



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

## **NAIS Commission on Accreditation**

### **Criteria for Effective Independent School Accreditation Practices February 2015**

#### **Criteria for Regional and State Associations**

1. The association holds schools accountable to a comprehensive set of standards related to the educational program and issues of institutional health.
2. The association, recognizing that accreditation is a peer review process, institutes policies and procedures that ensure fairness and impartiality and that are free of conflicts of interest, both in appearance and in fact.
3. The accreditation process consists of a continuing cycle: self-study by the school, visit and report by a team of trained peers, action by the association, and follow-up by the school and the association.
4. The association monitors the school's compliance with standards and its progress in addressing the recommendations of the self-study and of the visiting team report. The association also regularly solicits reports from schools on substantive institutional change and reviews the school's accreditation status in the light of those changes.
5. The decision-making and appeal processes regarding accreditation status and /or changes in the accreditation cycle are clear and understandable. Policies and procedures are available for public review.
6. The association offers formal and comprehensive preparation and training for all participants in the accreditation process, including team chairs and members, heads of school, self-study coordinators, and association boards and commissions.
7. The association engages in regular evaluation and review of its standards and accreditation process and solicits reports from schools and visiting teams on their experience with the process.
8. The association designates a decision-making body charged with overseeing the evaluation and accreditation process and making final decisions regarding accreditation.
9. The accreditation process will examine the whole school, including all divisions and those programs that are included in the accreditation.
10. The association has a procedure, available to the public and clearly explained, to handle complaints that accredited schools are not meeting standards.

#### **Criteria for Standards**

11. The accreditation process rests on comprehensive standards which schools must meet. The standards address all areas of school life, including the following: mission, governance, finance, program, community of the school, administration, development, admissions, personnel, health and safety, facilities, student services, school culture, and residential life (where applicable).
12. The standards require schools to conduct a thoughtful assessment of individual student progress consistent with

the school's mission. (amended 2/09)

13. The standards require a school to provide evidence of a thoughtful process, respectful of its mission, for informed decision-making that draws on data (both internal and external) about student learning. (adopted 2/09; to be implemented by 2/11)
14. The standards require a school to demonstrate that its educational programs, instructional practices, and institutional culture are informed by relevant research regarding how students learn and the knowledge and capacities they will need to lead purposeful and constructive lives. (adopted 2/11; to be implemented by 2/13)

#### **Criteria for the Self-Study**

15. The self-study process is deliberative, and the self-study report reflects the considered judgment of the school's professional community.
16. A broad cross-section of the community (including all faculty and staff, as well as members of the governing body and others in the community, as appropriate) participate in preparing the self-study.
17. The self-study includes reflection and self-analysis as well as description, identifies strengths and weaknesses, assesses both the school's compliance with standards and the congruence between its program and mission, and balances documentation of accountability to association standards with a focus on school improvement. The school will also provide all required documents in a timely fashion.

#### **Criteria for the Visiting Team**

18. The accrediting association appoints a visiting team chair who shall be responsible to follow the accrediting association's guidelines, to ensure the visiting team's effectiveness, and to protect the integrity of the process.
19. The accrediting association appoints a visiting team to conduct a site visit while school is in session.
20. The association is mindful of the circumstances of the school and the full range of the standards in determining the size and selecting the members of a visiting team.
21. The visiting team receives advance materials in a timely fashion and arrives at the school fully prepared.
22. The team observes the program and interviews school staff, trustees, students, parents, and others as appropriate. It validates the self-study, evaluates the school's compliance with standards, and writes a report with commendations and recommendations which is sent to the association and to the school in a timely fashion. The report is confidential, except as authorized by the school. Any release of parts or all of the report to the public must follow association guidelines.
23. The length of the visit is sufficient to accomplish the above.
24. The members of the visiting team hold confidential the information they receive and their discussions during the accreditation process.

#### **Criteria for the Association Review**

25. The association, or a representative committee, receives and reviews the self-study, and-visiting team report, determines the accreditation status of the school, prescribes appropriate actions, and sets up a schedule for future reports and visits. The school is given an opportunity to respond to the report of the visiting committee in advance of the association taking action on its accreditation.
26. The association notifies the board chair, as well as the head of school, concerning decisions related to a school's accreditation.



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### **Model Core Standards**

**February 2015**

#### Introduction

Model Core Standards are those which define the culture of independent schools and relate directly to the first of the Criteria for Effective Accreditation. While they do not serve as a template, these standards reflect the core elements of our schools and their operation and should be represented in some form in a regional or state association's accreditation instrument. Associations are expected to check that these areas are covered in their own standards and report on any discrepancies.

#### Mission

1. The school has a clear statement of educational mission. The stated mission and philosophy guide the school's admissions, program, planning and decision-making.
2. The mission of the school is congruent with principles of academic scholarship: permitting and encouraging freedom of inquiry, diversity of viewpoints, and independent/critical thinking.

#### Full Disclosure

The school makes full, accurate and truthful disclosure of its mission, policies, expectations, programs and practices.

#### Governance and Fiscal Responsibility

1. The governing board of the school is a deliberative body with clearly defined roles and responsibilities that are communicated to all constituents.

It provides for,

- a. Continuity of mission;
  - b. Stability in transitions of leadership;
  - c. Establishing and monitoring needed school policies;
  - d. Comprehensive strategic and financial planning;
  - e. Financial oversight, accountability and stability;
  - f. Evaluation and support of the development of the head of school;
  - g. Clearly defined and regularly applied procedures to orient, educate, and evaluate the governing body;
  - h. A model of inclusive decision making for the school community; and
  - i. Adequate risk management policies.
2. The governing body consistently exercises its fiduciary responsibility.
  3. There is evidence of efficient and effective management of resources sufficient to advance the mission of the school.

4. There are effective policies and procedures for management of operating and capital funds in compliance with generally accepted accounting principles and practices.
5. The board delegates the operational and educational functions of the school to the head of school.

#### Program

1. The educational program stems from the school's beliefs about teaching and learning which are regularly reviewed and which are consistent with the mission of the school.
2. All school programs (including early childhood, residential, extended care, etc.) demonstrate consideration for the appropriate intellectual, social, physical, aesthetic, emotional and ethical development of students in all aspects of school and student life.
3. The school has sufficient resources to support the program of the school and the needs of the students and professional staff.
4. Instructional materials and equipment are of sufficient quality, quantity, and variety to provide effective support to the goals and methods of the program.
5. The school has in place a procedure for follow-up on graduate success, and utilizes resulting data to assess its goals and programs.
6. Requirements and expectations for students, parents, faculty, trustees, and employees clearly reflect the values and mission of the school.
7. Procedures are in place to assess and communicate effectively individual student progress toward meeting the goals of the program.
8. The school demonstrates that its educational programs, instructional practices, and institutional culture are informed by relevant research regarding how students learn and the knowledge and capacities they will need to lead purposeful and constructive lives.

#### Professional Staff

1. Faculty and staff are well qualified through education and training and/or experience to fulfill the responsibilities of their positions.
2. Faculty, administration and staff members are sufficient in number to accomplish the work for which they are responsible.
3. The administration actively supports the professional development of faculty and staff through allocation of time and resources.
4. The school implements clearly defined programs for supervision and regular performance evaluation of the administration, faculty and staff.
5. Personnel practices provide ethical treatment among all faculty, administration and staff with respect to compensation, workloads, and working conditions.

#### Culture and Climate

1. In keeping with its mission, the school promotes an equitable, just, and inclusive community of adults and students, fosters a culture of learning, and inspires students to respect and value diversity.
2. The school recognizes global connectedness, promotes a culture of global understanding, and fosters a commitment to the values of sustainability in all areas including preservation of the environment for current and future generations

### Health & Safety

The school has a process to ensure that it demonstrates compliance with all state, local and federal regulations.

### Enrollment

The school has procedures in place to ensure that students who are admitted are appropriate to the mission and can be served by the school's program.