

# Accreditation Procedures

## Section One

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## Preface

The Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) is an association of independent schools located in a 15 state region: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

ISACS was founded in 1908, incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 1967, and serves both as a service organization for its member schools and as a network for the promotion of quality in independent schools. A central purpose of ISACS is to encourage, develop, and support the highest possible standards in its member schools and to recognize by formal evaluation those schools in which these standards are achieved and maintained.

While membership in ISACS is voluntary, member schools are required to demonstrate their commitment to quality education and school growth through their participation in the established ISACS accreditation process. This is a seven-year cycle of components consisting of an intensive self-study, visitation by a qualified evaluation team, and several stages of follow-up.

The ISACS Accreditation Guide provides the rationale, standards, procedures, and materials involved in the accreditation program. It has been developed over several years and editions through the efforts of the ISACS staff and the ISACS Evaluation Review Committee.

This ISACS Accreditation Guide should be studied by the head of school and the school's Self-Study Steering Committee to provide the overview of the process and detailed information about each element within it. The Appendix provides all the forms necessary for the self-study, the visit process, and the two follow-up documents eventually required in years subsequent to the self-study and ISACS visit years. Section Three, Visiting Team Leaders, of this guide should be read and studied by the ISACS visiting team leader (VTL) for a thorough description of the VTL's role and full descriptions and suggestions for administering each element of the visit. In the appendix, the Visiting Team Leader will find a checklist for his or her responsibilities as well as the various guides, schedules, forms, and sample documents necessary for successful execution of the ISACS visit and for the completion of the visiting team report.

Section Two, School Self-Study, is the primary instrument for the Self-Study Steering Committee, for each of the school's self-study committees and subcommittees, and for the visiting team. The Self-Study Steering Committee will find in the appendix a checklist for each of its responsibilities. In Section Two, the self-study committees and subcommittees will find explicit instructions for undertaking their work in each area of investigation. A sample report is in the appendix and ISACS hopes that schools will emulate these reports in format and succinctness. The visiting team will find at the end of each section of the guide a charge for its work and specific ISACS standards for membership that apply to the areas of school operation being reviewed.

The ISACS office is available for assistance and guidance whenever questions arise.

# An Overview of ISACS Accreditation

## INTRODUCTION

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A principal function of ISACS is the evaluation of its member schools, which, as independent not-for-profit schools, have voluntarily chosen to guide their progress toward an ideal of educational excellence by measuring against the highest possible standards. In providing and developing standards of excellence, ISACS in no way limits, but strives to preserve, the freedom of each individual school to practice its own theory and philosophy of education.

Independent schools differ from other non-public schools in that they generally have the following characteristics:

- Governed by a board of trustees.
- Fiscally independent. (Roman Catholic and Anglican “order” schools such as Benedictine, Jesuit, Sacred Heart, etc. as well as certain other Christian and Jewish day schools, are considered to be fiscally independent so long as they control their own finances).
- Have a stated policy of nondiscrimination in admissions and employment.
- Recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations.
- Approved through a recognized accreditation process, such as that provided by the five regional accrediting bodies and certain independent school associations.

While ISACS member schools vary significantly in their purpose, program, and style, they are all subject to certain means of accountability including the following:

- They must satisfy their constituencies concerning the quality of their educational program and services since enrollment of students and voluntary financial support depend upon such satisfaction.
- They must meet the published ISACS Standards of Membership, ISACS Principles of Good Practice in Admission and Employment, ISACS Teacher Qualifications, and ISACS Definition of an Independent School and be guided by the National Association of Independent Schools Principles of Good Practice.
- They must demonstrate their commitment to quality and growth through participation in the seven-year cycle of the evaluation process as established by the ISACS board of trustees.

## ACCREDITATION PRINCIPLES

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Throughout the accreditation process the school is closely monitored for its adherence to two fundamental standards, in addition to the specific published standards:

1. Full and accurate **DISCLOSURE** of its mission, philosophy, program, qualifications of its professional staff, procedures, and services, and
2. **CONGRUENCE** between the school’s stated mission and its actual program and services.

These two fundamental standards are of paramount importance in view of the differences that exist between individual member schools’ missions, philosophies, programs, and styles.

While accreditation (or some other form of approval, recognition, or licensing) can be obtained from several other organizations, including state and the five regional accrediting bodies for colleges and schools, independent schools often find the following specific advantages in the ISACS accreditation program:

- The process involves a peer review, conducted by those who understand and appreciate independent school qualities and contributions to American education;
- The standards and procedures have been developed for independent, not public, schools;
- Wherever possible, standards are directed towards the quality of the school’s product or outcomes rather than typical “input” factors (such as teacher certification, number of books in the library, etc.);
- The process provides flexibility for unique situations and needs. Schools are encouraged to plan a self-study process, within certain guidelines, that will help the school in its own search for excellence;
- In both philosophy and practice, the focus of the ISACS accreditation program is on the development and nurture of excellence rather than certification. The principal objectives are to provide a stimulus for excellence, help the school assess its strengths and weaknesses, and confirm the validity of its priorities and plans for growth.

While the United States Department of Education can only recognize accrediting bodies for higher and adult education, ISACS accreditation is recognized by the U.S. Government for such purposes as certification by the Immigration and Naturalization Service for foreign students and access to military academies and programs. Most of the states in which member schools are located recognize ISACS accreditation, and some accept it in lieu of their own approval process. Universities and colleges throughout the country recognize ISACS accreditation, and ISACS is recognized by the College Board as an accrediting body for secondary schools located in this region.

The ISACS accreditation program operates under the umbrella review process of the National Commission of Accreditation. This method is similar to that used by the U. S. Department of Education in reviewing accrediting bodies for higher and adult education: it involves a detailed petition (self-study) and on-site visits by the National Commission on Accreditation to both an ISACS school evaluation visit and to a meeting of the ISACS Evaluation Review Committee. ISACS was the first of the independent school association accrediting bodies to complete the review process successfully and received its NAIS recognition in June 1990.

## DESCRIPTION OF CYCLE

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The ISACS accreditation program has the following components within its seven-year cycle (including an option to petition to extend the cycle to 10 years). See Appendix P for a description of this cycle.

**Year 1 – Self-Study Preparation: Two years prior to an evaluation visit, the school undertakes several preliminary activities to provide some of the foundation work for the self-study in Year 2:**

- Review, revision (as needed), and re-affirmation by formal board approval (ratification must appear in the board’s minutes) of the school’s statement of mission, philosophy, and goals;
- Review, revision, and codification of the school’s curriculum. (See Curriculum Guide Outline, Appendix E);
- Survey of constituents and tabulation/analysis of the results (See the ISACS Independent School Constituent Survey, Appendix V);
- Development of a profile of program graduates (i.e., some alumni follow-up/program outcome data via surveying of graduates, analysis of transcripts, or other methodology that suits the school).

**Year 2 – School Self-Study Report:** In the year of self-study, the school undergoes a comprehensive self-examination. In the self-study the school identifies its strengths, weaknesses, and plans/priorities for the future. The School Profile (Appendix T) must be completed. Also, a certified financial audit is required for the year preceding the ISACS visit (Year 2 of the cycle).

**Year 3 – Evaluation Visit:** In the year of the ISACS visit, the school hosts an ISACS accreditation team chaired by an experienced Visiting Team Leader and composed of teachers and administrators competent to assess the various aspects of the school. The leader and the team members are, for the most part, from ISACS schools, but the team may also include representatives from the public sector (i. e., public schools, universities, and the state department of education) and, possibly, from other geographical areas. The visiting team report, based upon findings from the visitation and a comparison of these with the self-study, is reviewed by the ISACS Evaluation Review Committee (ERC) and acted upon by the ISACS Board of Trustees at one of its quarterly meetings; the chosen action and the visiting team report are sent to the head of the school.

**Year 4 – Reaction Report:** In the year after the ISACS visit, the ISACS visiting team report is reviewed by the administration, faculty, and trustees of the school, and the school submits a Reaction Report (Appendix U1) and defines its place in the Strategic Planning Process. This may include developing a Plan for School Improvement, building upon what it has gleaned from its constituent survey, self-study, visiting team report (especially the major recommendations), and ERC/ISACS Board actions.

The Plan for School Improvement can take the form of a strategic plan—either a new one or an updated one—or the form of a stand-alone document, one that projects out three-to-five years. The Plan for School Improvement should be derived from the findings from three completed reports that the school has following the team visit:

- The ISACS Constituent Survey (or another school community survey)
- The School’s Self-Study Report
- The ISACS Visiting Team Report

**Step 1:** Prepare a summary of “critical findings” from the required ISACS Constituent Survey/ instrument of the school’s choice. This should include all of those areas that the survey indicates are significantly below the medians indicated in the base group of the survey, and in particular, those that would have the greatest impact for good on the school if some modifications were made.

**Step 2:** Extract the listing of Challenges from the school Self-Study Report, and any other recommendations from within the report that the school may wish to address in a report describing the school’s position in the strategic planning process.

**Step 3:** Extract the listing of Major Recommendations from the ISACS Visiting Team Report and any other recommendations from within the report that the school may wish to address in a report describing the school’s position in the strategic planning process.

**Step 4:** Consolidate these three lists into a single list. This will provide the list of topics to be addressed in the school’s narrative report defining its position in its strategic planning process.

For each topic in the consolidated listing, prepare a brief statement of the need, a statement of the desired outcome(s), and a statement of the approach to be used to address the issue(s). A timetable, and the person(s) responsible should also be included in the report.

- The School need not be limited to topics included in the three reports listed above.
- It is expected that a school’s narrative report defining its position in its strategic planning process will generally be approximately two or three pages in length.
- All members of the school’s constituency should be included in the preparation of the Plan.

The full Reaction Report is comprised of the Reaction Report Cover Page, the current ISACS School Profile for the school, The Head of School’s Report, and the school’s position in the Strategic Planning process. Once the report is submitted to ISACS, it is reviewed by the Evaluation Review Committee and acted upon by the Board of Trustees at one of its quarterly meetings; this action is communicated to the head of the school.

The school’s **Reaction Report** is due **September 15th** of Year 4 for all schools who had Fall evaluation visits during Year 3, and **March 15th** for all schools who had Spring evaluation visits during Year 3.

**Year 5 – Certified Financial Audit:** Unless a follow-up is required by the ISACS Board to meet a conditional re-accreditation rather than full accreditation, no additional reports are required in Year 5. A certified financial audit is required for this year, the year preceding the submission of the progress report, and must be submitted with the school’s Progress Report on **May 1st** of Year 6.

**Year 6 – Progress Report:** By **May 1st** of the third year after the evaluation visit, the school must submit a 3-year Progress Report (Appendix U2) that shows the progress made in implementing the recommendations with which the school agreed in its Reaction Report. This report is reviewed by the Evaluation Review Committee and acted upon by the ISACS Board at one of its quarterly meetings. Any deficiencies in the school’s progress report or concern over lack of progress in implementing recommendations are communicated promptly to the school, which is then held accountable for appropriate remediation within a reasonable and stated period of time.

At the time of the progress report (**after a school has completed at least its second seven-year cycle**), a school may petition to have its accreditation extended for an additional three years, committing to further school improvement tasks as indicated below. Note: this extension is not a permanent change. Once completion of an extended 10-year cycle is achieved, the school must return to the regular seven-year accreditation cycle.

The school’s **Progress Report** with the certified financial audit from the previous school year is due **May 1st** of Year 6 for all schools that had evaluation visits three years prior.

**Year 7 (Standard 7-year cycle):** Unless a follow-up is required by the ISACS Board to meet stipulations set upon review of the progress report, no additional reports are required in this year of the cycle.

## Three Year Extension

Schools that have completed two, complete seven-year accreditation cycles while members of ISACS, may apply for a Three Year Extension of the arrival of the Visiting Team when the school's Progress Report is submitted during Year 6 of the accreditation cycle. The ERC and ISACS Board of Trustees grant or deny these requests depending on the content of the application. The school should have a compelling reason to request such an extension.

**Year 7 of 10 – Re-Survey and Improvement Plan Updates:** (Optional three-year extension): The school re-administers a survey of constituents, preferably the ISACS Independent School Survey, to assess current satisfaction levels and to benchmark progress from the last survey (Year 1). The school updates its position in its strategic planning process and sends this report to the Coordinator of Accreditation Services at the ISACS office in Chicago.

**Year 8 of 10 – Interim Visit:** The school is revisited for 1 1/2 days by an ISACS team of three individuals comprised of the chairperson of the school's last ISACS evaluation or another member of that visiting team, an ISACS Head of School to serve as the team chair, and one administrator from an ISACS school. The team will visit the school in Year 8 to conduct an on-site assessment. The interim visiting team conducts an on-site assessment and presents a 2-5 page report on the progress of the school in meeting the goals outlined in the original visiting team report and the goals established in Plan for School Improvement/Strategic Planning Process. (See Appendix R)

**Year 9 of 10 – Certified Financial Audit:** The school conducts a certified financial audit that must be submitted to the Coordinator of Accreditation Services at ISACS by **December 10th** of Year 10.

**Year 10 of 10** Unless a follow-up is required by the ISACS Board to meet stipulations set by review of the revisit report, the submission of the Certified Financial Audit from Year 9 by **December 10th** is the only deadline to be met.

### ACCOUNTABILITY ABOUT SCHOOL CHANGES

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As **required** by ISACS by laws, schools are required to keep their school information updated with ISACS **ANNUALLY** by means of the ISACS Website.

It is necessary for schools to update ISACS electronically with any of the following changes between **June 1st** and **July 31st**:

- ALL changes in faculty and administration;
- School contact data changes – website, phone numbers, email host changes;
- Addition of new school divisions or campuses (See policy, p. 20);
- Changes in nominees from school to serve on ISACS evaluation teams;
- Enrollment adjustments.

See Appendix Q for more information about logging in to the Members section of the ISACS Website.

# Categories of Membership and Affiliation

## MEMBERS

**Accredited Member (full membership):** Independent schools within the 15-state ISACS region of the Midwest that meet membership standards and that have successfully completed the accreditation program are Full Members. “Independent school” shall be construed to mean those elementary or secondary schools that are incorporated not-for-profit and federally tax exempt; schools with early childhood programs are eligible provided that they also offer some of the elementary grades (typically at least through grade 6). Member schools shall continue in good standing so long as they comply with the standards established by ISACS and meet the other obligations that are detailed in the by laws and the resolutions duly adopted and enforced by the ISACS Board of Trustees. Each member school shall be entitled to two votes. One of these shall be cast by the head of the school; the other shall be cast by a teacher-representative of that same school. The manner in which such a teacher-representative is appointed, elected, or selected shall be left to the discretion of each individual school. The school must also pay annual ISACS dues set by the Board of Trustees and based on a sliding scale based on student enrollment.

**Provisional Member (provisional membership):** Independent schools within the 15-state ISACS region of the Midwest that have successfully operated for a minimum of three consecutive years, but have not yet been evaluated by ISACS or those formerly accredited members which, after formal ISACS accreditation, are found no longer fully compliant with one or more of the Membership Standards, but are acting in good faith to return to full compliance are Provisional Members. Provisional Members may complete the accreditation process within three years (and must complete it within seven years) from the time of designation as Provisional Member. Schools of this category may share in all of the privileges of membership except that of voting. Provisional member schools are responsible for annual ISACS dues set by the Board of Trustees and based on a sliding scale based on student enrollment.

## AFFILIATES

**New School (operating less than three years):** Services shall be provided, upon a two-thirds vote of the Board of Trustees, to new schools within the ISACS region not established long enough to qualify for full or provisional membership (i.e., schools that have offered full services to students less than three years). Schools in this category are eligible to subscribe to the services of ISACS, but they shall not be members. New Schools are entitled to receive publications and attend meetings, but without voting privilege. No school may continue to receive New School Services beyond its third year except with the approval of the Board of Trustees. Such approval may be granted, on a year-to-year basis, upon request of the school. Schools are also responsible for annual ISACS dues based on a sliding scale based on student enrollment (i.e., one-half full dues for member schools, based on enrollment).

**Associate:** Associates shall be educational institutions or organizations concerned directly or indirectly with independent education but not residing within the ISACS region or not qualifying as independent schools as defined by ISACS (i.e., independent in governance and finance). Associates in this category are entitled to receive publications and attend meetings, but they have no voting privileges nor are they eligible for accreditation by ISACS. Associates are eligible to receive ISACS consulting services. Annual ISACS Associate dues are \$500.

**Association:** Associations shall be those organizations which are similar in purpose to ISACS, such as associations of independent schools on a local or regional basis, but which are not themselves institutions of learning. Associations in this category are entitled to receive publications and attend meetings, but without voting privilege. Annual ISACS Association dues are \$500.

**Sponsor:** Sponsors shall be those persons, firms, or corporations invited to join the organization within the category of affiliate. Sponsor status is restricted to those organizations with which ISACS has sought to establish a relationship to further the ISACS mission and purposes. Sponsors are entitled to receive publications and attend meetings, but without voting privilege. Annual ISACS dues for sponsors are available on the ISACS website, [www.isacs.org](http://www.isacs.org).

# Application for Membership

Any school interested in becoming accredited by ISACS must obtain the application materials from ISACS Headquarters in Chicago. Once school officials decide to initiate the application process for Provisional Membership or New School Services, the following steps must be followed:

- Complete the application in its entirety and submit the materials to the Accreditation Department at ISACS Headquarters where they will be reviewed by a member of the Accreditation Department.
- Once a school's application has been accepted, the school must arrange with the Director or Coordinator of Accreditation Services a site visit by an ISACS representative. This visit gives an opportunity for the ISACS representative to spend time on the campus of the school. Generally, meetings with the Head of School and some members of the administration will take place as well as a complete tour of the school's facilities.
- A report of the site visit will be submitted by the ISACS representative to the President of ISACS and the Director of Accreditation Services.
- The application and the site visit report will be reviewed by the Evaluation Review Committee which will make the recommendation concerning ISACS membership to the Board of Trustees.
- The application materials will be reviewed by the Evaluation Review Committee at the quarterly meeting closest to the submission of the materials. Submission deadlines for review at each meeting are

<b>SUBMISSION DEADLINE</b>	<b>ERC MEETING</b>
December 1	January
March 1	April
May 1	June
September 1	October

The school will be informed of the decision by the Board of Trustees shortly after its meeting. One of the following membership categories will be assigned to the applying school:

**APPROVED** – The materials in the application meet with the requirements for the school to become a Provisional member school within the ISACS organization.

**PENDING** – Conditions were found in the school's application that do not meet the ISACS standards of membership. The school will be informed of these conditions and given a period of time during which to satisfy the conditions and resubmit those relevant areas of the application to the Evaluation Review Committee for a second review.

**DENIED** – The information in the application does not meet with the requirements of ISACS in order for the school to become a member school in ISACS.

Final responsibility for action upon applications for membership rests with the Board of Trustees.



## Standards for Membership

The ISACS Standards for Membership (Appendix A) have been developed, and reviewed periodically, to describe the kind of school that ISACS believes it can serve and that, in turn, can benefit from the ISACS network and services. ISACS does not suggest that the only good schools are those that meet the ISACS' standards. ISACS does hold that its standards describe the type(s) of school represented in its membership. Accreditation by ISACS is assurance to the public that these standards have been met and that the school's success in meeting these standards is periodically reviewed.

Because of the range in the ISACS member schools and the corresponding variation in philosophy, program, procedures, and style, these standards have been developed to focus on the elements that should be common to all good independent schools. The approval of a school, however, for membership or accreditation shall not be contingent upon literal compliance with every detail of the standards. Wherever the provisions of a particular standard are waived, however, there shall be sufficient evidence that the intent of those provisions is being observed.

Of paramount importance are those standards listed in Section A, ISACS Policies and Practices, because they are either essential to the definition of an independent school, or they represent fundamental tenets observed by all independent schools. Among these tenets is the commitment to the highest possible quality in a school's program and both the learning and teaching integral to it. Of equivalent importance, as identified in Standard B4, is the recognition and respect of equity and justice. ISACS schools strive to ensure that all students will have an equal opportunity to experience educational success while feeling secure in their physical and emotional safety. Finally, it is believed that the ultimate test of a school's quality is the measure of how well the school does what it intends as represented by the degree of its congruence with its mission statement.

## The Self-Study/Accreditation Process

The dual purposes of the ISACS accreditation process are to provide accountability and to promote school improvement. Therefore, the self-study and the visiting team report must be comprehensive. However, the number of specific reports in both the self-study and the visiting team report may vary given the size and complexity of the school, larger schools often creating more subcommittees and nested reports and smaller schools combining sub-report areas in one larger section report written by a single committee. Both the ISACS Director and Coordinator of Accreditation Services can provide guidance.

Schools that have completed the accreditation process invariably find that the principal benefit is the spirit of inquiry that develops in the school community concerning the school's qualities, needs, and plans for the future. The purpose of the material that follows is to help the school develop an evaluation plan and process that will most effectively stimulate and nurture such inquiry and commitment.

For purposes of simplicity, this section will describe a typical plan, representing a schedule and set of procedures that have proven to be successful in previous evaluations conducted by member schools. Schools are encouraged to make modifications that may streamline or improve the process in view of the school's own special circumstances or priorities. If there are any significant variations from the established procedure described herein, however, the head of the school should consult with the president of ISACS and the leader of the visiting team.

The ISACS office maintains and publishes the evaluation schedule. Schools that are due for re-accreditation are sent reminders in special mailings. However, it is the school's ultimate responsibility to follow and complete each of the required steps of the ISACS septennial accreditation cycle.

### **SELECTION OF A SELF-STUDY STEERING COMMITTEE AND CHAIR**

As the school head begins planning for the next evaluation, the first step is to select and appoint a person, or small committee, from within the school to provide coordination and leadership for the self-study and evaluation. Unless the school is very small, or there are other special circumstances, it is strongly recommended that the head not assume this responsibility for two principal reasons:

- Leadership and coordination of an effective self-study will require some intensive effort and time that may be incompatible with the head's ongoing responsibilities.
- The self-study may be more objective, thorough, and open-ended if someone other than the head is directing it. The head will be critically involved in the self-study, particularly as findings and conclusions are developed, but a low-profile involvement by the head in the early stages of the self-study usually promotes faculty comfort with the process and integrity of inquiry.



When selecting, the chair and members of the Self-Study Steering Committee, schools should consider faculty that are well organized, can write well, have had previous evaluation experience (possibly as members of an accreditation visiting team), and have good rapport with the faculty. The chair of the Self-Study Steering Committee should report to the school head and clear all schedules, assignments, ordering of materials, etc. with the head. The head should be an ex-officio member of the Self-Study Steering Committee and should attend certain meetings, particularly when reports are being compiled and when major findings are being identified.

The following elements would appear in a typical job description for the chair of the Steering Committee:

- Chairs and sets agendas for meetings of the Self-Study Steering Committee.
- Sets general timetable and deadlines, with approval of the head.
- Orders evaluation materials and documents.
- Oversees the administration of the ISACS Constituent Survey.
- Establishes a self-study subcommittee structure and composition, again with the approval of the head.
- Collects and coordinates the review and editing of self-study reports.
- Assists the head with the logistics for evaluation visit—mailings to team members and visit arrangements.
- Keeps things moving (most important), checks on subcommittees frequently, helps faculty from getting “bogged down” in unnecessary detail, and informs the head of progress and potential problems.

## SUGGESTED COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEES

Critical to a useful self-study is the involvement of all members of the school community. This includes administrators, faculty members, staff, and board members. In addition, some sections of the self-study relate to parents, students and alumni, thereby making their participation vital. Some schools may find the following suggestions useful as they plan committees to write the required reports of the self-study.

### Report Area

Introduction

Purpose, Goals, and Philosophy

School Community

Admissions

School Advancement

The Parent Community

The Local Community

School Climate

Equity and Justice

Personnel

Program

By Structure

By Discipline

By Developmental States

By Themes/Goals/Mission Points

Student Services

Specialty Areas

Governance & Administration

Governance / Decision-Making

Finances / Financial Audit

Facilities

Conclusion

### Committee Membership

head, Self-Study Steering Committee chair

administrator, board member, faculty

admission director, division heads, faculty

development director, alumni/ae, board member

administrator, parent association president, faculty

faculty, administrator, board member

faculty, administrator, student, alumni, secretary, maintenance personnel

faculty, administrator, student, parent, board member

administrator, business manager, division heads, board member, faculty, staff member

administrator, faculty

administrator, faculty

administrator, faculty

administrator, faculty

counselor, nurse, business manager, faculty

administrator, faculty

administrator, school head, board member, faculty

administrator, business manager, board member

Administrator

Self-Study Steering Committee

## **SELECTION OF A VISITING TEAM LEADER**

Another early step in planning for the accreditation is the recruitment and appointment of a leader for the visiting team. ISACS Visiting Team Leaders are current or recently retired heads of ISACS schools who have participated on a number of visiting teams, been trained in special workshops offered by ISACS, and co-lead or lead other Visiting Teams at ISACS schools. It is generally recommended that the leader selected be the head of a school reasonably similar in structure and purpose to that of the school being evaluated.

**The visiting team leader (or co-chair if a joint accreditation with another association is involved) must be chosen in collaboration with the Director of Accreditation. ISACS will confirm the final selection of a Visiting Team Leader for the school.**

Once the visiting team leader has been determined, the head of the school and the team leader determine the specific dates of the evaluation visit and notify the ISACS office of the dates. Generally, the visit spans four days; a typical schedule involves arrival of the visiting team on Sunday afternoon and a concluding oral report by the visiting leader to the school on the subsequent Wednesday afternoon.

## **SELECTION OF AN APPROPRIATE SELF-STUDY INSTRUMENT**

The school has the responsibility to select a self-study instrument that meets the ISACS required areas of coverage and suits the school's needs. The most obvious, practical, and frequent choice is the ISACS process as outlined and defined in this guide. There are a variety of other self-study instruments that are published by other organizations such as the National Study of School Accreditation (NSSE), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), etc.

It is recommended that the head of the school and the Self-Study Steering Committee chair consult with both ISACS staff and the visiting team leader for their advice and suggestions. Schools may choose any of the established documents, some combination of selections from various documents, or a narrative version of their own composition. Schools supplement the self-study instrument with questionnaires or surveys to measure impressions of faculty, students, parents, and trustees concerning school climate, morale, and various aspects of the school's program. The ISACS Constituent Survey (Appendix V) is the instrument of choice for this purpose.

As far as ISACS is concerned, the intended outcome of the self-study is a clear, well-organized statement of the school's principal strengths, challenges, and plans and priorities for growth and development. The reason for using a self-study instrument is that it provides a plan and method for reaching these conclusions as well as documentation to support the conclusions reached.

It is also expected that, no matter which self-study instrument is selected, the following areas of the school will be included in both the self-study and the report of the visiting team.

## **AREAS OF THE SCHOOL THAT MUST BE INCLUDED IN THE SELF-STUDY**

These clusters are organized in accord with the ISACS Accreditation Guide for School Self-Study and correspond to the ISACS Standards for Membership (Appendix A).

**ISACS Policies and Practices** (Standards A1-A12): Since evidence of compliance with these will primarily evolve from the self-study, no separate report is necessary. Documentation should be available for such aspects as tax-exempt status, recent certified financial audit, statements of non-discriminatory policies, etc. The school's annual ISACS School Profile (Appendix T) is to be completed and included in the school's Self Study and Visiting Team report. Also, a survey of constituents is required to be included as part of the self-study and reporting process (see Appendix V and W).

### **Required Self-Study Report Areas (no matter what self-study instrument is employed):**

- **Introduction & Summary/Highlights of School Constituent Survey** (See Appendix V): welcome to visiting team; introduction of school's mission statement.; summary of school survey -  
**Note:** references to the appropriate sections of the school survey should be integrated into each of the following reports as well.
- **Purpose, Goals, and Philosophy** (See standards B1 - B4) (1 report).
- **Community of the School** (See standards C1 - C5) (1 report) Sections on the following topics:  
**Note:** This section cites the school constituent survey heavily to address the following areas:  
Student Body (reviewing admissions policies and procedures, financial aid, student demographics)

School Advancement: alumni relations/development/communications/marketing, PR)  
Parents (PA organization and programs for parents)  
The Local Community  
School Climate and Morale (reviewing factors affecting the learning and social environment)  
Equity and Justice (assessing indicators that the school is moving along the continuum of “awareness to commitment to action”).

- **Personnel** (See standards F1-F6) (1 report) Administration, Faculty and Staff - to include employee organization, responsibilities, relationships, qualifications, and personnel practices. Also to include provisions for professional development (See standard F-5.)
- **Curriculum/Program Overview** (See standards D1-D9) (1 report) Regardless of the format of the self-study, the Program section should be introduced with a substantial Curriculum Overview: relationship of curriculum to mission; curriculum design and integration; relationship of parts to the whole (academics; sports & arts; integration of technology; program development; student assessment; etc.)
- **Program** (See standards D1-D9) (3-20 reports) Beyond the overview, the school writes separate reports by disciplines (math, English, social studies, etc.), divisions (PS, LS, MS, US), or core themes (mission points, core values, school goals, etc., depending on the “lens” through which the school chooses to view itself). The integration of technology should be assessed within applicable areas or as a separate report.
- **Student Services** (See standards D1-D9) (1 or more reports) Student Services include counseling, guidance, health services, referral services, school and college placement, library and media services, technology, testing, reporting to parents, etc.)
- **Other Programs** (See standards G1-G2) (1 or more reports) To include residential program and supplementary programs (extracurricular activities, extended day, summer school, special ed programs, community service, religious programs, character education programs, etc.).
- **Governance and Administration** (See standards E1 - E9) (3 reports)
  - Governance and Decision-Making - to include the study of the board of trustees, communications and relations between board/administration/faculty as well as between the school and its various constituencies.
  - Business and Financial Management
  - School Facilities - to include review of buildings, grounds, food service, equipment, maintenance, transportation and evidence of compliance with public health and safety requirements.
  - Plan for School Improvement – indicate status (current strategic or long-range plans are acceptable substitutes, see pages 3-4 for full description)
- **Conclusion** (1 report) Indication of the Steering Committee’s assessment of the process itself and any overriding themes that may have evolved from the process. Typically written by the Self-Study Steering Committee.
- **Ohio Addendum** (1 report.) Specific only to Ohio ISACS schools, this report satisfies the requirements of the Ohio Department of Education.

The visiting team will be looking for evidence of the integration of the constituent survey results throughout these required areas (Appendix W).

## **INTRODUCTORY ON-CAMPUS ACCREDITATION WORKSHOP (KICK OFF)**

Just prior to a school's writing its Self-Study, the head of the school should make arrangements with ISACS for an on-campus workshop (Kick Off) for faculty, staff, administrators, and board of trustees. This should be held before involving the faculty and staff deeply in the study. The principal purpose is to ensure that the school community has a clear understanding of the purpose, process, and intended results of the self-study and the accreditation program as a whole. It can also serve to relieve potential anxiety on the part of faculty and others and may even help significantly in stimulating enthusiasm and excitement for the process.

The kick-off workshop can be held on a regular day of school, if desired, or it can be part of an in-service day for the faculty. The kick-off workshop may be led by the ISACS President, the ISACS Director of Accreditation Services, or the ISACS Coordinator of Accreditation Services.

To review final plans and arrangements for the ISACS visit, the visiting team leader must also visit the school at least six weeks prior to the ISACS visiting team dates.

A typical kick-off workshop day will include (50-60 minutes each):

- A meeting with the head and administration of the school to discuss the major focus and areas of special emphasis (if any) for the self-study, school leadership of the self-study, role of the head, intended relationship between the head and coordinator/steering committee, budget for the evaluation, choice of self-study instrument, trustee involvement in the self-study, process for selecting and inviting visiting team members, etc.
- A general orientation meeting for the entire administration and faculty to provide an overview of the accreditation process and writing of the school's Self-Study. Emphasis is placed on making the self-study streamlined, focused, and analytical.
- A separate meeting with the board of trustees, or several representatives of the board. It is extremely important that there be some trustee involvement in the orientation to help the board understand its vitally important role in the self-study and evaluation.
- A meeting with the Self-Study Steering Committee to discuss specific planning for the evaluation. This session includes discussion of the role of the coordinator and/or steering committee, establishing an overall schedule and timetable, choice of self-study instrument and materials, use and interpretation of the survey of constituents, establishment of the necessary self-study committees, preparation of the self-study report, selection of the visiting team, mailings to visiting team members, etc.

The entire faculty needs to be involved only for the hour-long, general briefing. Some schools build this general briefing into the regular faculty meeting schedule. If the kick-off workshop is held on an in-service day for the faculty, either before school begins or during the year, other meetings may be scheduled as well. Some schools will use such a day to begin discussion of the school's mission statement and philosophy or to hold preliminary meetings of self-study subcommittees. However the arrangements are made, it is vitally important that this introductory accreditation workshop/kick off be held early in the accreditation process.

The school bears the cost for this visit with all parts usually being completed in one day.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE SELF-STUDY

### Schedule

Typically, the self-study portion of the evaluation should be commenced at least one calendar year before the time of the actual evaluation/accreditation visit. If a school desires to have the visitation during the fall (September - early December), the accreditation kick-off workshop should be held the previous fall. Similarly, for accreditation visitations in the spring, the kick-off workshop and beginning of the self-study should occur sometime in the previous school year during the winter or spring.

The self-study report by the school should be in final form and ready for mailing to the visiting team no later than three weeks prior to the visit. For schools on a fall-to-fall schedule, most of the self-study report material needs to be generated and written in draft form prior to the end of the school year in which the self-study is begun. This will leave ample time during the summer and early fall for updating, editing, and final revision. For schools planning their visitation during the spring, the organization of the self-study and work on Philosophy and Objectives should be well in hand by the end of the first school year; most of the self-study work by subcommittees will be done during the fall and the self-study should be in draft form by the December holidays. This will leave the early winter for updating, editing, and final revision.

While schools are expected to develop a time schedule that suits the school best, the following represents a typical schedule of activities, roughly in chronological order, for schools following the two most common timetables:

Activity	Fall to Fall Schedule	Spring to Spring Schedule
Review of school mission & philosophy	Prior year	Fall (1)
Review of curriculum guide	Prior year	Fall (1)
Survey of constituents	Prior year	Fall (1)
Develop a profile of graduates	Prior year	Fall (1)
Appointment of Steering Committee Chair	Summer (1)	Fall (1)
Introductory accreditation workshop	Early Fall (1)	Winter/Spring (1)
Selection of visiting team leader	Early Fall (1)	Spring (1)
Organization of subcommittees	Fall (1)	Spring (1)
Principal work of subcommittees	Winter/Spring (1)	Fall (2)
ISACS' selection of the visiting team	Late Spring (1)	Fall (2)
First draft of self-study report	End of Year (1)	December (2)
Updating, editing & revision of report	Summer/Fall (2)	Winter (2)
Self-study report mailed to visiting team	Early Fall (2)	Early Spring (2)

### Process and Format

The self-study report should begin with the presentation and review of the school's mission, philosophy and objectives, followed by a separate section on School and Community. It is suggested that the school set a typical report format for the various subcommittees and that it strive for consistency. Typically, self-study subcommittee reports will include a section with a narrative description and analysis for the area, a summary of principal strengths, a summary of principal weaknesses/challenges, and a concluding section with recommendations on plans and priorities.

Careful organization of the self-study subcommittees is important for a good self-study. The school will want to assign all members of the faculty to one or more subcommittees and, as appropriate, will want representation on certain subcommittees from trustees, parents, and older students. If possible, no faculty member should be assigned to more than two or three subcommittees and to more than one subcommittee, chair position. It is also recommended that there be some cross-departmental and cross-level representation on most committees, including those for subject areas. For example, a subcommittee for mathematics must have representation from the Mathematics Department, but there should be members of the subcommittee from another discipline or who are not members of the faculty. The subcommittee structure and assignments should allow for both a vertical component (continuity from youngest grades to oldest, sequential patterns, etc.) and a horizontal component (interdisciplinary relationships, overall impact of curriculum at each level, etc.).

### **Assembling and Distributing the Self-Study Report**

A self-study report will be most helpful to the school and the visiting team if it is composed and saved electronically, clearly organized, succinct, and as brief as possible; typical for schools using the ISACS instrument is a self-study of 80-100 pages (4-5 pages for each of the 20 or so report areas indicated in areas required to be covered).

Responsibility for collecting, compiling, coordinating, editing, and revising subcommittee reports, and eventually, the entire self-study report is generally that of the steering committee. The head of the school should be well informed about the contents at this stage of the self-study. The self-study report should be presented and made available to the faculty before the visiting team arrives.

### **SELECTION OF A VISITING TEAM**

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The ISACS database hosts a list of teachers and administrators who are qualified for service on visiting teams. The head of each ISACS school is asked annually to recommend a number of faculty members for such service from his or her school (the number roughly equivalent to the size of a visiting team for his or her own school). ISACS keeps track of the principal teaching and administrative expertise for each of the nominees as well as their previous experience in accreditation. These people are nominated for their objectivity, sensitivity, and writing ability in addition to their specific experience in teaching or administration. It is vital to the success of the visiting team program that school heads submit their recommendations for visiting team members in a timely and accurate fashion.

The size of the visiting team will vary with the size of the school and its range in grades and programs as well as the nature of the self-study conducted by the school. Generally, teams vary in size between eight and twenty or more, the average team being ten to twelve.

The first step in the selection of a visiting team is for the Director of Accreditation Services of ISACS and the head to agree upon the desired number and composition of the team. ISACS will staff the entire team, covering all areas to be addressed in the self-study. Schools may suggest members of their own choosing for the team; however, the final determination of the members of the team will be determined by ISACS. Suggested team members might include educators for attention to specific areas such as psychology, fine and performing arts, college guidance, technology, marketing, fund-raising, etc. The head of the school has the right to veto suggestions because of potential conflict of interest or other sound reason for believing that there is not a good match between a potential team member and school. ISACS will provide alternative suggested candidates whenever vacancies develop for any reason.

Once team members accept the invitation to serve, they complete a biographical data form and submit it to ISACS which then makes preliminary assignments for areas of responsibility and prepares the overall roster before forwarding the roster and assignments to the visiting team leader and the head of school for final approval.



## **PREPARATION FOR THE VISIT OF THE ACCREDITATION TEAM**

It is recommended that the visiting team leader visit the school at least six weeks prior to the actual evaluation visit. This will provide an opportunity for the leader to talk with the Self-Study Steering Committee and faculty about the forthcoming visit, to check on progress in completing the self-study, and to be sure that all arrangements for the visit have been made.

There are certain tasks that need to be accomplished by the Self-Study Steering Committee Chair and head of the host school. These include the following:

1. Making arrangements for lodging (required for all team members, even local ones), meals, and meeting room facilities (with computers) for the visiting team members and providing assistance in making travel arrangements. Arrangements for team travel between lodging and school must also be made.
2. Providing space at the school for the exclusive use of the visiting team during the visit and providing equipment (such as computers), supplies, and accreditation information (such as self-study data not included in the report, schedules, etc.) for use of the committee.
3. Sending school information to team members sufficiently ahead of time (See Appendix J).
4. Sending the self-study report to the visiting team members and to ISACS no later than three weeks prior to the visit.
5. Ensuring that the school operates on as normal a schedule as possible during the visit (discouraging field trips, examinations, special assemblies, etc.) and ensuring that school personnel and representative groups (trustees, parents, student leaders, etc.) will be available to meet with the visiting team members before and after school during their visit.

The school must also plan its budget to provide funds for the cost of the accreditation visit. No honoraria are ever given to team members, even those from the public, governmental, or collegiate sectors. Four areas for budget planning need to be considered

1. The principal expense to be incurred will be the costs of the visit (i.e., travel, lodging, and meals for each member of the visiting team, likely ranging from \$1,000 - \$2,500 per individual team member).
2. The costs of the constituent survey: \$1,500 - \$2,500+ depending on the size of the school.
3. The ISACS Accreditation Fee of \$200 that includes two copies of the Accreditation Guide and covers the costs of additional services at ISACS Headquarters required during Years 1 – 3 of the Accreditation Process.
4. The school will experience additional clerical, copying, and materials costs.

Typically, the total accreditation/visit costs are in the range of \$15,000 - \$45,000 for most schools (depending on size of school and size of visiting team). Significant and partially controllable variables are the size of the team and the proportion of the team that comes from distant locations.



## The Accreditation Visit

The principal purpose of the visiting team is to review, assess, and validate the school's own findings as generated by the school's self-study process. Therefore, the visiting team will begin its work with the school's self-study report. A second purpose of the visiting team, however, may involve going beyond the self-study report itself; this is the responsibility to help the school learn what it may have missed during the self-study process. It may be that schools have a "blind" side consisting of qualities that are either taken for granted or are more easily observed and identified by someone outside the school community than by people involved in the everyday flow of activity at the school.

It is important that everyone understands a limitation, which is both philosophical and practical, of the accreditation visit. The ISACS evaluation **cannot, and does not, attempt to evaluate individual performance of anyone at the school, faculty or administration**. While the visiting team will observe individual classes, this is for the purpose of sensing the school's overall instructional methods and style, and not to evaluate individual teaching effectiveness. The reasons for this limitation are obvious from the limited time, three to four days at the most, spent on the campus. Thus, while the school's own process for evaluation of individual performance of administrators and teachers will be reviewed by the visiting team, the team's interest will be directed to the effectiveness of the accreditation process, and communicating of it to those involved, not the performance of individuals. Another limitation of the team visit is that it cannot provide a "consultant's report" on each discipline. Since it is the whole school that is being evaluated, all team members will be involved in the review of two or three different areas. If the school does a discipline-by-discipline analysis of its program, there will be a team report for each area, but it must be limited to principal impressions only.

The actual schedule for the accreditation visit will vary with the school and its program, but it will typically span four days, concluding with an oral exit report to the faculty, administration, and board members by the visiting team leader (Appendix K).

It is essential that the visiting team members have as much time as possible for visiting classes, meeting with faculty and students, reviewing materials, and writing their reports during these four days. For this reason, it is inappropriate for the host school to attempt to entertain the visiting team except for the one informal gathering of administration, faculty, trustees, and team on the day of arrival. This social occasion can be an afternoon tea or reception, an after-supper dessert and coffee, or even supper itself on the first evening. Sometimes, there may be an actual presentation of the school's philosophy, remarks of welcome from the school head, and a few comments from the visiting team leader. Any such formal program, however, should be brief, and principal emphasis should be on informal conversation between faculty and team.

The Self-Study Steering Committee chair from the school does have an important final role during the visitation, involving such functions as the following:

- Serving as liaison to the visiting team, ensuring that the team has the equipment, materials, and information it needs.
- Providing any needed special schedules or interviewing time with departments, administrative committees, part-time personnel, representative trustees, parents, or students, etc.
- Providing computers and secretarial assistance as the team prepares its reports.
- Daily checking, as necessary, on lodgings, meals, refreshments, transportation, etc.

Both the members of the school community (faculty, staff, administration) and the visiting team should wear nametags during the visit.

No member of the visiting team should leave the campus until a draft of the report(s) for which the team member is responsible has been given to the team leader. The team leader will review the drafts, do sufficient editing to ensure clarity, coherence, and consistency, and email a copy of the final draft, or appropriate sections of it, to team members for any final revisions. This draft should also be sent to the ISACS Director of Accreditation Services and to the school head, who may make suggestions, but only if they involve clear errors or omissions. The final responsibility for the format and content of the visiting team report is that of the team leader. The team leader completes his or her duties by e-mailing one final electronic copy to the ISACS Director of Accreditation Services. The final report should be received by the ISACS office no later than four weeks after the conclusion of the visit.

## Joint Accreditations with Other Organizations

Some schools are jointly accredited by ISACS and another organization, such as the American Montessori Society (AMS), the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA), etc. In such cases, schools are encouraged to undergo a combined self-study and accreditation that will meet the requirements of both organizations. These schools should be sure to contact the Director of Accreditation Services for such other organizations at the beginning of the planning process. It is particularly important that the designated visiting team leader (or co-chair) and the self-study instrument are approved by both organizations. Routinely, AMS and AWS automatically approve the use of ISACS' instruments and processes.

## The Accreditation Process

Accreditation is granted by the ISACS Board of Trustees when it is assured that the school has demonstrated, through successful completion of a self-study and accreditation visit, that it meets the standards for membership, that it fairly and accurately discloses its mission and program, and that it achieves a high degree of congruence between its stated mission and the program it provides. The following is a brief description of the procedures and groups involved in this determination.

### REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE VISITING TEAM

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At the conclusion of the accreditation visit, the visiting team determines whether or not it will recommend to the ISACS Board of Trustees that the school completing its evaluation should be granted full membership and accreditation (or be approved for continuing full membership and accreditation). **This recommendation is kept confidential and is sent in a separate letter to the President of ISACS.** The visiting team's recommendation is not an official action of ISACS until it is approved by both the Evaluation Review Committee and the ISACS Board of Trustees. On occasion, the ISACS Evaluation Review Committee or the ISACS Board alters the visiting team's recommendation.

If the visiting team should decide not to recommend accreditation, the specific reasons or deficiencies must be shared with the school head by the President of ISACS and the visiting team leader. Such reasons would have to involve demonstrable deviation from the membership standards, demonstrable inadequacy of disclosure of mission or program, or significant inconsistency between the stated mission of the school and the program as observed by the visiting team.

The basis of this recommendation is the school's statements about itself, especially the statement of philosophy and goals, and the team's judgment whether or not the school has demonstrated that it meets the disclosure and congruence standards. Secondary consideration should also be given to the published ISACS Standards for Membership (Appendix A) and the team's determination whether or not the school's compliance with these standards is adequate.

The recommendation of the visiting team can be in one of the following forms:

Full accreditation.

Full accreditation, subject to conditions (conditions that relate to deficiencies in meeting the ISACS Standards of Membership).

Removal of accreditation (for current member schools no longer meeting the ISACS Standards of Membership, possibly with reversion to provisional membership until conditions are met and full accreditation can be reviewed and restored).

Denial/Delay of accreditation (until conditions are met, for provisional member schools).

It is expected that the visiting team will report as a group, and every attempt should be made by the visiting team leader and the team to achieve consensus.



## EVALUATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

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The Evaluation Review Committee is a standing committee appointed by the ISACS Board of Trustees. It consists of school heads who have had extensive experience with accreditation; most will be experienced evaluation team leaders. Members of the Evaluation Review Committee can serve for two 3-year terms.

It is the purpose of the Evaluation Review Committee to review all accreditation program procedures periodically and, more specifically, to review all accreditation reports (visiting team, reaction, and progress reports) on behalf of the Board of Trustees. The Evaluation Review Committee may accept or modify the recommendation for accreditation submitted by the visiting team, and reports this to the Board of Trustees. In the case of an adverse recommendation (for accreditation), the school will be notified, and will be given an opportunity to appeal if it chooses, before final action by the board.

The Evaluation Review Committee may also attach certain provisos or conditions along with a recommendation for accreditation if the committee feels that circumstances justify doing so. Such provisos or conditions are part of the recommendation to be considered by the board.

## ACTION BY THE ISACS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Final responsibility for granting, delaying, or denying accreditation rests with the Board of Trustees. It acts upon the report and recommendation submitted by the Evaluation Review Committee, making any modifications if deemed appropriate. Board action will occur at one of the regular quarterly meetings of the board in November, January (Executive Committee), April, and June (Executive Committee). The action of the board is communicated to the school by the president of ISACS who will also advise the school on required follow-up and remediation of any conditions that might be involved.

## REACTION REPORT

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In the year after the ISACS visit, the ISACS visiting team report is reviewed by the administration, faculty, and trustees of the school, and the school develops a Plan for School Improvement, building upon what it has gleaned from its constituent survey, self-study, visiting team report (especially the major recommendations) and ERC/ISACS Board actions. The plan for school improvement can take the form of a strategic plan—either a new one or an updated one—or the form of a stand-alone document, one that projects out three-to-five years. The school attaches to its Plan for School Improvement/Strategic Plan Update a report from the head of school indicating any major changes, reactions to the major recommendations, and a list of any other recommendations with which the school disagrees (providing a rationale for the latter). These reaction reports are due to ISACS by **September 15th for fall visits** and by **March 15th for winter or spring visits**. The cover letter, Plan for School Improvement/Strategic Plan Update, and reaction report checklist are reviewed by the Evaluation Review Committee and acted upon by the Board of Trustees (at one of its quarterly meetings); this action is then communicated to the head of the school by the ISACS office (Appendix U).

## PROGRESS REPORT

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In the third year after the accreditation visit, the school submits Progress Report by **May 1st** that updates progress made in implementing the recommendations with which the school agreed. This report is also reviewed by the Evaluation Review Committee and acted upon by the ISACS Board (at one of its quarterly meetings). Any deficiencies in the school's Progress Report or concern over apparent lack of progress in implementing recommendations are communicated promptly to the school, which is then held accountable for appropriate remediation within a reasonable period of time. A full-opinion, financial audit must also be submitted with the Progress Report. (ISACS requires a minimum of two full-opinion financial audits within the seven-year cycle.) At the time of the Progress Report, a school may petition to have its accreditation extended for an additional three years, committing to further school improvement tasks including re-administering the survey of constituents, updating the Plan for School Improvement/Strategic Plan, and hosting a 3-member revisit team from ISACS.

The purpose of the follow-up reports is to encourage and assist the school to take maximum advantage of the opportunity provided by the accreditation program to grow and improve. The purpose is neither to look for deficiencies nor to require schools to undertake activity that will not contribute to the school's own search for excellence and growth. On the other hand, the accreditation program and the follow-up after the visitation enable the school to certify its accountability to the best interests of its students and to the independent school community as a whole. In its accreditation program ISACS continually strives for the appropriate balance between supporting school development and refraining from interference in the internal affairs of any member school.





## APPEALS PROCEDURES

In almost all cases, member schools have found the accreditation program to be positive, supportive, and encouraging. One reason for this is that most ISACS member schools are vital schools with strong personnel and resources. Another is that independent schools, by their very purpose, are committed to quality, improvement, and growth; their structure, which depends upon voluntary enrollment (and often substantial, voluntary financial support), mandates a high level of accountability to the school community. Thus, while one result of a school's evaluation is that it will have some specific challenges to meet and some specific work on self-improvement to do, it is rare that a school's evaluation will lead to an adverse accreditation action by the Board of Trustees.

If an adverse accreditation action, however, is recommended by the Evaluation Review Committee and acted upon by the ISACS Board of Trustees, a member school is accorded the right to appear before the ISACS Board to contest the action. The procedures for appeal are the following:

1. The school is notified in writing of the adverse accrediting action, and the reasons for action, subsequent to the quarterly meeting of the Board of Trustees at which the action was taken.
2. The school may request to have its representative(s) appear before the ISACS Board or its Executive Committee to lodge an appeal or to submit additional information. Such a request must be submitted in writing to the president of ISACS no later than the first of the month of November, January, April, or June (i.e., prior to the next meeting of the board or its Executive Committee).
3. A school may retain its prior accreditation status subject to the outcome of the appeal to the ISACS board.

The action of the Board of Trustees on accreditation and membership, after any appeals have been heard, is final.

## THE THREE-YEAR EXTENSION (10-YEAR CYCLE)

In June of 1998, the membership approved the option for a school after its second or subsequent evaluation to petition the Evaluation Review Committee for a three-year extension. Once the extended cycle is granted and achieved, the school then returns to the original seven year. (For a comparison of the procedures and requirements for the seven-year and ten-year cycles, see p. 4-6 of this accreditation guide; for procedural information on the three-year extension, see Appendix R.)

### Standard Evaluation Review Committee (ERC) Expectations for Three-year Extension Petitions

- The school has had at least two visits by an ISACS school accreditation team.
- The school's petition should
  - outline major changes within the prior years,
  - indicate some reflection upon why an extension would be in the best interest of the school,
  - commit to undertake the required steps during years 7-10 of the cycle (e.g., new constituent survey, update of Plan for School Improvement/Strategic Plan, re-visit by small ISACS committee).

**NOTE** - The 7-year cycle should remain the norm, the ERC is responsible for indicating a compelling reason to deny a school's petition for a Three Year Extension.

### Interim Visit Procedures

Once approved for a three-year extension, the school should coordinate efforts with ISACS to prepare for an interim visit (Year 8) by a three-person team. These three individuals, comprised of the Chairperson of the school's last ISACS accreditation or another member of that visiting team, an ISACS Head of School to serve as the team chair, and one administrator from an ISACS school will visit the school in Year 8 to conduct an on-site assessment or audit. At least three-weeks prior to the re-visit, the school would send to the re-visit team the following required materials:

- Summary of salient results of Year 7's ISACS Independent School Survey.
- An update of its Progress Report, indicating in brief narrative form (1-2 pages is adequate) the outcome of the implementation of the major recommendations from the ISACS visiting team report and any major changes in the school since the accreditation visit.
- An updated Plan for School Improvement/Strategic Plan or clear statement defining the school's position in the Strategic Planning Process.
- Appendix T School Profile or statistical data on school operations (available from NAIS' STATS Online).
- Most recent financial audit.



### **Interim Visit Report**

The job of the interim visiting committee is:

- To review the outcomes of the original visit's major recommendations;
- To assess the major changes in the school;
- To analyze new data on the constituent survey, and on the school's annual report (staffing, enrollment and finances);
- To evaluate validity and progress of Plan for School Improvement/Strategic Plan/position of the school in the strategic planning process;
- To write a report to the school, that frames the major questions to address over the next three years; and
- To make a recommendation to the ISACS Evaluation Review Committee and Board either to extend accreditation for three more years or, alternatively, to deny the extension (and therefore require the school to begin the self-study in the next school year).

Within three weeks of the re-visit, the re-visit team leader submits a 3-5-page report to ISACS and to the school. At the next quarterly meeting of the board, the Evaluation Review Committee and the ISACS Board act upon the report and respond to the school.

### **ACCREDITING NEW CAMPUSES AND DIVISIONS**

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From time to time, fully accredited members of ISACS add a grade, division, or campus to their operation. When such a change occurs, the following guidelines explain accreditation in reference to the changes at the school:

- The parts of the school originally accredited by ISACS retain their full accreditation status.
- The newly, added section(s) of the school are considered under Provisional membership in ISACS until the next time when the school undergoes the re-accreditation/writing of the Self Study process.
- When the entire school prepares for re-accreditation and is successful with the process, the new sections of the school (as part of the whole) will be duly accredited.

