



2020 - A VISION FOR LEARNING

# Accreditation Visit Handbook

for Public Elementary, Middle and High Schools seeking Accreditation in 2021

FOR SPRING 2021 SCHOOLS

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES  
Commission on Public Schools

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## 2021 Accreditation Visit Framework

### Overarching Principles of the visit

- The primary purpose of the visit will be to hold schools accountable for improvement and growth on their identified priorities – not necessarily improvement or alignment with every Principle in the Standards.
- The visit will be organized largely based on observing and discussing the school's Priority Areas for Growth.
- The visiting team will employ a growth mindset in meetings, interactions, and debriefs with school personnel.
- The spirit of the visit will be based on trust, inquiry, collaboration, and support.
- The visiting team will place a large emphasis on observing learning and teaching practices through classroom observations and talking to teachers and students about their work.

### The visiting team will look for

- any changes in alignment with the Foundational Elements
- progress made implementing the School Improvement/Growth Plan and possible next steps regarding the Priority Areas
- learning and teaching practices and their impact on each student
- other areas of change or growth on which the school requests feedback
- the school's capacity as a learning organization to make changes based on the 4Cs Framework: Conceptual Understanding, Commitment, Competency, Capacity

# School Summary Report

The School Summary Report will be prepared by the school prior to the Accreditation visit and uploaded to the NEASC online portal. The purpose is to provide updates and additional information related to what has happened at the school since the time of the Collaborative Conference (CC) visit.

## **School Summary Report Components**

### **School and Community Summary Section**

- Update the School and Community Summary (from the Self-Reflection Report) if necessary and cut and paste it into the online portal
- Update core values, beliefs, and vision of the graduate/learning expectations if necessary and cut and paste it into the online portal
- Upload the School Improvement/Growth Plan document created after the CC visit

### **Part 1 – Foundational Elements Alignment**

- Provide detail on the school’s alignment to the Foundational Elements and identify any changes since the time of the CC visit.

### **Part 2 – Reflection on Priority Areas**

- Report on the progress made in all identified Priority Areas in the School Growth/Improvement Plan from the time of the CC visit using the Action-Impact-Growth framework.

To analyze progress in each Priority Area for Growth, the school should describe each action that has been undertaken, the status of each action, the impact of each action, and what growth/improvement opportunities each action has revealed.

#### **Describe each of the ACTIONS**

- What has been done and who was involved?
- What is the status of each action? Are each of the actions completed, in progress, or planned for the future?
- How was progress for each action measured? What evidence was used? How would you rate the success of each action?

#### **Describe the IMPACT of each of the actions**

- What impact have the completed actions had towards alignment with the Standards for Accreditation? Have any of the Standards/Principles been impacted?
- What impact have the completed actions had on learning, achievement, and well-being of students?
- What impact do you anticipate the actions, which are in progress or planned for the future, will have on alignment with the Standards for Accreditation or student learning, achievement, or well-being?

#### **Describe the opportunities for GROWTH for each Priority Area**

- What are the new opportunities for growth based on the actions and impacts to date?
- What plans may have been made or may need to be made to further growth?

**Include any evidence that was used to show growth in each of the Priority Areas by uploading it to the portal.**

- Make the presentation of evidence user-friendly.
- Organize the evidence by Priority Area for Growth.
- Use the best representative evidence that supports the work completed to date and supports your explanation of the growth accomplished.
- Use the cover sheet for any student work that supports any of your explanations.

### **Part 3 – Reflection on the Principles**

- Use the Principles of Effective Practice Rubric in the Self-Reflection Guide to rerate any of the Principles in which the rating has changed since the time of the Collaborative Conference visit.
- Write a brief explanation describing any changes that occurred and why.

### **Part 4 – Capacity for Continuous Growth as a Learning Organization**

- Reflect and write a brief narrative on each of the 4Cs, conceptual understanding, commitment, competency, and capacity, as a useful way to organize reflection on the school's capacity for ongoing and future growth. Consider the following questions in the response:

#### **Conceptual Understanding**

- Is there a shared understanding of what optimal or effective learning looks like in the school? How do you know?

#### **Commitment**

- To what extent are members of the school community committed to the school's vision of the graduate?
- To what extent are members of the school community committed to a growth mindset for students? For adults? For the school?
- To what extent is the school community committed to alignment with the Standards for Accreditation?

#### **Competency**

- To what extent does the school community understand and acknowledge the changes that need to be made in order to align with the Standards?
- To what extent do faculty members, staff members, and school and district leaders have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to help students achieve the school's vision of the graduate?
- What additional professional learning will be required for the school to align with the standards?

#### **Capacity**

- Does the school have the time, resources, and support needed to make progress on its identified priorities?

### **Part 5 – Planning for the Accreditation Visit**

- Provide information on any particular areas for the visiting team to review more deeply concerning the current Priority Areas, or any areas of growth, for the future and suggest any specific areas of focus for the team’s classroom observations.
- Start brainstorming possible visiting team activities aligned to the school’s priorities, such as specific meetings connected to the Priority Areas for Growth, observations of meetings, specific classes, etc.

# Steering Committee Checklist

The following checklist should be used by the steering committee to ensure that the appropriate materials are prepared and finalized.

## **I. School and Community section**

- Update the School and Community Summary if necessary and upload it to the Summary Report
- Update core values, beliefs, and vision of the graduate/learning expectations if necessary and upload it to the School Summary Report
- Upload School Improvement/Growth Plan

## **II. School Summary Report**

- Summary Report completed
- School Summary Report reviewed by faculty

## **III. Other documents to upload to the portal or provide to the chair**

- Program of studies
- Bell and daily class schedule
- Letter of welcome from the principal
- Floor plan of the building
- List of emergency phone numbers (school, local hospital, etc.)
- Directions/address for school and hotel

## **IV. Coordinate with the chair**

- Selection of students and/or facilities manager to lead the facility tour(s) on Monday
- Small group meetings or observations connected to Priority Areas
- Classroom visits, teacher and/or student conferences for Monday and Tuesday
- Chair's Preliminary Visit Checklist

# Accreditation Visit Protocol

## Required Elements of the Protocol

**School tour** – Students conduct a tour of the school for the visiting team. If there is a priority area related to facilities, then the or the facilities manager/head custodian should conduct a tour for one or two visiting team members

**Overview presentation** – The school administrators and Accreditation Coordinators give an overview presentation that explains their journey since the Collaborative Conference, which includes progress on and next steps for each priority area and the 4Cs, focusing on the school's capacity for growth. Time for questions and discussion should be included after the presentation.

**Priority Area meetings** – Small group meetings to discuss each priority area in-depth, involving personnel related to the implementation of each Priority Area for Growth.

**Priority Area observations** – Observations of activities related to each priority area, for example, PLC meetings, RTI meetings, advisory sessions, common planning time, etc. Include any activities that authentically relate to each priority area and can provide additional insight into how the school has implemented that Priority Area for Growth or the related actions.

**Classroom observations** – General observations of classroom instruction for 5-10 minutes in each classroom concurrent with priority area blocks. Two to three hours on Monday and Tuesday. Team members will be looking for evidence of student learning and any areas identified by the school related to the Priority Areas or specific areas identified by the school,

**Meeting with a group of students** – The team will meet with at least one group of students that reflect the diversity of the student body to discuss student learning in the school.

**Meetings with the principal and superintendent** – The chair should meet with the principal daily and meet with the superintendent one on one at least once during the visit.

**Meeting with the school board** – A meeting with the school board, or representatives from the board, will be held to ensure that there is support for the Accreditation process and the school's chosen Priority Areas.

**Discussions about student work** – The team should have some opportunities to review student work. The review of student work should be organized based on the school's Priority Areas and/or questions for the visiting team. Some suggestions to facilitate this review of student work are:

- teacher conferences – Teachers will be asked to discuss work by reviewing a selection of student work that the teacher chooses with a visiting team member.
- student-led conferences – Students will be asked to bring a portfolio or several pieces of work and sit down with a team member to discuss their work. The meetings should be held in a common space, such as the library. There can be 2-3 students with 1-2 team members.

- review of student work – Samples of student work are curated by the school organized based on the type(s) of assessment(s) rather than department area(s), to demonstrate alignment to selected Principles and/or Priority Areas for Growth

**Debrief with the principal** – Similar to the Collaborative Conference, the team chair and assistant chair, or possibly the whole team will sit down with the principal and leadership team to have a closed-door debrief about the visit and the school’s next steps on Wednesday.

**Chair’s closing remarks** – The chair will briefly address the faculty prior to ending the visit on Wednesday after school. Possibly, this presentation could be a joint one with the chair and the principal.

### **Optional Elements to Demonstrate Priority Area Growth**

**Constituent group meetings** – Meetings with individuals or groups of stakeholders including parents, central office staff, students, and teachers, who have specific knowledge related to the Priority Areas.

**Survey results** – Schools have the option of retaking the NEASC opinion survey or portions of the survey to show growth in Priority Areas at least a month prior to the visit.

**Other** – Other ideas from the school to demonstrate growth that may be incorporated into the visit.



## Chair's Preliminary Visit

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

- \_\_\_\_\_ The awareness of the faculty, staff, students, and community of the Accreditation process and purpose of the Accreditation visiting team's report
- \_\_\_\_\_ Completion of all materials
- \_\_\_\_\_ Collection, availability, and access to evidence
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sunday meeting with the school board at the hotel (unless another time is preferable)
- \_\_\_\_\_ The visiting team schedule (prepared in collaboration between the school and the chair)
  - selection of students to lead facility tours on Monday (or tour with facilities manager or head custodian)
  - priority area meetings
  - priority area observations
  - classroom visits
  - looking at student work protocols
  - meeting with students
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrangements for technology use during the visit including any laptops that may be needed, Wi-Fi access, and assistance as needed
- \_\_\_\_\_ The visiting team workrooms at the school and hotel. Discuss items such as:
  - size, location, and furniture
  - supplies
  - name tags for school
  - easel with paper and markers
  - a complete master schedule available in the school workroom
  - access to the curriculum documents
  - LCD projector (in both locations) and printer (at the school only)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrangements for lodging and meals for members of the visiting team
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parking at the school or transportation to and from hotel
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plans for reimbursement of travel expenses (school or NEASC form?)
- \_\_\_\_\_ An overview of how the Accreditation Report is developed
- \_\_\_\_\_ Press releases about the school visit
- \_\_\_\_\_ The school's responsibility for distribution of the final report
- \_\_\_\_\_ Press releases about the school visit

## Student Work Set Cover Sheet

Teacher / Course / Grade / Level

Type of Assignment (e.g. homework, group work, essay, test, project, etc.)

Skills and Knowledge (e.g. learning expectation, essential question, curriculum standards, etc.)

Describe the activity or assessment and context (or attach unit or lesson plan/overview)

Attach:

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

Identify the Learning Look-fors\*

Identify the Teaching Look-fors\*

\*Use the Look-fors list

Reflection

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

## Look-fors in Classrooms and Student Work

<b>Learning</b>	
<p>skills and competencies necessary to attain the school’s vision of the graduate</p> <p>knowledge, understandings, transferable skills, and dispositions necessary for future success</p> <p>dispositions, such as independence, flexible thinking, and persistence</p> <p>disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge</p> <p>deep understanding</p> <p>higher-order thinking</p> <p>inquiry</p> <p>application of knowledge and skills to authentic tasks</p>	<p>questioning, analysis, and understanding impacts</p> <p>analysis, synthesis, creativity, making connections, and understanding relationships</p> <p>critical and creative thinking</p> <p>using technology in informed, effective, and ethical ways</p> <p>communicate clearly and creatively</p> <p>construct knowledge</p> <p>create</p> <p>problem-solve</p> <p>share work with an audience</p> <p>collaboration</p>
<b>Teaching</b>	
<p>interdisciplinary learning, project-based learning, and authentic learning experiences</p> <p>strategic differentiating and individualizing</p> <p>purposefully organized group learning</p> <p>connections to prior knowledge across disciplines</p> <p>additional support and alternative strategies</p> <p>organizational, grouping, and tiered intervention strategies</p> <p>learning that is personalized, relevant, and authentic</p> <p>opportunities for students to determine learning outcomes, set goals and reflect upon the results</p> <p>student discourse and reflection on learning</p> <p>student choice, pursuit of personal interests, and opportunities for creative expression</p> <p>opportunities to learn in and out of school</p> <p>experiences that are cognitively challenging</p> <p>a wide range of assessment strategies, including formative, summative assessments, and common assessments</p> <p>specific and measurable criteria for success provided to learners prior to assessments</p>	<p>regular and consistent checks for understanding</p> <p>presentation of learning to authentic audiences</p> <p>multiple and varied opportunities over time to demonstrate learning</p> <p>consistent, systematic, specific, and timely corrective feedback</p> <p>opportunities to revise and improve work</p> <p>teacher feedback as well as peer feedback and self-reflection</p> <p>separate grading/reporting and feedback for work habits and academic skills</p> <p>technology to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ access, support, document, and supplement learning</li> <li>○ broaden perspectives locally and globally</li> <li>○ personalize the pace of learning</li> <li>○ share work with an audience beyond the school community</li> <li>○ collaborate digitally to support learning</li> <li>○ engage in learning beyond the constraints of the school building and school day</li> </ul>

# Visit Schedule

## **Sunday**

The visiting team arrives at the hotel between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. as determined by the chair and receives on-site training. The focus is on ensuring that team members understand team responsibilities and the information that has been sent to them in advance.

Some members of the visiting team meet with members of the school board/school committee. This meeting can be held in the hotel workroom in the late afternoon at approximately 5:00 p.m. for 45 minutes.

On Sunday evening, the team meets for dinner from 6:00-7:00 p.m. and then works until approximately 9:00 p.m.

## **Monday and Tuesday**

The schedule for Monday and Tuesday of the visit is determined by the school in consultation with the visiting team chair. The goal is for the school to demonstrate its progress on the Priority Areas for Growth through meetings and observations related to each priority area. In addition, the team should visit classrooms to observe teaching and learning practices.

Required elements of the protocol include:

- school tour
- overview presentation
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- classroom observations
- meetings with the principal and superintendent
- meeting with the school board/committee
- meeting with students
- discussions about student work

## **Wednesday**

Wednesday will include time for the team to finish the report and any necessary paperwork. There will be a brief faculty meeting after school. Prior to the faculty meeting, the team will debrief with the principal and anyone else the principal would like to be present.

The principal and chair should determine, in advance, how the closing remarks will be delivered, for example, a workshop model, looking at Priority Areas and next steps, and/or the principal and chair making remarks together.

## Sample Accreditation Visit Schedule

### **Sunday**

- 3-4:00 p.m. Team arrival and check-in at hotel (time determined by the chair)
- 5:00-5:45 p.m. Meeting with the school committee/school board of education
- 6:00 p.m. Team dinner
- 7:00 p.m. Orientation and planning for the visit

### **Monday**

- 7:30 a.m. Team arrival and organizational meeting
- 8:00 a.m. School tour
- 8:45 a.m. Overview presentation
- 9:30 a.m. Block A\* - Priority Area meetings and observations
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch
- 12:30 p.m. Block B - Priority Area meetings and observations
- 3:30 p.m. Return to the hotel
- 4:00 p.m. Team work time
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner
- 7:00 p.m. Team discussion and writing time

### **Tuesday**

- 7:30 a.m. Team arrival and organizational meeting
- 8:00 a.m. Block C - Priority Area meetings and observations
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch
- 12:30 p.m. Block D - Priority Area meetings and observations
- 3:30 p.m. Return to the hotel
- 4:00 p.m. Team work time
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner
- 7:00 p.m. Team discussion and writing time

### **Wednesday**

- 7:30 a.m. Team arrival
- 8:00 a.m. Team work time and finishing report
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Debrief with the principal and leadership team
- 2:15 p.m. Closing remarks to the faculty\*\*

\*Schedule priority area meetings and observations, classroom observations, teacher conferences to discuss work samples. Schedule student conferences during Blocks C or D on Tuesday. Classroom observations that support the Priority Areas should be scheduled in Blocks A or B on Monday.

\*\*Closing remarks can be delivered jointly with the chair and the principal

# The Accreditation Report

There are several sections to the Accreditation Report. Keeping in mind what has already been reported on in the Collaborative Conference Report, the newly designed Accreditation Report seeks to address the progress made by the school since the Collaborative Conference visit and provides additional information to help the school on its school improvement journey.

## School and Community Summary

### Core Values, Beliefs, Vision of the Graduate/Learning Expectations

#### Introduction

#### Summary Section

##### **Part 1 – Foundational Elements Reflection**

The team provides an update on the Foundational Elements and will confirm or change ratings determined at the time of the CC visit.

##### **Part 2 – Reflection on Priority Areas**

The team provides feedback on each Priority Area for Growth using the action-impact-growth model and suggests next steps or new priorities related to the work the school has done so far, including impacts or outcomes of the stated plan.

##### **Part 3 – Reflection on Student Learning**

The team will provide a reflection on teaching and learning in the school based on classroom observations, meeting with students, and looking at student work. The reflection is based on Principles 2.4 – 2.9 in the Standards for Accreditation.

##### **Part 4 – Capacity for Continuous Growth as a Learning Organization Feedback**

The team provides feedback on the 4Cs framework: conceptual understanding, commitment, competency, and capacity in relation to the school as a whole and the Priority Areas.

##### **Part 5– Additional information (optional, will vary by school)**

The team will provide feedback on any areas the school identified as additional areas to be reviewed during the visit, changes to any ratings on the Principles as noted by the school, any other areas identified by the team.

##### **Part 6– Commendations and Additional Recommendations**

Commendations – The team will commend areas where the school is aligned with the Standards

Additional Recommendations – The team may provide recommendations based on other elements not in the School Improvement/Growth Plan which may be potential next steps for the school or where there is room for significant improvement.

**Follow-Up**

**Substantive Change Policy**

**Members of the Visiting Team**

## **Review and Release of the Final Accreditation Report**

### **Suggested Procedure for Implementation of the Accreditation Report**

The principal should review and discuss the Accreditation Report with

- the steering committee to establish a framework for the follow-up to the Accreditation Report, including the revised School Growth/Improvement Plan due one year after the Accreditation visit
- the superintendent, appropriate central office staff, and the school board to discuss their involvement in the planned follow-up
- the faculty to discuss their involvement in the follow-up
- students, parents, and community members to discuss the Accreditation Report's follow-up

### **Reproduction of the Accreditation Report**

The CPS staff liaison will send an electronic copy of the final report to the principal. The school is responsible for any duplication of the final report for distribution.

### **Distribution of the Accreditation Report**

The principal is responsible for the distribution of the Accreditation Report within the school community. In accordance with the Commission's policy on The Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Team Accreditation Report, the final report must be released in its entirety, within sixty (60) days of its receipt, to the superintendent, school board, school professional staff, public library or town office, and appropriate news media. A copy should also be sent to the appropriate state department of education official identified in the 2023 *Accreditation Handbook*.

## **Principal's Report following the Accreditation Visit**

Following the visit, the principal will receive an email with a link to complete the Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Accreditation Report Document; the Survey of Visit Expenses Document; and the Questionnaire for Principals Document. We appreciate your prompt completion of these forms.



## Sample Invitation to Parents about Involvement in the Visit

Dear (Name of Parent):

Thank you for your willingness to participate in our school's upcoming Commission on Public Schools' on-site Accreditation visit on (date/time). For the last two years, the school community has been involved in preparing a self-reflection, an extensive document that demonstrates ways in which the school is meeting the Standards for Accreditation, identifying priority areas, and implementing our school improvement plan based on those priority areas. The educators who will be visiting our school for four days will be using those materials as part of their work.

An important component of the four-day visit is time designated for members of the visiting team to meet with parents, like you, to learn about the school's programs, services, improvement areas, and your thoughts about your son/daughter's experiences at our school. Information gathered during those meetings will be shared with the entire visiting team and incorporated into the school's Accreditation Report.

All members of the faculty and administrators truly appreciate your involvement in the on-site visit conducted by our educational colleagues. We anticipate it will be a positive experience for you and we sincerely value your thoughts about our school. Please see us if you have any questions or seek additional information before the visit. We would be pleased to talk with you about the visit and the role of parents.

Sincerely,

Name of Principal/ Steering Committee co-chairs

## Sample Press Release

To help you publicize your participation in the Accreditation Seminar below is a sample news release which may be sent to a local newspaper and/or other local media

### EDUCATORS ATTEND ACCREDITATION SEMINAR

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

\_\_\_\_\_(Name)\_\_\_\_\_, principal of \_\_\_\_\_(School)\_\_\_\_\_, (Name)\_\_\_\_\_, teacher of \_\_\_\_\_(Subject)\_\_\_\_\_, and (Name)\_\_\_\_\_, teacher of \_\_\_\_\_(Subject)\_\_\_\_\_, attended an Accreditation Seminar for the upcoming Accreditation visit on \_\_\_\_\_(Date)\_\_\_\_\_.

Sponsored by the Commission on Public Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the program was offered for principals and steering committee members of schools scheduled to be visited this year. The seminar provided information to help schools finalize their plans for the Accreditation visit and to learn more about the final report.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, founded in 1885, is the oldest accrediting agency in the country and is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a reliable agency to award Accreditation in the New England area. The Association is a voluntary accrediting agency of approximately 2,000 public, independent, and international schools, and vocational, technical and career institutions. Of these, over 700 public K-12, middle/high, and high schools have been accredited through the Association's Commission on Public Schools.