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# HANDBOOK

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*Commission on Public Secondary Schools*

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➤ Procedures

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# Commission Policies

## Candidacy for Accreditation

Candidacy for Accreditation is a temporary status during which time a school is preparing for an evaluation visit. An institution admitted to this category is entitled to make public its Candidate status in its publications, correspondence and student transcripts. Candidate schools are listed in the Association's Roster of Membership.

Schools that wish to apply for Candidate status must:

- have completed one year of operation
- be approved by the appropriate government agency
- be tax supported
- publish and distribute a program of studies and student handbook
- prior to the candidacy visit, submit a narrative assessment of the extent to which the school meets each Standard for Accreditation, to be signed by a committee of representatives of the school, along with a statement of major strengths and needs related to adherence to the Standards, and the school's statement of mission and expectations
- host a visit from a Commission representative(s)
- pay the required Candidacy application fee

Public high schools, middle/high schools and K-12 schools that wish to become accredited must first apply as a Candidate for Accreditation. If a school wishes to be evaluated before the final year of Candidacy, the principal should inform the Director of the Commission in writing.

Upon approval of Candidate status, the school will be required to host a visiting committee in no fewer than eighteen months and no more than three years. Earlier team visits may be scheduled at the discretion of the Commission.

## Candidacy for Schools Whose Accreditation Has Been Terminated

Once a school has its membership terminated, the school must undergo a one year waiting period before applying as a Candidate. When a school whose accreditation has been terminated wishes to apply for Candidate status, school officials must submit, along with the Application for Candidacy, a written explanation of the school's actions to address the

deficiencies in the Standards for Accreditation for which the school lost its accreditation. Based on this information, the Director will determine the length of an appropriate Candidacy visit and the size of the committee making such a visit.

## Candidacy for Schools Who Voluntarily Withdraw From Membership

Once a school has voluntarily withdrawn from membership, the school must undergo a one-year waiting period before applying as a Candidate.

## Commission Preparation of Evaluation Report

Members of visiting committees serve as agents of the Commission on Public Secondary Schools during their service in evaluated schools.

During the draft stage of the evaluation report the principal may request the visiting committee chair to revise the report to ensure its factual accuracy. Appropriate changes may be made by the visiting committee chair.

The chair of the visiting committee is responsible for the preparation of the report in its final form and its submission the school and the Commission office. The principal is responsible for the distribution of the final report in compliance with the Commission Policy on Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Evaluation Report.

## Complaints Concerning Alleged Unethical Practices In Member Schools

Public schools accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges are expected to operate in the public interest and in accordance with ethical practices with respect to the rights and responsibilities of faculty, students, administrators, board members and all others related to the institution.

If the Commission on Public Secondary Schools receives a request to investigate an alleged violation of ethical practices in member schools, its attitude towards such a request will depend upon the nature of the charges and the evidence offered. Only substantially supported allegations of actions or practices that could seriously impair the quality and effectiveness of the school will be considered by the Commission as a basis for further inquiry. Unless the situation suggests the kind of capricious or unprofessional action which precludes the continued adherence to the Commission policies or Standards for Accreditation, the Commission will not intervene on behalf of individuals.

If the circumstances do appear to be of a more serious nature, the Commission staff may conduct an inquiry with a knowledge of and in conference with those concerned. Findings will be reported to the Commission for its consideration. Should the Commission's deliberations lead to a recommendation for an adverse action, the institution may invoke the appeals procedure of the Association.

### **Composition of Visiting Committees**

Visiting committees to public high schools will be composed of a minimum of four administrators, six classroom teachers, a student services representative, an educational media specialist, and an evaluator from the appropriate state department of education when available. The school may also request one or two additional classroom teachers. Middle high schools have members from middle high schools and/or middle schools. Visiting committees to K-12 schools include two elementary teachers and two or three middle level or middle high school teachers.

The Commission staff may make appropriate changes in the composition of visiting committees based on local needs and the availability of evaluators.

### **Date of Initial Accreditation**

The date of a school's initial accreditation is retroactive to the last day of evaluation by the visiting committee.

### **Denial Of Candidacy For Accreditation**

If, after a public school has submitted an Application for Candidacy for Accreditation, the Commission determines that it should recommend to the Board of Trustees of the Association that the school be denied candidacy, the school shall be given the opportunity to show cause why such a Commission recommendation should not be made. The school's response must be received within a reasonable time as determined by the Commission.

### **Distribution, Use And Scope of The Evaluation Report**

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers a school's evaluation report to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to the principal of the school and to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final evaluation report must be released in its entirety

within sixty days of its completion to the superintendent, school board, public library or town office and the appropriate news media.

The visiting committee assesses the quality of the teaching and learning and the support of teaching and learning at a school in terms of the school's stated mission and the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member, but rather a professional appraisal of the school's adherence to the Standards.

### **Failure to Undertake a Self-Study**

If a school fails to undertake a self-study twelve to eighteen months prior to a scheduled decennial evaluation, the school will be asked to show cause why its accreditation should not be terminated for failure to make reasonable progress.

### **Focused Visits**

At its discretion, the Commission may send a small visiting committee to evaluate a school's compliance with one or more of the Standards for Accreditation at a time other than the normal decennial evaluation. The cost of travel, lodging and meals for the team will be borne by the evaluated school. Where there are seven or more members on the team, the school will be assessed half the annual dues.

### **Grades Included in the Self-Study**

All grades and programs for which a building principal is responsible shall be included in the self-study and evaluated by the visiting team. In rare instances where the superintendent and principal request an exception, the burden will be on the school to justify the exclusion of particular grades from the self-study. If the Commission grants the request, the grades excluded from the self-study will not be accredited.

### **Involvement of Professional Staff in the Self-Study**

The self-study of a public school for the purpose of accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges must involve the entire professional staff of the school. Each subcommittee report prepared for the visiting committee must first be accepted by vote of the school's professional staff.

## Postponements

A postponement of a scheduled team visit within the decennial cycle may be granted by the Director of the Commission. A postponement of a team visit beyond the decennial cycle may be granted by the Commission if special or emergency conditions affect the capability of a school to complete a self-study or host a visiting committee. Such a request must be co-signed by the school principal/headmaster and the district superintendent. Normally a postponement will be granted only once and for no longer than one year.

## Probation

Probationary status indicates that a school has failed to meet one or more of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation to the extent that if identified concerns are not resolved in a timely manner the school is in danger of losing its accreditation. Schools on probation remain accredited by the Association while working to resolve the problems identified by the Commission.

If after a reasonable period of time determined by the Commission the school has failed to demonstrate reasonable progress to address the concerns prompting the probationary status, the Commission may terminate the school's accreditation. If termination is voted, the school will be given the opportunity to show cause why such action should not be taken by the Commission. If the school fails to show cause successfully and the Commission votes to terminate the school's accreditation, the school may invoke the appeals procedure established by the Association.

## Special Progress Reports

The Commission may request a Special Progress Report at any time during the decennial process and in addition to the routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports.

The conditions prompting a Special Progress Report may include:

- a special circumstance or emergency situation, e.g., fire, structural problems
- a substantive change report which warrants immediate follow-up
- an update of information of a school on warning or probation which may change the school's status
- a significant health or safety issue
- insufficient information which suggests that the school may no longer be meeting one or more of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation or has conditions contrary to one or more of its Guidelines

## Submission of Required Reports and Documents

Routine progress reports are required of member institutions. Two-Year Progress Reports are due October 1 of the second year following evaluation, and Five-Year Progress Reports are due March 1 of the fifth year following an evaluation.

Requested Special Progress Reports and Pre-Self-Study Reports must be submitted by the indicated due date.

Member schools are also required to submit other documents. These include:

- a statement confirming distribution of the decennial evaluation report
- an Application for Evaluation, due by June 30th of the eighth year of the school's decennial cycle, and
- annual reports noting school enrollment, grade structure, any substantive changes not previously reported, and nominations for evaluators

Failure to submit a required report or other documents is sufficient cause for the Commission to recommend termination of accreditation.

## Substantive Change

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change in the school which has a *negative impact* on the school's ability to meet any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of a substantive change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact on the school's ability to meet the Standards. The following are potential areas where there might be negative substantive changes which must be reported:

- elimination of fine arts, practical arts and student activities
- diminished upkeep and maintenance of facilities
- significant decreased funding
- cuts in the level of administrative and supervisory staffing
- cuts in the number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
- grade level responsibilities of the principal
- cuts in the number of support staff
- decreases in student services
- cuts in the educational media staffing
- increases in student enrollment that cannot be accommodated
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees

- changes in the student population that warrant program or staffing modification(s) that cannot be accommodated, e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency

Reports of positive substantive changes are not required, but may be submitted to the Director of the Commission at the discretion of the building principal.

### **Termination of Accreditation**

No school can have its accreditation terminated for failure to meet the Standards for Accreditation without currently being on probation.

Accreditation of a school on probation may be terminated for failure to:

- comply with any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation
- continue to meet eligibility requirements for public schools
- undergo an evaluation within its decennial cycle
- submit a required report
- pay established dues or fees
- adhere to the Commission's accreditation policies

### **Warning**

If a school has significant deficiencies in its adherence to one or more of the Standards for Accreditation, has failed to submit a required report, or has failed to meet the responsibilities of membership, the Commission may issue a warning to the institution to correct its deficiencies, refrain from certain activities, or initiate certain activities within a stated period of time. A warning does not affect the accredited status of the school and is not a public status. The school must respond to the Commission's concerns within a reasonable time as established by the Commission.

A school will remain on warning until the specified problems have been resolved to the satisfaction of the Commission. If a school on warning fails to make significant progress to resolve identified problems, the Commission may vote to place the school on probation. If probation is voted, the school will be given the opportunity to show cause why such action should not be taken by the Commission. If the school fails to show cause successfully and the Commission votes to place the school on probation, the school may invoke the appeals procedure established by the Association.

# Commission Guidelines

The following guidelines have been approved by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to be used in its deliberation about the accreditation status of member schools:

## Accessibility to Facilities for the Handicapped

The Commission expects that the entire school facility and all programs will be accessible to the handicapped. If such is not the case, school officials shall provide details on how the school meets the needs of the handicapped in compliance with state and federal law or shall provide an action plan to make the school and all programs fully accessible to the handicapped.

## Counselor/Counselee Ratio

Each member school should have a counselor/counselee ratio not to exceed 300:1. If this caseload is exceeded the school will be asked to demonstrate that the full range of students' guidance needs are being met including, but not limited to, regular student individual and group meetings with guidance counselors, the provision of personal, career, and college counseling, student course selection, and personal wellness. The school should also clarify the guidance counselors' roles in crisis intervention committee/teams, mediation and violence prevention programs, special education teams, and working with community mental health providers and other partnerships.

## Curricular Offerings in Member Schools

There shall be formal programs available to students in all academic areas including applied and fine arts. If a school drops, combines or eliminates school programs, it will be asked to indicate what appropriate alternatives have been provided to ensure students are prepared to live and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## School Dropouts

Schools reporting high or increased dropout rates shall describe and assess the effectiveness of preventive programs and services offered to address the dropout problem. The Commission shall expect that reasonable progress will be shown by the school in decreasing the dropout rate.

## Health Services

Each member school should have nursing services available in the building throughout the school day to provide preventive health services and direct intervention for students. If a school does not have such services, it will be asked to demonstrate that the following comprehensive services are being provided: health records are maintained for every student, immunizations are current, physical exams are provided as required by state statute, students have health screenings, medications are administered as required by state or local law, there are appropriate referrals, there are appropriate emergency response mechanisms, and there are ongoing student health assessments.

## School Librarians/Media Specialists

Each member school with 400 or more students should have a full-time, certified librarian/media specialist. If a school does not meet this guideline, it will be asked to indicate how adequate library services are being provided, including ensuring that the library is open throughout the school day as well as both before and after school.

## Schools Requesting Postponements

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools will grant a postponement of a school's scheduled decennial evaluation if the school can demonstrate that extraordinary circumstances preclude the school from completing a thorough and accurate self-study or the team from making an accurate assessment of the extent to which the school meets the Standards for Accreditation.

A school requesting a postponement based on a restructuring initiative must (1) explain the scope and comprehensiveness of the restructuring initiative, (2) demonstrate that the restructuring initiative incorporates the best practices articulated in the Standards for Accreditation, (3) clarify where the school is or will be in the process of restructuring at

the time of the self-study and the team visit, and (4) clarify how the restructuring process will so negatively impact and be disruptive to the teaching and learning process that the school and/or the team could not accurately assess the extent to which the school adheres to the Standards for Accreditation.

A school requesting a postponement based on a facilities/renovation project or extraordinary circumstances must demonstrate the extent to which the project or extraordinary circumstances will so negatively impact and be disruptive to the teaching and learning process that the school and/or the team could not accurately assess the extent to which the school adheres to the Standards for Accreditation.

### **Schools With Facilities Deficiencies**

Schools placed on warning for facilities deficiencies are expected to develop a plan and timeline to resolve identified deficiencies in two years and to seek and secure funding to resolve such deficiencies within five years. Failure to demonstrate such proactive efforts and progress will prompt the Commission to place such schools on probation.

### **Use of Portable Classrooms or Separate Buildings**

Schools with portable classrooms or separate buildings must demonstrate that the facilities support the instructional program, are safe, connected to the main public address system to ensure appropriate communication, connected to the school network, readily accessible to restrooms, are handicapped accessible, and do not isolate students, teachers, or programs.

# Guiding Factors

## Warning and Probation

The Commission has adopted these Guiding Factors for Commission members to consider in making a recommendation on a school's accreditation.

### **Significance**

How serious or grave are the problems, particularly as they impact teaching and learning?

### **Time**

Can the problems be resolved quickly or will they take significant time to resolve? In the case of a school already on warning, has the school failed to make progress addressing the identified concerns?

### **Extent/Scope**

How extensive or pervasive are the problems? Are they wide-ranging, long-standing, and/or perhaps symptomatic of larger problems? Are there a number of Standards areas involved?

### **Recognition**

Do school personnel recognize the problems as problems? Do they want to resolve them?

### **Ability**

Does the school have the ability to correct or resolve the problems?

### **Capacity**

Do the faculty and staff "get it"? Do they have a full understanding of the meaning of the problems? Do they have a handle on what needs to be done to address the problem?

### **Plans**

Does the school already have a plan that it is in the process of implementing to resolve the problems? If not, how long would it take to develop and implement a plan to solve identified problems?

# Commission Procedures

## Abstention From Voting

During Commission meetings and Review Committee meetings no Commission member shall vote on, or participate in, discussion of matters affecting any institution in a school district or supervisory union in which the member has a professional affiliation. In other instances in which a conflict of interest might exist, the Commission members shall exercise appropriate discretion.

## Attendance at Commission Meetings

Attendance at Commission meetings is imperative since each Commission member will be assigned specific responsibilities as a resource person for reports to be reviewed by the Commission.

## Commission Meetings

The Commission holds four meetings annually in January, March, June, and September, open only to Commission members, Association officers and staff. The dates for each next calendar year are approved at the September meeting.

## Commission Vacancies

An Association By-Law (*Article IV, Section 5*) outlines the procedure for filling Commission vacancies:

*A vacancy on a Commission occurring at a time other than that of the Annual Meeting of the Corporation may be filled by the commission concerned subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees. An appointment made under the authority of this Section shall expire at the time of the next Annual Meeting of the Corporation upon the election and qualification of the successor.*

When the position of a Commission member becomes vacant, the Nominating Committee shall elect a replacement subject to the requirements of *Article IV, Section 2 Make-up of Commission*.

## Committees of the Commission

Standing committees of the Commission are the Leadership Council, Nominating Committee, and Review Committees.

*Ad hoc* committees may also be appointed by the Commission Chair.

## Composition of the Commission on Public Secondary Schools

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools is comprised of twenty-six members who are elected from member schools or their districts.

Commission members serve in one of six categories:

1. *High School Administrators*

Eighteen (18) Commission members are elected from among high school administrators and represent the six New England states, three from each state.

2. *Central Office Administrators*

Three (3) Commission members are elected from among central office administrators. Each member represents a specific state as determined on a rotating basis. Each state shall be represented in its turn for a period of six years.

3. *Non-Administrator*

One (1) non-administrator is elected from a member high school, member middle-high school or member K-12 school.

4. *At-Large Educator*

One (1) at-large educator is elected from a member school in any of the six New England states.

5. *Middle-High School Administrators*

Two (2) at-large middle-high school Commission members are elected from among member middle-high school administrators.

6. *Public Member*

One (1) public member who is from a district which has at least one member school and who is currently not an employee of a public educational school system.

The Commission may deviate from this policy upon the recommendation of the Nominating Committee.

## Duties of the Commission Chair

The Commission Chair will serve for one year beginning at the conclusion of the Annual Business Meeting. The chair's duties are to:

- prepare with the Director of the Commission the agenda for each Commission meeting
- preside over Commission meetings and annual meetings of public school delegates
- present the chair's report at Commission meetings
- appoint *ad hoc* and standing committees
- represent the Commission at meetings of the Board of Trustees of the Association
- make decisions on issues which require action between Commission meetings

The Commission Chair may be re-elected for a second one-year term.

## Duties of Commission Members

Commission members are assigned by the Commission Chair to Review Committees.

*Chairs of the Review Committees are to:*

- oversee the review of evaluation and progress reports by resource members of the Review Committee
- solicit comments about the reports from all Review Committee members, stressing the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation
- take votes on accreditation recommendations

*Members of Review Committee are to:*

- study in detail all reports assigned to the Review Committee, noting commendations and recommendations which might be included in the Commission's letter of notification

*Resource members of Review Committees are to:*

- highlight the most important aspects of assigned progress reports and summaries, stressing strengths and weaknesses of the school
- note degree of implementation of valid recommendations as indicated in assigned progress reports
- prepare recommendations on accreditation for consideration by Review Committee

- present Review Committee recommendations on assigned schools to the Commission for all schools not on the consent agenda

## Election Of Commission Members

The Commission's Nominating Committee shall nominate individuals to the public school delegates at the Association's Annual Business Meeting. The slate of names prepared by the Nominating Committee must be approved by the Commission prior to presentation at the Annual Meeting. Election shall be consistent with the following Association By-Laws (*Article IV, Section 4*):

*Commission members shall be elected by a majority vote of the delegates of institutional members served by the Commission concerned. Meetings of such delegates for this purpose shall be held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Corporation. Each Commission shall present a slate of nominees to its delegates meeting and there shall be opportunity for nominations from the floor. In compiling its slate of nominees each Commission shall solicit suggestions from the chief administrative office of each of its member institutions. For an election of a Commission member to be valid the result must conform with the provisions of Section 2 and 3 of this Article.*

## Leadership Council

The purpose of the Leadership Council is to foster consistent, equitable practices by the Commission in serving the membership and in making recommendations to the Board of Trustees of the Association which affect public secondary school accreditation.

The Leadership Council shall consist of the Commission chair and the chairs of the Review Committees.

*Duties of the Leadership Council are to:*

- review Commission policies, procedures, and guidelines periodically and make appropriate recommendations
- make recommendations to the Review Committees to ensure consistent practices
- ensure that Commission policies and procedures are consistent with those of the Association

## Maintenance of School Records

The Commission will retain in its office all records, reports, and communications relating to each member school since its last evaluation.

## Nominating Committee of the Commission

### *Make-up of the Nominating Committee*

The chair of the Commission shall appoint annually a Nominating Committee of seven Commission members, one from each state and one to serve as the Committee chair.

### *Duties of the Nominating Committee are to:*

- determine eligibility for continued service of those Commission members with expiring terms
- solicit through the Director of the Commission nominations from the principal of each member school
- prepare a slate of nominees for Commission approval
- present to delegates at the Annual Meeting the approved slate for election
- appoint persons to Commission vacancies which occur during the year
- nominate persons to represent the Commission on other groups
- nominate a Commission Chair for election by the Commission

## Parliamentary Authority

Meetings of the Commission are conducted in accordance with parliamentary procedure as delineated in *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*.

## Public Disclosure

The staff of the Commission will make available certain information on those public secondary schools which are members of the Association, are Candidates for Accreditation, or have sought accreditation. The specific information to be provided relates to school data, and Board of Trustees and Commission actions.

## *School Data*

The following information is published in the Association's annual Roster:

- Name and mailing address of member and Candidate schools
- Date of initial accreditation
- Date of last accreditation
- Grades in school
- Chief administrative officer of the school
- Any probationary status
- Any interruption of accreditation

## *Board of Trustees Actions*

Board of Trustees actions on accreditation are made public through news releases after each Board of Trustees meeting. Those actions are:

- Awards Initial Accreditation
- Denies Initial Accreditation
- Awards Candidacy for Accreditation
- Denies Candidacy for Accreditation

## *Commission Actions*

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools establishes policies and standards for accreditation for its public k-12 schools, public middle-high schools, and high schools.

### *The Commission takes the following actions:*

- continues accreditation
- accepts, rejects, or defers action on progress reports
- requests special progress reports
- takes appropriate action on letters of substantive change
- places schools on warning
- removes school from warning
- requests a show cause letter for probation or termination
- places schools on probation
- terminates accreditation

### *The Commission recommends to the Association's Board of Trustees:*

- denial or awarding of Candidacy for Accreditation
- denial or awarding of Initial Accreditation

## **Quorum**

In order for the Commission to act on business at Commission meetings, there shall be a quorum of two-thirds of the Commission membership.

## **Terms Of Commission Members**

The terms of office for each Commission member are subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees. The following restrictions appear in the Association By-Laws (*Article IV, Section 3*):

- a. *No person may serve more than six consecutive years as a Commission member. This restriction may be waived for specific individuals for one year periods by action of the Board of Trustees.*
- b. *In any year in which more than 40% of the Commission membership have terms expiring, the Commission shall create varying terms in such a way as to restore a rotation system in which no more than 40% of the terms expire in any one year.*

Individuals will be nominated and elected to the Commission on Public Schools for three-year terms and may be elected for full or partial terms subject to the aforementioned restrictions.

## **Terms of Commission Members Who Change Schools or Positions**

Under circumstances where a Commission member changes positions within a school or school system or moves to another school or school system, that individual may complete his/her term as long as the Commission continues to comply with *Article IV* of the Association By-Laws.

## **Visiting Committee Chair's Recommendation on Accreditation**

The chair of the visiting committee will record his/her own recommendation on the school's accreditation and add any comment regarding the school or the accreditation which can help the Commission in determining a recommendation on accreditation. The chair of the visiting committee shall note all those commendations and recommendations which should be brought to the attention of the Commission.

## **Visiting Committee Advisory Recommendation On Accreditation**

Each visiting committee member will make an advisory recommendation by secret ballot on whether initial or continued accreditation should be awarded or denied.