programs or parent-teacher conferences? Does the school understand cultural norms that may inhibit parents' communication with the school? Would parents be embarrassed by their attire or appearance if they were invited to programs at the school? Would schools find the most effective

communication with some families by arranging a visit to their homes? The principle behind all these approaches is to promote effective communication that leads to a community of belonging around the student's development.

Accredited schools that communicate effectively with their parents and other constituencies typically use multiple approaches: assignment and grade-reporting programs, regular parent-teacher conferences, information meetings, emails, robocall announcements and updates, text messages, periodic written mailings, and announcements and calendars on the schools' websites.

Evidence for this Indicator may come from family and alumni surveys, conversations with representative groups of parents both current and past, or asking the students if their parents feel a sense of belonging in the school community, and if not, why not.

11.b. The school and the local community interact to their mutual benefit.

> This Indicator asks schools to assess the interactions and relationships the school establishes with its immediate physical community.

Accredited NEASC schools exist in various physical settings ranging from the centers of large cities to isolated, rural locations scattered throughout the New England countryside. Because the variety of landscapes, or cityscapes, is highly diverse, this Indicator asks schools to discuss the mutual benefits of their immediate locale.

Additionally, schools seek to maximize program development stemming from the potential of their location. This relationship should indicate clearly to students what responsible local citizenship means and, where appropriate, should engage students in enhancing community involvement. Accredited schools present a vast array of possible local relationships, and this Indicator asks the school to assess the ways the mission of the school extends into the community.

11.c. The school effectively engages with its alumni and friends.

> This Indicator asks a school to assess the goals and effectiveness of the current alumni stewardship and cultivation program and communications, and to establish plans for future improvements, all within the scope of their missions, goals, and resources.

For many schools, their relationship with alumni is crucial to their development and sustainability. Alumni may serve on the Board of Trustees or return to the school as faculty or staff. They may volunteer to lead clubs and activities or coach teams. They may serve as guest speakers or mentors to students. In doing so, they spread the word about the school's current realities and strategic plans. Maintaining the alumni network is an essential objective for an independent school, albeit one that is carried out with highly variable degrees of success.

Relationships with alumni and friends — who include past parents and grandparents and various other constituencies as, over time, schools develop their circle of associates, is a significant challenge for all schools. Simply keeping accurate contact information remains, for all schools, a major and constantly evolving struggle. Many schools seek comparative data to know how they are faring within the broader context of "schools like ours" but it is unclear if such data — which falls on

a spectrum from reassuring to troubling — is truly helpful. And it is not necessary to accreditation.

Alumni, advancement, and development programs in accredited schools fall along an extremely long spectrum, and from the accreditation perspective, the essential question is how well the program serves the mission of the school and whether or not there are creative, specific, or necessary steps the school might/should take to strengthen the program.

Few school programs define "elusive final goals" more vividly than alumni stewardship and cultivation. That being said, there is a voluminous literature on the operation of strong-performing alumni and advancement offices.

11.d. The school is committed to broadening the diversity of the students' perspectives and encouraging engagement with the wider world.

> This Indicator asks schools to assess their commitment to diversity and to ask how that commitment might be strengthened.

One of the essential goals of accreditation is encouraging schools to seek multiple ways to expand their students' awareness of and engagement with the "wider world." This may be done through study, such as when young students in a Waldorf School make vividly colored maps of Africa or when high school seniors take Advanced Placement Chinese. It may be done through service-learning projects when students venture to the Dominican Republic or impoverished parts of Appalachia. It may happen when students volunteer for the Special Olympics, acquaint themselves with the plight of a local refugee population, serve as companions at a retirement community, or engage in a weekend-long clean-up project on a New England coastal beach. It may happen when a school spends a year defining what a "developing country" really is, studying one developing country in depth, and exploring how that country might progress given the realities of today's geopolitics. It may happen when a racially or gender-biased comment appears in a school restroom.

The entire community sets out to think together about the disturbing reality of prejudice and to see if and how these forces can really be changed. The opportunities for "broadening perspective" are endless.

11.e. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials

A.   Examples of communication with alums and parents

PROGRAM STANDARD

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

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

In boarding schools, the residential program should be founded on an intentional curriculum centered on assuring the health and well-being of each student. Facilities, relevant and engaging activities, and appropriate supervision to meet the needs of each student are essential.

12.a. The residential life program and curriculum align with the mission of the school.

A residential school should have a clearly thought-out and well-organized residential program in place. The program may have many components, but the program as a whole should be conceived and carried out to enhance the school's mission for the benefit of its students. No list could include all the components of a well-thought-out residential program, but the following are some of the elements to be considered:

- How secure are the residential facilities?
- How is dorm/house student leadership established?
- What responsibilities are dorm/house student leaders expected to carry out?
- What training/orientation do they receive?
- Do they have any distinct "privileges" in concert with what responsibilities?
- Does the school use vertical housing?
- What responsibilities are expected of dorm/house parents?
- How frequently are individual dorm/house parents "on duty?"
- What training and orientation do they receive?
- Is there a role for "back-up" or non-residential faculty to play?
- If these individuals are on duty, do they have reasonable facilities when in the house/dorm?
- What role do other faculty play in residential life?
- What expectations does the school have for the social realities of dorm parents? Does the school allow unmarried couples to live together in dorms/houses? What expectations does the school have for unmarried faculty around visitors and significant others? How does the school account for the ages and levels of maturity of faculty?
- What activities are part of the culture of the dorm/house?
- What rules/regulations are in place?

- How are these rules/regulations enforced?

- What expectations are there for visitors?

- What expectations are there for deliveries?

- How is dorm/house safety handled?

- How is cleanliness managed?

- Are expectations consistent across campus or are there different expectations for different dorms/houses?

- How are noise and music managed?

- Are there common rooms and how are they used and managed?

- How are bathrooms monitored, cleaned and maintained?

- How are the grounds around the dorm/house maintained? What is the role of students?

- How is electronic technology — cell phones, computer, gaming, internet — managed?

- Are there traditions in the dorm/house or residential program and are they positive and in alignment with the mission?

- How is the health of students monitored?

- What happens in the dorm/house on weekends?

- Are there specific residential activities?

- What place do day students have in the dorms/houses?

- Who in the administration has specific responsibility for dorm life?

12.b. The residential life program, including evening, weekend, and vacation activities, is integrated into the total life of the school and promotes appropriate interaction with day students.

Except for the small number of residential schools without day students, accredited schools have a policy and set of procedures for day and boarding students to create an integrated school culture. The most common perceptions seem to be that either boarding students have it better because they can develop friendships and be "part of the action" throughout the 24/7 life of the school or that day students have it better because they can go home at night and be with their friends and families.

Developing mutual activities, allowing for visitation back and forth, encouraging day students to be part of dorm life, and bringing boarders home on occasion — are all pieces of an effective residential program. A school should acknowledge and spend time understanding the relationships between day students and boarding students. How evenings, weekends, vacation times, and visitation are conceived and planned for is essential to a healthy residential program.

12.c. The residential life program intentionally promotes an inclusive community of safe belonging for the diversity of students.

> This Indicator asks schools to reflect on how its residential life program intentionally promotes inclusive communities in its dorms/houses, securing the physical, social, and emotional safety of its students—students who are safe to express their identities, safe to voice their opinions respectfully, and safe to act upon their beliefs and convictions in ways that do not offend others. Evidence for this Indicator may come from the written residential life program, with its guidelines and policies, as well as student focus groups, surveys, and conversations with residential staff.

Belonging and feeling safe are essential to a student's sense of self and personal happiness. We know that they do not happen by chance. It is why residential life programs with any diversity of students spend considerable time thinking, planning, and educating the community to ensure all students feel welcome, comfortable, and secure. Students should be involved, too. They should be invited into informal conversations and allowed to give honest feedback and suggestions. They might offer paths to reconciliation, for instance, when students perceive they have been excluded, shunned, or meanly teased by other students in their dorm/home because of their religious practices, political views, race, ethnicity, nationality, cultural background, language of origin, economic status, and a host of other defining characteristics and common human behaviors. Students can see that belonging is not only an ideal to aim for but a reality that can be achieved. Often, they need little reminding and encouragement to value thoughtfulness, understanding, and kindness. An excellent residential life program implicitly and explicitly promotes these and similar values.

12.d. Those responsible for organizing the rooming arrangements of students take into account the ever-evolving variety of considerations that go into each assignment.

> This Indicator asks the school to reflect on its approach to selecting rooming and dorm/house assignments and how its approach aligns with its mission, what is right for the students, including their personal identities and privacy rights, and what is acceptable and supported by the parents' sensibilities. The school should provide evidence of its approach, how it deals with roommate conflicts, and what reasoning or best practices support its approach.

There is no shortage of ways schools have developed for selecting rooming arrangements: lotteries, seniority, grade levels, interest and compatibility surveys, personality traits, social interests, athletic participation, and combinations of these. In the past, the students' sex was a primary determinant for dorm and room assignments, and that will continue for many schools. Yet today, we know several New England schools are using the students' self-identified genders to rethink what were once traditional rooming arrangements. Some schools have created all-gender dorms and found ways to balance respect for student privacy with visiting practices. Gender is only one of many evolving considerations. Race, ethnicity, religion, cultural practices, uber wealth, poverty, and mental health may be considerations for some schools. Neurodiversity may be another. Behavioral habits may be still another. Not all schools can accommodate students in single rooms. Getting a student's

rooming assignment right can make or break the student. Get it right, and they flourish. If it is wrong or if incompatibility is not addressed early enough, students may leave the school disillusioned or disaffected.

12.e. The expectations for the residential students and the residential staff are clearly stated, written, and understood, including acceptable use of technology.

Given the reality that all written documents risk obsolescence as soon as they are drafted, it is still essential that boarding schools write down, distribute, and go over with faculty and students the written policies for the issues listed in this manual, and likely several others.

A written handbook is perhaps most important simply for the act of creating it and the requirement to think through a policy out of the necessity to put it online. Such a document helps students feel confident about the school's approach and is reassuring as well as clarifying. Such a document is a platform for discussion, for anticipating behaviors, for considering appropriate discipline, when necessary, as a place to start when policies need revision, and when, inevitably, something previously inconceivable and unimagined crops up:

- A dead animal in or around a dorm
- A student with a "replica" firearm
- "Elbow slingshots" with the capacity to fell a moose
- The presence of knives — pocket, switchblade, "Bowie" and Bosun's
- Fish tanks
- 98-inch television sets
- "Pets" — mice, snakes, birds, alligators, frogs, bats, injured fox (we don't make this up)
- Refrigerators — and theft
- Locks/no locks
- Locked/unlocked trunks
- Weird smells
- Empty pizza boxes
- Etc., ad infinitum

Gaming, cell phones, internet, social media — the force of these platforms and technologies assert themselves from the first moment students enter their dorm rooms. The school should anticipate these realities and establish clear and enforceable policies around them. The school should also endeavor to understand the roots and consequences of technology in all its guises, for example, online papers and research, programs that check for plagiarism, video reports and creative projects, digital photography and image manipulation, TikTok, Snapchat, ChatGPT, texting and sexting, gossip and gaming.

Without waxing poetically or wringing our collective hands in despair, the infinite possibilities for creativity hover menacingly for every one of our students, teachers, and schools.

In particular, residential schools must contend with the small and large details of it.

- Do we take away cell phones at the start of study hall?

- Do we monitor gaming in the evening, or the middle of the night, or on Saturday afternoon?

- Do we care about the sites our students visit?

- How do we know?

- Do we have policies prohibiting faculty and coaches from "friending" students, and how do we approach the world of private photos taken and sent?

12.f. Residential students are included in planning and developing policies, expectations, and programs.

> This Indicator asks schools to provide evidence of the effective contribution of residential students in the planning and development of policies, expectations, and programs.

In the most effective residential settings, frequent, dependable, and open conversations about issues, concerns, events of the day or week, anticipation of things ahead, and reflections on past activities are vital. In addition, including student voices and perspectives in creating policies, procedures, common practices, and the simple day-to-day matters of residential living indicate a great deal about the health and effectiveness of its programs.

12.g. Residential staff are appropriately qualified and assigned to meet the needs of students under their care and supervision.

> This indicator asks a school to provide evidence that its residential staff is appropriately qualified and assigned to meet the needs of the students under their care and supervision.

Residential schools staff dorms and houses in many ways. Most traditional New England boarding school staff are teachers, coaches, and administrators. Some schools, particularly special education and therapeutic schools, hire qualified individuals to live in dorms and undertake residential responsibilities. The key here is twofold: all individuals with direct responsibility for students in a residential setting are appropriately chosen to meet the immediate needs of the students, and they have received the necessary training and supervision to carry out the role.

The students' ages, specific needs — mental and physical health, gender, maturity, and sense of responsibility — must be considered when staffing a dorm or house. For example, balancing the ages and family situations of house parents in a particular dorm can be critical. If there are six dorm parents under, say, the age of thirty and no families in a house, the school may be placing unnecessary strain on everybody.

In addition to basic safety training (first aid, CPR, use of an AED) staff should receive considerable, regular and ongoing professional development around the positive expectations and challenges of residential life. What typical student situations can they expect to encounter? How do they deal with them as a matter of routine? How do they get better at doing so? What about not-so-typical

situations? To whom do residential faculty turn when they have questions — and are they actively encouraged to ask questions? Are they trained to deal with emergencies? Serious alcohol or drug use, or any alcohol or drug use? What if they encounter students fighting? How are they 100% sure, without exception, that their students are accounted for when they should be accounted for? What about a "middle of the night" absence? Who should be called? What about parents who disagree about court-ordered visitation or custody rights? How clear are all affected staff with the communication around "duty assignments"?

Creating a positive dormitory program requires considerable thought and attention to detail. It requires a capacity for constant monitoring, reviewing, and training. Residential programs should exhibit particular care around the qualifications, professional development and training, assessment, and regular discussions necessary to help dorm parents do their jobs well.

12.h. Residential staff are appropriately housed in ways that enhance the experience of the students, faculty, and families.

> This Indicator asks that the school provide evidence that it has, to the best of its ability, and given the realities of the physical campus and residential facilities, considered the complexity of the issues created when housing students and adults together.

Recognizing that schools have a large spectrum of faculty-in-dorm housing, NEASC notes that paying thoughtful attention to faculty in-dorm housing is essential. Such attention includes the appropriateness of housing for families, single faculty, and spaces for "out of dorm" faculty who may be on duty.

NEASC notes that concerns around faculty housing are ongoing and constant elements of planning in virtually all residential settings. Maintenance issues, personal preferences, changing family dynamics, the experience and age of the faculty, pets, and location are all significant factors. The desired goal is to provide housing that fits the needs of individuals and families as closely as possible and that, most importantly, provides a suitable place to live for faculty to supervise and work with students effectively.

Privacy, respect for family realities, and the history of faculty within a school community are always balanced — and sometimes with difficulty — with the needs of the students. Does a school ask a long-time faculty couple whose children have grown and left home to move from their four-bedroom apartment to make room for a new family with three young children? Is there a policy about this kind of shift, or does the school make these decisions on an ad hoc basis? Does the school have a large dorm with only single-faculty apartments? Would such a housing arrangement provide the kind of mature stability the students need? If a faculty member needs to bring an aging parent home to live, how will the school accommodate this reality? Is an apartment near a busy street the right place for a family with very young children? There is no limit to the possible situations schools face in balancing the needs of the adults with the needs of the students.

12.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials

A. Residential student handbook (if separate from student handbook)

B. Faculty or staff materials specific to the residential life program

C. Residential life curriculum and pertinent policies

D. Copy of weekend activities calendar

E. Faculty housing policies

PROGRAM STANDARD

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

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

This Standard requires schools with homestay students to understand, monitor, and ensure the healthy experience of these young people.

The principle focus here is that a school with a homestay program must demonstrate attention and active participation in the experience of their international students. While there may well be agencies and services that manage the logistics of homestays very thoughtfully, the school must always be aware of the policies and procedures of the agencies. In a word, it must provide clear evidence of such awareness.

The school should commit to a homestay program providing an intentional curriculum centered on the health and well-being of each student, with appropriate facilities, relevant and engaging activities, and adequate supervision to meet the needs of each student.

13.a. The homestay program aligns consistently with the mission of the school.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence that its homestay program is consistent with its mission, that international students are being well-served by it, and that they are never perceived simply as "sources of revenue."

Most schools enroll international students for two reasons: first, they reinforce the school's mission to bring a broad understanding of the world to their domestic students, who have an opportunity during their formative years to live and work closely with persons from many cultures. Second, international students bolster revenue for schools.

Schools should be candid and transparent in assessing and explaining their motives for enrolling international students. Homestay programs require considerable thoughtful attention to be done well. Ensuring that homestay families are appropriate and monitoring the academic, social, and emotional lives of international students who are far from home is a significant responsibility.

NEASC schools universally possess missions that aim to form and develop their students' healthy intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical lives. The homestay and international programs must support and enhance this essential mission.

13.b. The school understands that it is ultimately responsible for each homestay student's health, well-being, and belonging and assigns appropriate school personnel to ensure their welfare.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence that it understands its ultimate responsibility for each homestay student's health, well-being, and belonging. Accordingly, it assigns appropriate school personnel to ensure the student's welfare.

Agencies may recruit and help students apply, vet homestay families, and place students within these settings. The majority of schools enrolling international students employ such services. A school may establish a healthy partnership with an agency. Through frequent and detailed conversations about each student and homestay situation, it may maintain a constant awareness of their well-being. Nevertheless, a school may never delegate the final responsibility for its students to any agency. And, without question, it must have the capacity to take appropriate action on the students' behalf at any time and for any reason.

Most schools employ an international student advisor or coordinator. This is an advisable approach. All schools must be sure there are specific individuals responsible for knowing, monitoring, and following through on any concern, if necessary, with each international student and host family.

13.c. The school has a well-defined process to include students, host families, and appropriate school personnel to regularly review the homestay program and the experience of the students.

It is highly advisable to schedule regular discussions about the unfolding realities of student and school experiences throughout the year. Providing a meeting time and place and a dependable agenda brings homestay families to the school. It creates the necessary impetus for all parties to bring concerns, and positive experiences, to the fore. Such meetings must be scheduled regularly to ensure that experiences — many of which may fall outside the observation of the school — are reviewed and, when necessary, remediated.

13.d. The school has a formal understanding with homestay families if there is a direct placement or with agencies that provide homestay placements, detailing the ethical and legal responsibilities of the school, the host families, the agencies, and the students.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence it has done its due diligence to ensure that all parties to a homestay arrangement know and will abide by their legal and ethical obligations.

Accredited schools have formal, written contracts with families and/or homestay agencies that have been carefully reviewed by the school's legal counsel. These contracts specify the exact responsibilities of the school, the agencies, and the families.

A formal understanding with homestay families should include, at least, the length of the student's stay, details of the accommodations, including meals and food, what utilities are included, if transportation will be provided to the school and back as well as on weekends to social and cultural

events, payment details, conditions for cancellation or should the student decide to move out, and any visa responsibilities of the student and family or other legal obligations.

13.e. The school can assure that homestay facilities are safe and clean and provide sufficient and appropriate living space.

> This Indicator asks that a school guarantee that regular, scheduled, on-site visits of homestay facilities are conducted and that international students are also allowed to evaluate their homestay settings confidentially. Agencies may take this direct responsibility, but the school must monitor the agency's work and be completely assured this responsibility can be met.

School personnel must be sure homestay facilities meet this Indicator. The facility or home must meet typical standards for health and cleanliness. The students must have appropriate space for sleeping, eating, studying, and privacy for bathing and hygiene. The facility must be comfortable, neither too hot nor too cold. It must be safe and the students' possessions secure. Noise levels inside and outside the homestay should allow the students to concentrate on their studies. Their work environment should be free of unnecessary interruptions and distractions. There should be adequate lighting and access to technology and the Internet. Students should know and abide by the "house rules," but they should not be responsible for caring for the homestay families' children or doing their chores; for example, laundry or yard work. Students should have relative freedom to come and go, join friends for outings, participate in school and cultural events on weekends, and attend religious services if desired.

The homestay personnel or families should be expected to provide for not only the students' basic needs — food, clothing, shelter, and health care when needed — but also social and emotional support, recognizing the students are still children in need of an adult presence and far from their own families. Students must experience respect and never feel they are subject to manipulation or coercion of any kind.

13.f. There is a clearly defined process in place to ensure appropriate screening of host families, including background checks and a process for matching student and family interests.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence of its screening processes to keep students safe and match them with families with similar interests.

Among agencies and schools, NEASC finds a wide variety of capacities to screen and vet host families appropriately. This Indicator asks schools to be sure that each homestay family has gone through a proper criminal background check, including all family members eighteen or older living at home. The school should be sure these records are on file and can be provided as necessary. A school may rely on an agency to do such checks but should, again, monitor this work to be sure it has been accomplished. A school must also provide opportunities for each international student to speak, if need be, to a trusted adult about any inappropriate comments or untoward behavior.

The quality of an international students' experience depends on more than the hours spent at school. Life with a host family can leave a lasting impression and form lifelong friendships. Schools

should ensure that host families share as much enthusiasm for hosting an international student as the international student has for coming to this country and attending an American school. Just as international students have individual interests, so host families have particular interests. These may be interests in music, the arts, foods, travel, sports, fashion, learning about cultures, and acquiring new languages. The school should have an effective process for matching student and family interests.

13.g. The school has clearly stated and understood expectations, published and disseminated in a handbook, for the school, host families, and students regarding the student academic program and experiences during the school week and on weekends and vacations.

A written handbook for international students and host families, necessarily translated into the language of the family, will prove very helpful. This handbook, modest in scope and narrowly focused on the specific expectations for the international students, their host families, and the school's obligations, would be the equivalent of a student-parent handbook for international students and their host families. A school may work with an agency to produce such a volume, but articulating these expectations and programs in writing is beneficial to everybody.

13.h. The school has procedures in place to integrate international and other students living in homestay situations into the school's social and academic fabric.

> This Indicator asks the school to provide evidence that it has ways of integrating international homestay students into the full life of the school l— social, athletic, theatrical, artistic, cultural, service-learning endeavors, and travel experiences.

Part of the school's responsibility is to ensure that international students are included as much as possible in the life of the school. Staging weekend experiences for international and local students, inviting international students into other students' homes, taking these kids on trips and outings, and ensuring they are part of service-learning endeavors all bring them to experience the real life of New England students and families. It is too easy, sometimes, for international kids to sequester themselves on evenings and weekends, and schools have a significant responsibility to help these young people find a larger and richer experience.

13.i. Students are included periodically in planning and developing policies, expectations, and programs.

Schools should meet regularly with the international students, one-on-one and in groups, to plan activities, develop programs, and review the progress of their lives. Giving students a forum and helping them become comfortable expressing their perspectives is crucial to a positive experience. It also helps the school review and revise its program to better serve the students and their development as students and young adults.

13.j. The school ensures that homestay students have a family experience and their social and personal lives outside of school are both safe and rewarding.

> This Indicator asks the school to evaluate the students' homestay experience with their host families, and whether the students have safe and rewarding opportunities outside of the school week.

While schools will find that the homestay experience of students will always depend on the personalities and dynamics of the homestay families, it is important for schools to help families understand their role in creating a positive experience. Schools should talk with families about the value, for everybody, of including their homestay student as much as possible in their family life, and, to the degree possible, making sure expectations are clear through the vetting process. Again, NEASC finds that agencies can be skilled in encouraging homestay families both to understand and to follow-through on their commitment to a positive experience for their students. And, when they are less so, schools should be prepared and able to step in.

13.k. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials

    A. Agency contract

    B. International student handbook

STRATEGIC PLANNING STANDARD AND INDICATORS

STRATEGIC PLANNING STANDARD

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

Thoughtful strategic planning lies at the heart of a sustainable and viable school. In two words, schools either advance or regress. As the school must imagine the future for the students whom they serve: What will the world become for which we are preparing them? So, schools must constantly, even reflexively, envision and plan their own future.

A healthy school is both conservative (How do we maintain our strengths?) and visionary (How can we create and achieve higher goals?). To achieve this Standard, schools should demonstrate their commitment to planning through a written planning document. Plans should originate in the school's mission and, ultimately, serve it. Plans should be visionary: What might be possible? Plans should be practical: Who is going to do what? In how much time? How will we know when a goal has been reached? How do we celebrate accomplishment? Plans should demonstrate determination and also leave room for the unexpected.

Planning documents sometimes appear as four-color brochures intended to sway potential donors and inspire alumni. Planning documents sometimes reflect a variety of possibilities within a broad framework. Planning documents may be presented as binders of projects with budgets and timelines. Planning may encompass goals for personnel training, for student support, for renewed mission, for the campus, for program development, for international partnerships, faculty responsibilities, and benefits, student retention and recruitment, for ancillary sources of income, and for working with parents. Most importantly, planning should identify the key strengths of the school and the singularly important, vital objectives. Planning establishes priorities and sets out a specific map to reach them. Planning is founded on responsible financial management and accurate data.

A word about "strategic," "long-range," and "multi-year" planning. The distinction here is perhaps more significant than between "culture" and "climate."

Strategic planning aims to articulate a vision, mission, and essential goals. Usually, strategic planning is the province of the board and the head of school. These are all strategic goals:

> *We want to create a truly sustainable financial program.*
> *We want to be the leaders in marine science education.*
> *We want a genuinely global education that attracts students from around the world.*
> *We want to be seen as the most personal and friendly elementary school in our city.*

Leadership constantly reviews and revises strategic plans, and strategic planning requires thinking broadly about the school's purposes and the world where they are to be achieved.

Long-range plans contain the steps necessary to get to strategic goals, have time frames (usually three to five years), steps toward larger goals, individuals assigned to tasks, and measures or assessments of achievement that are commonly understood. "We want to be the premier marine science program in New England" would require a fund-raising campaign, land acquisition, a new facility, new training for faculty members,perhaps a new hire, a unique curriculum, careful examination of other such programs, an outreach to students and families, and an alumni education program. The strategic goal drives the long-range plan to achieve it.

14.a. The school, led by its governing authority, continuously engages in thorough, realistic, aspirational, and actionable planning in all critical areas.

> This Indicator asks the school to assess the overall approach to and quality of the school's planning.

- Does the head of school constantly encourage the Board to plan?
- What role do the Head's plans and objectives for the school play in determining the direction?
- Does the Board create a Strategic Plan and review and revise it at least annually?
- Is there a written, accurate, and up-to-date copy of the document readily available to all?
- Who is responsible for monitoring — "bird-dogging" as one school head termed it — the plan?
- How are the qualities "thoughtful," "realistic," "thorough," and "continuous" defined and assessed?
- Is the community aware of the plan?
- Is there general and enthusiastic support for the goals among the school's constituency?

14.b. The school conducts research, collects data, and evaluates its program and resources to inform planning.

> This Indicator asks a school to demonstrate they have identified, collected, and analyzed data necessary for every phase of long-range planning.

Data — financial, enrollment, demographic, trends, general understanding or opinion, success or failure of programming — must inform effective planning. A responsible feasibility study should articulate reasonable goals for a capital campaign. A three-to-five-year financial projection should guide decisions around tuition, financial aid, and potential increases in salaries and benefits.

The school should collect, analyze, and appropriately share critical data from its own study and consider local and national trends. A day school in a town where a major new manufacturing facility is being planned and one in a town where one has just closed should account for the realities this "outside" force may introduce. If the housing prices in an urban area have increased 30–50% in the last two years, the school should think about the impact this may have on young families with children who might have otherwise moved into the area a few years ago.

14.c. The school proactively identifies factors that must be addressed to ensure sustainability.

> This Indicator asks schools to pay close attention to enrollment and related financial trends, make realistic projections, examine underlying assumptions about staffing and program priorities, and carefully analyze the facilities' infrastructures. In planning, how clear is the school about the most significant challenges in front of it?

New England's independent school community faces the realities of changing demographics. Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine have seen significant declines in their school-age populations, and many, if not most, urban areas in our region are undergoing major demographic shifts. Metropolitan areas that were once predominantly Catholic have experienced a metamorphosis in religious adherence and affiliation.

14.d. The school considers issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in its planning.

> This Indicator asks schools to consider the effects of its planning on every constituency in school to ensure that all students are respected and included. Implications of all aspects of its planning on how it embraces its student body's diversity and works to ensure equity and inclusion of all should be considered.

Unanticipated consequences remain one of the most difficult components of long-range planning. It has been the NEASC experience that schools that meet the stated goals of a plan often discover a host of unseen implications that were also achieved.

If a school intends to require each student to use a laptop or Chromebook, what provision has been made for those who cannot afford them? If a school wants to help students take more responsibility for their own learning, has the school assessed the variety of abilities students possess to do so? If a school emphasizes in its planning the "highly competitive nature" of its student body, is it also realistically assessing the enormous variations in ability and interest that exist even in the most competitive environments? In a plan to move to a "competency or proficiency-based diploma" (Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine are currently leading this charge in public education), has the school considered what "mastery of material" must be "demonstrated?" and whether or not a positive-sounding goal genuinely improves education for each of its students?

14.e. The school has the capacity, competence, and commitment to achieve its goals.

> This Indicator asks schools to make a realistic assessment of the components of accomplishing a plan. A school should demonstrate it has the necessary personnel, resources, time, facilities, understanding, and skill to effect a proposed idea.

Essential to effective planning is the capacity to carry out plans.

- If a school lays out financial goals and decides a constituency-wide capital campaign is necessary to reach them, has the school also carefully analyzed the actions, resources, time, and personnel to carry out the campaign?

- If the head of school will need to spend significant time on the road, are there individuals in place to whom he/she can delegate the on-campus tasks necessary?

- Does the current development/advancement office understand the various components of a capital campaign?

- How has the Board determined realistic goals?

- How much time will the campaign take?

- How much "seed money" will need to be in the door during the "quiet phase" to allow a public announcement containing reasonable assurance the goals can be met?

- If a Board and Head decide that the fundamental approach to teaching and learning needs to shift from "teacher-centered" to "student-centered" classrooms, how will these decisions be communicated and how, specifically, will each faculty member come to understand both the nature of his or her current teaching and what exact training, observation, reflection, practice, feedback are necessary to make the requisite changes?

- How will these individual accomplishments be monitored and assessed?

- Are the academic leaders in the school sufficiently trained, and do they have the necessary time to devote to this work?

14.f. The school's written strategic plan determines responsibilities and includes means to assess progress and demonstrate the completion of goals.

Effective strategic and long-range plans are specific, detailed, step-by-step "blueprints" that include timelines for each step, methods of assessment, individuals responsible, and statements about "status/where this goal stands right now." Individuals responsible should be expected to report on their actions, the progress of the work, and expectations for the next steps.

Setbacks and unexpected events should be noted. Stories and "tales from the road" sessions can create camaraderie among the folks responsible.

A good strategic plan is understood and, as appropriate, created by all the adult members of the school community (board, head of school, faculty, and administration) and should be communicated regularly with the broader community. Expectations should be managed, accomplishments celebrated, and detours expected. The best strategic plans emerge from the community's thoughtful, visible, and active engagement. This may, as appropriate, include students, families, and alumni.

Notably, the plan should articulate each element's financial implications, goals, and realities. The cost of a new facility, for instance, is not simply the design and building cost but includes the expense of operation and the effects of depreciation on the overall budget. Will other facilities be taken offline? How are operational costs estimated? Will any new personnel be necessary? Might there be ancillary costs such as heightened security, new equipment, cleaning, and unique maintenance issues, influencing other facilities ("We used to do this in the old facility, but we can't do it in the new...")

Creating the plan itself is an excellent avenue toward increased engagement and, ultimately, its long-term achievement.

14.g. The school celebrates accomplishments and programs contributing to identity and legacy.

This Indicator asks schools to be intentional in their recognition and celebration of accomplishments and aims simply to encourage schools to keep optimism, hope, recognition, and celebration at the forefront of their development.

In a school with a long tradition in a community, are long-tenured teachers honored and recognized? In a school that has made a "turn-around" (even a small one) in its enrollment, noted the event with joy? In a school that aimed to increase its alumni annual-fund participation and in the next year went from 18% to 22% giving credit to all the volunteers who worked hard for this goal? This Indicator asks schools to assess how it measures and highlights the "small victories" (and the larger ones!) along the path toward long-range goals.

14.h. The school regularly reviews and adapts its goals and plans to actual experiences and unanticipated realities.

> This Indicator asks schools to demonstrate their capacity for contingency planning, articulate alternatives, and options, and give examples of the types of events that might result in one or more of these alternatives occurring.

Simply stated, no one can plan for every contingency or unexpected event. But, in their planning, schools should anticipate where positive and negative events might enhance or derail plans. For instance, a school should be cautious about writing binding construction contracts based on the "promises" of a donation. Often, promises are kept. Sometimes, they are not.

Plans tend to be idealistic and optimistic, setting out timelines and anticipating trends that may or may not materialize. How long will current leadership be in place? How stable is the Board? Is the state contemplating some potential legislative initiative that would influence enrollment?

14.i. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

Required Materials

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

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

Self-Study: Reviewing the Standards

Each Standard must be addressed separately in the Self-Study Report. Refer to the Guide to the Standards for specifics. The school should appoint Self-Study Committees, each responsible for one or more Standards.

The committees should proceed as follows:

1. Gather and review relevant information from required documentation, surveys, handbooks, policy manuals, compilations of data, annual reports, etc.

2. Discuss the Standard and suggested indicators, identify other possible indicators relevant to the school, assess alignment with the Standard, and identify questions to be asked and people to be interviewed.

3. Interview individuals and convene groups to discuss the school's alignment with the Standard and how the school might strengthen this area of the school.

4. Draft the section of the Self-Study Report for the Standard. It should include five elements:

    a. A thoughtful summary of reflections on the Standard and indicators

    b. Challenges and strengths for the Standard

    c. The school's aspirations and plans to strengthen this Standard

    d. School's self-rating and an explanation of the rating

    e. Committee membership and the process undertaken to address the Standard

5. For each Standard, there is a listing of required materials to be provided. These should be gathered early in the process and uploaded into the Portal to support the work of the Standard committees.

Review and Edit

The school should ask an outside reader (an alumnus/a, trustee, retired teacher, parent or other knowledgeable person who was not actively involved in the Self-Study) to review the final draft for clarity, completeness, and consistency of messaging.

Reflections on Strategic Planning

"If you don't know where you are going, you might end up somewhere else." Casey Stengel

"Plans are nothing; planning is everything." Dwight D. Eisenhower

Effective school management and thoughtful improvement require strategic planning. The Strategic Plan defines the school's view of success and prioritizes the work needed to achieve it. Strategic plans may project three-to-five-year goals, but strategic thinking should be perpetual.

> *"When we remain in a strategic posture — when we stay attentive, nimble, and opportunistic — we can be true to our missions and visions and can navigate in this Age of Flux with greater confidence and success."* Pat Bassett, former President of NAIS.

Ironically, schools should be wary that "plans" don't ossify and restrict rather than inspire creative approaches.

Michael Wilkinson articulates five fundamental reasons to plan:

1. Set direction and priorities
2. Get everyone on the same page
3. Simplify decision making
4. Drive alignment of resources
5. Communicate the message

A school seeking NEASC Accreditation commits itself to the ongoing process of self- assessment, goal setting, and planning. Planning should be based on the school's mission and specific objectives.

Effective strategic planning follows this general outline:

1. Address basic questions: "Where are we now?" "What is our current context?" "What are our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats." (SWOT Analysis)
2. Answer the question: "Where do we want to be?" This answer begins to form the vision for the school's future.
3. Articulate concrete goals to accomplish to achieve the vision.
4. Create an action plan that includes:
   - Measurable goals
   - Individual(s) charged with their achievement
   - Resources necessary to accomplish goals
   - Specific time frame for progress report/completion

Strategic planning is imbedded at every level in both the Foundation and Program Standards and, if available, a copy of the school's Strategic Plan should be submitted. Note that schools may be working on their own individual schedules for strategic planning. The accreditation process expects that schools are planning and discussing the future vision. A completed Strategic Plan is not required until the Two-Year Progress Report. The Annual Reports request a yearly update on this process.

Numerous models describe the construction of a Strategic Plan but virtually all of them will include the following components:

Enrollment Management and Marketing

The school should update enrollment projections for the upcoming three to five years. This projection should include: grade level, gender, and, where appropriate, separate numbers for students who will qualify for financial aid, children of employees who may receive tuition remission, and students who may be involved in special programs. Enrollment data should be aligned with projected tuition to forecast net income. Desired levels of financial aid should be included in this plan.

If enrollment is expected to change, the school should plan to adjust staffing, facilities, curriculum and other program components; these changes, driven by enrollment fluctuations, should inform other planning.

The critical question is "Are all of our students mission appropriate?" If not, the school should plan either changing its mission or its admission practice.

Curriculum and Program

Based on the school's vision for the future, what should the curriculum contain? Should the school create (or drop) particular courses and programs? Should it revise the approach to the teaching of the current ones? To ensure students will benefit from new programs, what courses, staffing, facilities, time, technology, and materials are required? Curriculum planning is usually quite complex and should always include appropriate provisions for faculty training and development. It is an old saw in education that it is relatively simple to envision a new program and usually complicated to put it into effect.

Technology

The technology component of the Strategic Plan should focus on both the instructional and the operational use of technology. Integrating technology into the teaching and learning process should aim to transform, and improve, the way teachers teach, and students learn. An effective plan should consider professional development, technical support, and the equitable allocation of resources. Operational needs, data management and communication, are also key components.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The school's efforts to support difference and multiculturalism might be facilitated by identifying the specific needs of various students and planning how best to provide:

- Special or augmented programs for certain students or groups
- The education of students about issues of equity and justice

- The professional development of faculty, including relevant topics in the general curriculum
- Awareness by all constituencies of the complexities of the ways differing cultural and learning backgrounds affect the school's environment and its ability to meet its mission

NEASC research indicates that a fundamental commitment by the school's leadership and a culture permeated by values of equity, inclusion, and belonging are necessary to creating a genuinely equitable school community.

Facilities

Thoughtful, thorough, and imaginative facilities planning is essential to most Strategic Plans and the complex details of facilities planning require their own volume. These plans will include, among other elements:

- Thorough assessment of the entire plant, property, and the many elements of the site
- Thorough assessment of current facilities: age, condition, use, potential for renovation
- Vision for the school's mission and program providing context for new proposals
- Objective analysis of the needs and outcomes of a new facility
- Thorough understanding of the costs of construction/renovation
- Long-term costs/depreciation of the facility
- Opportunities for revenue from a new facility
- Effect of a new facility on existing facilities

Financial Sustainability

The financial ramifications of strategic planning should be clearly articulated. Financial plans and projected cash flows should be updated regularly, and contingencies analyzed. The financial plan should also help determine short and long-term development needs.

Faculty

The faculty should be appropriately engaged in planning and sufficiently trained and professionally supported to carry out the plan. Including faculty in the creation of strategic planning can often advance their understanding and their capacity to work positively with new approaches and innovative programs. A realistic perspective on the faculty's capacity to advance the plan may prove essential to its success.

Advancement and Development

As the direction and needs of the school evolve, the school also begins to develop an advancement program to meet them. The Strategic Plan will include such components as:

- The need for a capital campaign
- The level of staffing required
- The role the head of school
- The capacity and appropriate role of the Board
- The ability of school's constituency to fulfill the goals

Culture

The Strategic Plan should attend thoughtfully to the shared beliefs and values of the school community. Lists of these qualities will vary depending on the mission but, as Peter Drucker famously said: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

Drucker asserted that a culture will either enhance and encourage a strategic vision or strangle it. Planning should always strive to understand, strengthen, and respect the school's culture.

Elegantly said, "No one ever changes the oil in a rental car." The keys to fostering a culture of ownership are alignment of personal and organizational values plus shared expectations regarding attitude and behavior in the workplace. A cultural blueprint is an essential step to creating a shared vision and common expectations."

RESOURCES

Strategic Planning: The Basic Idea (Support Center for Nonprofit Management; idealist.org, 1995)

Why You Need a Plan: 5 Good Reasons (Michael Wilkinson; blog, October 18, 2011)

Strategic Planning is an Oxymoron (Pat Bassett; Independent School Magazine, Fall 2012)

Eight Reasons Culture Eats Strategy for Lunch (Joe Tye; Values Coach Inc., 2013)

The Inclusive Self-Study

Accreditation should be inclusive, incorporating perspectives from representative members of the entire school community. Each school should consider how best to incorporate the ideas, observations and perspectives of the various members of the school community.

Faculty, Administration, and Staff

The faculty play a key role in the reflective process of the Self-Study, and to the extent possible, should serve on at least one Program Standard Committee. When there are too many faculty members to include on these committees, the school should use focus groups that provide each teacher an opportunity to have a voice in this process. Faculty surveys also gather data from all faculty.

Administrators and professional staff will likely find their greatest role in the Foundation Standards. School leaders and staff with particular areas of expertise should be involved in the discussions and planning outlined in the Foundation Standards.

- Administrators should have an in-depth understanding of the accreditation process as a means to school improvement.

- The best way to fully understand the process is to serve on a Visiting Team at another NEASC Accredited school.

The head of school, or designate, should arrange appropriate time for the various committees to complete their work and secure the necessary funding for the decennial visit. To the degree possible, NEASC recommends using previously scheduled faculty meeting time for the work.

Members of the Governing Body

Each school should consider how members of the governing body can best be included in the Self-Study process. With a focus on plans for long-term growth and viability, the Self-Study, and, in particular, the Foundation Standards, are an important place to include those with governance responsibilities.

Parents

Parents bring an important perspective and insight to this process. The school is expected to conduct parent surveys and might also consider parents on standard committees, particularly those around admissions, program, health and safety, student experience and finances. Given the variety of independent school missions, including boarding, elementary and middle schools and particular philosophical or religious traditions, schools will likely have distinctive approaches to including parents in the process. But their perspectives should be included, and the Visiting Team will always expect at least one meeting with parents during their time on campus.

Students

The Self Study process ultimately aims to understand, respect and improve the quality of students' experience. As has been stated many times in this Manual, students are the essential focus of the school and of NEASC. Given the enormous range of students served by accredited schools, NEASC strongly encourages schools to develop and implement effective mechanisms to draw out and welcome student voice in the process.

Such mechanisms might include:

- Administering the student surveys, as appropriate by age and ability

- Including students as active members of some, or even all, Self-Study Committees

- Inviting students to speak directly with Visiting Team members during their time on campus

- Inviting student groups (student council, newspaper staff, drama group, student leadership, etc.) to speak with Visiting Team

- Administering the NEASC (or other) "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Survey"

- Ensuring that the full range of students and their experiences are included in the Self- Study and/or during the visit

Note: Surveys for students below sixth grade are not usually effective. Family surveys are particularly important for this age range.

Religious Leaders for Faith-Based Schools

Schools affiliated with a religious organization should, at the least, share the results of the Self-Study with the appropriate religious leaders. Strategic Plans will be most effective when there is support and collaboration between the school and the religious community. Some schools may choose to include members of the religious community on standard-based committees.

NEASC Surveys

During the preparation and data gathering phase of the Self-Study process, schools are expected to survey their constituencies: teachers, families, students (grades 6-12), and alumni (high schools only). The NEASC surveys are designed to elicit feedback from the various members of the school community about the areas addressed by the NEASC Standards. Insight and understanding gained from the survey results should be used to inform the discussions and reflections of the Standards Committees, both Foundation and Program. In order for the committees to have the data from the surveys, it is essential that schools distribute the surveys early in the process.

Schools may use the surveys provided by NEASC or design their own surveys.

If a school chooses to use the NEASC surveys, they cannot be customized.

There are two different versions of the student surveys:

1. General Student Survey

2. High School Student Survey

The General Student Survey will be more accessible for middle school students; the vocabulary is simpler, and the questions stated more directly. Each school can choose which version to provide to which population of students.

Schools choosing to use the NEASC surveys will be sent links to the surveys that can be distributed directly to members of their school community. These surveys can only be completed online. The survey automatically scales itself to mobile devices, but it is recommended that respondents use a desktop or laptop. Generally, surveys will take no more than 15 minutes to complete and must be completed in one sitting. To access the survey, each respondent need only click the appropriate link; there is no password required.

Schools will be sent the electronic survey links following the faculty in-service provided by NEASC staff. A cut-off date will be noted in the communication from the NEASC office. Once the surveys have been closed, no additional responses can be entered. NEASC will then send to the school the survey reports as well as an Excel Spreadsheet with the raw data. Survey data should be used to inform the Self-Study, but Schools are also expected to make the survey reports and raw data available to the Visiting Team, both Foundation and Program.

Survey links are sent out in August (for spring Foundation Visits) and January (for fall Foundation Visits).

NEASC reserves the right to use school data anonymously for statistical analysis only.

Faculty Survey

1. The school's mission accurately reflects the school as it currently operates.

2. The school's mission guides decision-making.

3. The school enrolls mission-appropriate students who will benefit from their experience at the school.

4. The admissions process is effective in enrolling students who will contribute positively to the school community.

5. Faculty have a role in the admissions process.

6. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the academic programs at the school.

7. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the athletic programs at the school.

8. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the extra-curricular programs at the school.

9. My students' needs and aspirations are being met by the visual and performing arts programs at the school.

10. I am encouraged to explore new teaching methods to support student learning.

11. I have the resources and time that I need to do my job well.

12. I am respected as a professional.

13. School policies are administered fairly and consistently.

14. The role of faculty in decision-making is clearly defined and appropriate in scope.

15. Internal communication at the school is timely, clear, and effective.

16. The school culture promotes and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.

17. I trust the school leadership is operating in the best interest of the students.

18. The governing body acts with transparency and integrity.

19. The professional evaluation process is clearly outlined and understood.

20. Professional development is a priority at the school.

21. The school engages positively with the local community.

22. The school tries to broaden students' perspective on the global community.

23. The school is a safe, clean, and well-organized place for students to learn.

24. I am confident in the school's long-term viability.

25. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?

26. What is the best thing about working at this school?

27. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree — Agree — Disagree — Strongly Disagree — I Don't Know

Family Survey

1. I believe in the school's mission.

2. The school's mission is effectively communicated to the community.

3. The admission process was welcoming and conveyed an accurate depiction of the school.

4. The academic program at the school meets the needs of my child(ren).

5. The visual and performing arts program at the school meets the needs of my child(ren).

6. The athletic program at the school meets the needs of my child(ren).

7. The extra-curricular activities at the school meet the needs of my child(ren).

8. The school culture promotes and celebrates the essential equity and inclusion of all students.

9. The faculty and staff have worked respectfully and professionally with my child(ren).

10. The faculty uses effective assessment tools to promote my child's learning and monitor growth.

11. The school is a safe, clean, and well-organized place.

12. The school facilities are clean and well-maintained.

13. The school environment supports my child's social development.

14. The school environment supports my child's emotional development.

15. There is a clearly defined role for parents at the school.

16. Communication from the school is clear and effective.

17. I trust the school leadership to operate in the best interest of the students.

18. The governing body acts with transparency and integrity.

19. The school engages positively with the local community.

20. The school encourages my child to broaden his/her perspective on the global community.

21. The school's facilities enhance the student experience and the program.

22. The school's residential facilities enhance the student experience and the program, if applicable.

23. I am confident in the school's long-term viability.

24. This is a great school for my child.

25. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?

26. What is the best thing about this school?

27. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree — Agree — Disagree — Strongly Disagree — I Don't Know

High School Student Survey

1. The school's mission is clear, and I understand it.

2. The academic programs at the school meet my needs and interests.

3. The visual and performing arts programs at the school meet my needs and interests.

4. The athletic programs at the school meet my needs and interests.

5. The extra-curricular programs at the school meet my needs and interests.

6. All students are treated fairly.

7. The faculty treat students with respect.

8. The students treat each other with respect.

9. The faculty who teach me are effective.

10. There are faculty to whom I can turn for academic help.

11. There are faculty to whom I can turn for help with personal issues.

12. School policies reflect the school's values.

13. Student perspectives and opinions are acknowledged and valued.

14. I am encouraged to think critically and problem solve.

15. The school is a safe, clean, well-organized place.

16. The school has a good relationship with the local community.

17. The school broadens my understanding of the larger world.

18. The school communicates effectively with me.

19. The school's facilities support the students and the program.

20. This is a great school for me.

21. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?

22. What is the best thing about this school?

23. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree — Agree — Disagree — Strongly Disagree — I Don't Know

General Student Survey

1. I understand the school's mission.

2. I understand what is important at my school.

3. The academic classes at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.

4. The athletic activities at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.

5. The extra-curricular activities at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.

6. The visual and performing arts activities at the school offer me choices and are interesting to me.

7. The teachers support and celebrate all students.

8. The teachers treat me with respect and encourage me to learn.

9. Other students treat me with respect.

10. There are teachers to whom I can turn for advice.

11. School rules are applied fairly.

12. Someone at the school listens to my ideas and opinions.

13. The school is a safe, clean, and well-organized place.

14. There are opportunities for me to get involved with the local community.

15. The school encourages me to think globally.

16. I am encouraged to think critically and problem solve.

17. The school's facilities support the students and the program.

18. This is a great school for me.

19. If you could change one thing at the school, what would it be?

20. What is the best thing about this school?

21. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree — Agree — Disagree — Strongly Disagree — I Don't Know

Alumni/ae Survey

1. The school's mission and values stay with me today.

2. The school's mission was matched by what happened at the school.

3. The academic programs at the school met my needs and interests.

4. The visual and performing arts programs at the school met my needs and interests.

5. The athletic programs at the school met my needs and interests.

6. The extra-curricular programs at the school met my needs and interests.

7. There were faculty to whom I could turn for academic help.

8. There were faculty to whom I could turn for help with personal issues.

9. The faculty who taught me were effective.

10. I was treated with respect by the faculty and staff.

11. I was treated with respect by the other students.

12. All students were treated equally and fairly.

13. The school environment supported my social and emotional development.

14. Student perspectives and opinions were acknowledged and valued.

15. The school was a safe, clean, and well-organized place to learn.

16. The school broadened my understanding of the larger world.

17. The school's facilities and resources adequately supported the programs.

18. The school's fundraising efforts, if applicable, are appropriate.

19. This was a great school for me.

20. When I left the school, I was well prepared for success in my next educational endeavor.

21. Did you graduate high school from this school? If yes,

    a. The school stays in touch with me now that I have graduated.

    b. I was well-prepared for college or vocational school.

    c. My experience gave me the foundation to successfully hold a job.

22. If you could have changed one thing at the school, what would it be?

23. What was the best thing about your school experience?

24. Please share any additional comments.

Strongly Agree — Agree — Disagree — Strongly Disagree — I Don't Know

Alphabetical Staff Overview

Name (last name, first name)	M/F	Teaching/Administrative Responsibilities	Degree(s)	Years experience	Years at school

School Data Sheet

Note: Your completed School Data Sheet may be copied and included with the Visiting Team Report.

School Name:

Address (line 1):

Address (line 2):

City: State: Zip:

Phone: Website: Grades:

Date of Founding:

Other Campuses (if applicable):

Second Campus/School name if different:

Address:

City: State: Zip: Grades:

Third Campus/School name if different:

Address:

City: State: Zip: Grades:

Partnerships and/or campuses in other countries (if applicable):

Address:

City: Country:

Date Initiated:

Total Enrollment (at the time of evaluation visit):   *Please submit one for each campus.*

	PS	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	PG	Totals
Male																
Female																
Non-Binary																
Day																
Boarding																
Homestay																

International students included in the above table who are not US residents:

	PS	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	PG	Totals
Day																
Boarding																
Homestay																

Please complete for each campus:

Number of Faculty: _____ full-time   _____ part-time

Number of Administrators: _____ full-time   _____ part-time

Number of other Staff
(Maintenance/Housekeeping/Kitchen/Administrative Assistants/Para Educators):
_____ full-time   _____ part-time

Full-time or FTE Faculty to Student Ratio
(number of students divided by number of faculty): _____

Sample Self-Study Report Template

Foundation Standard 1 — Enrolled students align appropriately with the mission.

1.a. The school's enrollment and admissions process align with the mission, core values, and cultural context of the school.

1.b. The school identifies and addresses current enrollment trends and influencing factors.

1.c. Enrolled students are appropriate for the mission and their learning needs can be fully met by the school's program and personnel.

1.d. The admissions and enrollment management policies and practices align with the school's beliefs and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

1.e. The granting of student financial assistance aligns with the mission.

1.f. The school aspires and plans to strengthen its alignment with this Standard.

School's Self-Rating _____

SM1: Standard Met: Evidences clear understanding, effective implementation and thorough planning for further improvement.

SM2: Standard Met: Evidences understanding, evolving implementation and planning for improvement.

SU1: Standard Unmet: Evidences inadequate understanding, implementation and planning for remediation that may foreseeably compromise student experience.

SU2: Standard Unmet: Lacks understanding, implementation and planning for remediation, thereby compromising student experience.

Explanation of Rating:

Self-Study Committee:

Background Materials:

Summary of Reflections on the Standard and Indicators:
(This summary should include an analysis of current status.)

Significant Challenges:

Significant Strengths:

Describe the school's aspirations and specific action steps to strengthen this Standard:

Materials provided:

    A. Current marketing and enrollment management plans ___

    B. Link to an online admissions application ___

    C. Parent tuition agreement ___

    D. Statement of financial aid policies and procedures ___

    E. Non-discrimination policy (may be included in other materials) ___

        o NEASC requires all students to be treated fairly and equitably.

        o The missions of independent schools may be gender specific.

    F. Parent and student handbooks with date of most recent revision___

Textbox and place to Upload documents — Materials Requested and Reviewed

The Visiting Team

Selection of Chair and Visiting Team

The Commission staff will identify the Chair or Co-Chairs of the Visiting Team and determine the composition of both the Foundation and Program Committees. Once the Chair of the Visiting Team has been confirmed, the head of school and the NEASC Office will establish and coordinate dates for both the Foundation and Program Visits.

Scheduling the Foundation Visit

Prior to the Foundation Visit, the head of school should contact the Chair and the Assistant Chair (if possible) to review the Foundation Standards Report and discuss the logistics of the Foundation Visit. After this phone call, the Chair will arrange the schedule for the Foundation Visit, identifying individuals and meetings that should take place. The school is responsible for providing a private room at the school as well as transportation and meals, as needed. If it is necessary for the Chair, Assistant Chair, or Foundation Visit Specialist to stay overnight, the school is responsible for obtaining accommodations.

Scheduling the Program Visit

Visiting Team members are scheduled to arrive on a Sunday afternoon and depart on a day determined by the Chair and the NEASC office. There will be overnight stays for the Team members and the number of days (usually Sunday — Wednesday) will be determined by the size and complexity of the school. The school, in consultation with the Commission staff, should select the dates for the visit well ahead of time to facilitate planning. Fall visits are scheduled from the last week in September to the first week in November, and spring visits from the last week in March through the end of April.

The Chair of the Visiting Team and the Self-Study Coordinator — or other appropriate individual at the school — will work out a detailed, specific, hour-by-hour, person-by-person, room-by-room schedule for each member of the Visiting Team and the appropriate individuals on campus. Prior to their arrival at the school, the Team will receive specific Standard assignments and will have coordinated with the Chair the working list of the people they need to interview and the places they need to visit.

This schedule should be circulated at the school well in advance of the Team's visit and the details worked out by the Self-Study Coordinator or other appropriate individual on campus. The Visiting Team members should each receive their schedules at (or prior to) their first Sunday afternoon meeting.

Usually, the first day-and-a-half of a Team's visit will be reasonably tightly scheduled. After that, individual Team members and/or the Chair or Assistant Chair may ask the Self- Study Coordinator to schedule additional conversations as necessary. In general, it is important that individuals engaged with a particular Standard meet with the Visiting Team members charged with that Standard. Whether or not this is all the people who worked on a Standard or a representative individual from the group would depend on the size of the school and the number of people involved. The composition of these meetings will be decided by the Chair in conversation with the Self-Study Coordinator and the members of the Team.

The importance of a detailed, carefully articulated daily schedule cannot be overstated. The

schedule permits the Team to do their work most effectively and gives confidence in the school community that all relevant individuals — including Board members, students, faculty, staff, administration and parents — have been included in the formal visit.

Accommodations for the Program Visit

The school is responsible for arranging housing for all Team Members for the overnight stays during the visit. Accommodations should be in a local hotel or motel and provide a private room and bath for each member. In addition, the school should arrange for a meeting room for the Team at the hotel.

Meals

The school is responsible for meals during both the Foundation and the Program Visits. Ordinarily, the Team will have lunches provided in their workroom at the school. Since the Program Visit entails an overnight stay, the school is responsible for providing breakfast either at the school or at the hotel. Most teams prefer to have working dinners on the days they are staying overnight, either at the hotel or a local restaurant. This may differ for boarding schools.

On Sunday the school customarily holds a small reception and dinner for appropriate members of the school community. The Team has a great deal of work to accomplish in a short time and, therefore, social events and entertainment should be kept to a minimum and scheduled only in consultation with the Chair. The school is expected to make the Team comfortable but should avoid extravagant expense.

Arrangements at the School

The Visiting Team must have a private and secured tech-ready meeting room at the school which is appropriately tech-equipped for their use only. Refreshments should be provided during the days of the visit. The Visiting Team Chair will remind all Team members to bring a laptop for their use throughout the visit.

What to expect from the Visiting Team

The Visiting Team will access and review the Self-Study from the NEASC Portal prior to their arrival. Their charge is to understand the school on its own terms, assess the accuracy of the Self-Study Report, determine alignment with the Standards for Accreditation, write a Report focused on commendations and recommendations, and make a recommendation to the Commission regarding accreditation.

The school should expect Visiting Team members to be at the school all day on Monday and Tuesday. While the presence of the visitors will obviously not go unnoticed, the school is asked to maintain as normal a routine as possible. Team Members will interview faculty, administration, parents, students, and Board Members.

Members of the Program Team will visit classes to gain a flavor of the academic program. Teachers should not schedule tests, field trips, or films during these days. The visitors will be observing interactions among students and between students and faculty. They will note teaching methods and instructional materials. The Visiting Team will visit representative classes but may not visit all of the classes offered. The Visiting Team is looking at the entire program and does not evaluate individual faculty, staff, or administrators and will not comment on the performance of individuals

or identify anyone by name in the Visiting Team Report.

The Team departs after they have completed a draft of their report. The Team is instructed not to share specifics of their report, however, since it has not been finalized. The Chair and another member of the Team (usually the Assistant Chair) will meet with the head of school and others as appropriate on the last day to review major areas of the visit.

Team Chairs may or may not hold a "thank you" meeting with the school community though, in some schools this has proven difficult to schedule. The Chair will edit the Visiting Team Report draft and send it to the school to ensure there are no factual errors. Once this is completed, the Chair will then finalize the Team's report and, within ten days of the Program Visit, submit it to the Commission. Upon receipt of the final report, the head of school is invited to write a reaction to the Visiting Team Report.

Commission Action

The Commission will review the school's Self-Study, the Visiting Team Report, the Visiting Team's recommendation concerning accreditation and votes on Standards for Accreditation, and the school's reaction letter (if applicable) at its next meeting after all these items are received. The Commission meets three times each year in November, February, and June.

If a school recommended for initial membership does not meet all Standards, action on their accreditation will be tabled until the Standards are met. If a school approved for Continued Accreditation should not meet one or more Standards, the school may be given up to one year to bring itself into compliance.

On the NEASC Annual Report Form, the school will report on actions taken in response to the school's own recommendations and those of the Visiting Team and the Commission. The Commission may ask the NEASC staff to follow-up with the school on concerns or may schedule a formal Focused Visit to inquire into progress the school has made.

In addition to any Special Progress Reports or visits, all schools are required to file an Annual Report and a Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report, documenting accomplishments in the follow- up process. School improvement is an ongoing process and the Strategic Plan submitted for the appropriate Reports should reflect this continual progress.

A one-day visit by a Commission staff member will also take place at the time of the Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report. This Five-Year Visit will review ongoing plans, aspirations and challenges for the school.

Eight years from the original visit, a Commission staff member will meet with the head of school and selected individuals to begin the process again in anticipation for the next visit.

Self-Study Coordinator(s) Checklist

Preparation for the Self-Study

1. In consultation with the head of school and NEASC Liaison, decide on dates for the Initial Contact and both the Foundation and Program Standards Visits

2. Login information and instructions for the online portal will be sent to the head of school and the Self-Study Coordinator(s)

3. Meet with the head of school to determine arrangements for the Visiting Team accommodations and meals

4. Arrange for the Visiting Team to have an area to work both at the school and the hotel, include refreshments and any materials requested by the Chair

5. Self-Study materials are available on the NEASC website at: www.neasc.org/independent

6. Register for a Self-Study Workshop at: https://www.neasc.org/events

7. Meet with the head of school to plan the calendar of professional days to work on the Self-Study, decide on the Steering Committee membership, and review the list of active evaluators for the school

8. Register new Self-Study Coordinators for a workshop and advise NEASC staff regarding those available to participate on Visiting Team during the two seasons prior to hosting the decennial visit

9. Schedule NEASC staff presentation at the school and meeting with the Steering Committee

10. Plan for a discussion and review of the mission statement

11. Arrange with NEASC for the survey links to be created, data collected, and data shared with all Foundation and Program Committees

Self-Study Foundation Standards

1. Following the NEASC staff presentation, work with the Steering Committee to confirm committee assignments and set timeline for the necessary work

2. Monitor progress of Foundation Standard committees

3. Arrange for all required documentation to be collected, uploaded or placed in files for Visiting Team

4. Submit completed report (Foundation Standards 1-6) six weeks prior to the Foundation Visit

Self-Study Program Standards

1. Survey faculty on preferences for Program Standard committees

2. Set committee assignments, create a timeline for completion of the work

3. Monitor progress of Program Standard work and compilation of all required documentation

4. Submit completed report six weeks prior to the Program Visit

Sharing of Report and Final Preparations

1. Share with all constituencies the results of the reports

2. Plan for the follow-up

About us

NEASC Mission Statement

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

Commission on Independent Schools Statement

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

Resources

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

Contact us

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Lowell, MA, 01851 USA

Phone: 781-425-7700

Email: cis@neasc.org

Staff directory: www.neasc.org/staff-directory