SAIS ACCREDITATION

SAIS is based on three key components – adherence to SAIS standards, a self-study which results in an improvement plan, and a review visit from peers.

Think of the process as three interconnected spheres that come together to form a complete picture.

THREE SPHERES OF SAIS ACCREDITATION

- Compliance: Adhere to community and research based standards.
- Growth: Conduct a thorough self-study that leads to institutional goals for strengthening mission fulfillment.
- Review: Host an external review from peer educational leaders.
This guidebook is designed to provide important information and direction to SAIS member schools as they undertake initial accreditation and re-accreditation.

The accreditation process is designed to serve the needs of the school. It focuses on continuous growth and provides the opportunity to engage the entire school community in a thoughtful discussion centered on the school’s unique mission.

While this document should serve as a guide and timeline for scheduling and completing the steps toward accreditation, participating schools should feel free to communicate and work directly with SAIS through each of the stages.

We trust that this process will be beneficial to your school and to the community that you serve.
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SAIS STAFF

President
Debra Wilson
(843) 860-4280
debra@sais.org

Executive Vice President
Lori Spear, CAE
(404) 561-5841
lori@sais.org

Director of Administration
Julia Grantham
(770) 789-3432
julia@sais.org

Director of Accreditation
Joanne Andruscavage
(678) 231-2908
joanne@sais.org

Data Operations Manager
Clay Gibney
(540) 420-5026
clay@sais.org

Director of Professional Development
Sheri Burkeen
(901) 651-6618
sheri@sais.org

Marketing Manager
Anna Taylor
(404) 583-6452
anna@sais.org

Events Coordinator
Abby Schultz
(517) 375-7303
abby@sais.org

Accreditation & Survey Coordinator
Carole Weems
(423) 645-8965
carole@sais.org
THE SAIS APPROACH

SAIS is deeply concerned with the quality of schools and with the continual path toward improvement that individuals and schools should exhibit. There are many standards-based accrediting models available to schools. But accreditation should not merely focus on a standards bar to cross; it should encourage and invite the school to aspire to raise their own bar ever higher.

An accreditation protocol must be focused on the needs of the individual school and must be flexible enough to allow schools to be creative. Just as no school should impede the progress of an individual student, no accrediting agency should either burden a school with tedious and irrelevant steps or limit a school’s own best thinkers. Accreditation serves the needs of the school, not the needs of the association.

SAIS accreditation is a voluntary practice widely accepted as a high mark of distinction. The process carefully considers a school’s capacity to serve the needs of its student community in accordance with its mission. The SAIS accreditation process comprises three distinct but related parts:

1. The school demonstrates compliance with research-based standards and independent school effective practices in the areas of mission, governance, teaching and learning, stakeholder communication, and resources and support systems.
2. The school conducts a thorough self-study that engages stakeholders and results in aspirational yet attainable and measurable goals for its future sustainability.
3. The school hosts a visit from peer educators who respond to the school’s vision for its future and are charged with ensuring that the school has addressed significant questions regarding their adherence to their mission and future capacities of fulfilling their mission.

Through standards compliance (the check for which is almost completely conducted outside of and prior to the peer review visit), SAIS schools analyze their finances and financial policies, communications practices, curriculum review procedures, employment policies including professional development opportunities, fair and ethical admissions procedures, safety planning, etc. SAIS believes that an accreditation visit based solely on standards is no different than the English student whose engagement with assessment ends when they receive the grade. Checking standards is necessary, but it is only the beginning of the SAIS accreditation process. Where many protocols end, SAIS is just getting started.

SAIS: THE GROWTH MINDSET

The self-study process is one that the school creates for itself and may be almost any rational form of self-study that a school chooses that best suits its community and culture. The three basic requirements of any self-study are that it is mission focused or mission driven, comprehensive of all aspects of school life, and inclusive of representatives of all stakeholder groups. The self-study process should result in the identification of specific and meaningful institutional goals to which SAIS asks a school to address these four critical questions:

- Embrace challenges
- Persist despite obstacles
- See effort as path to mastery
- Learn from criticism
- Be inspired by others’ success
1. Where is the school today? A profile of the school’s current status with respect to the selected institutional goal(s).
2. Where does the school envision it will be in the future? A vision for where the school wants to go relative to the institutional goal(s).
3. What is the school’s plan to get there? A plan for achieving the desired outcomes of the institutional goal(s).
4. What measures will the school use to chart its progress? Measurable results that will demonstrate to the school its movement towards the selected institutional goal(s).

A school can use any self-study method that leads to these ends: NAIS strategic visioning process, school improvement plan, school renewal process, long-range planning, schools wide SWOT analysis, or, significantly, a model that the school creates for itself. Choosing its own path is one of the most distinctive features of the SAIS accreditation process and is a further expression of a school’s independence. Self-study methodologies tend to have in common an analysis and response to accreditation standards, engagement of stakeholders, analysis of data and data collection processes, benchmarking and environmental scanning, and mission relevance and mission fulfillment data. Refer to the section of this Guidebook on self-study for three examples of methods schools have used.

SAIS IN THE WORLD

The SAIS accreditation process and protocols have been approved formally by the International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA), National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA), the Virginia Council on Private Education (VCPE), and the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission (TEPSAC). SAIS is specifically named as an accepted accreditor in state law and/or department of education administrative code in many states. The federal government recognizes SAIS accreditation for the purposes of issuing student exchange documentation through the Department of Homeland Security. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) recognizes SAIS accreditation in determining athletic eligibility for incoming student athletes.

SAIS partners with different national and international agencies to accredit or co-accredit schools. These agencies include: AdvancED/SACS, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the American Montessori Society (AMS), the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA), the Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI), and several state based organizations, including the Virginia Association of Independent Schools (VAIS), and the Florida Council of Independent Schools (FCIS).

THE STEPS IN THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The process begins with the school’s application for membership. Once a member of SAIS, they become a “candidate school” as they seek initial accreditation. The process continues with the school readying itself through a workshop, submitting a request for participation (RFP), responding to standards, hosting a pre-visit to assess compliance with standards, completing self-study work and producing a narrative of the school’s goals for greater and continued mission fulfillment, hosting the site visit from a group of peers who will respond to the strategic goals of the school report, and finally receiving notice from SAIS that the school is accredited or re-accredited.
FIRST STEP: MEMBERSHIP

SAIS is a membership organization that requires member schools to become accredited. If your school is not already a member, you must apply to join. We recommend that you join SAIS a MINIMUM of three to four semesters prior to your planned accreditation visit date.

STEP 1: DO YOU MEET THE CANDIDACY CRITERIA?
Review the criteria to determine if your school is eligible to become a candidate for membership in SAIS. The final step to full membership is becoming accredited by SAIS. Additional candidacy criteria apply to schools operating outside of the United States.

STEP 2: FILL OUT THE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION ONLINE
If your school meets the candidacy criteria, the next step is to complete the online application for membership at www.sais.org/membership and pay the application fee.

STEP 3: DOCUMENTATION REVIEW
If SAIS agrees that you meet the membership criteria (based on your application), we will send you instructions for submitting supporting documents. See below for the sample documents requested.

STEP 4: SCHOOL VISIT
After the supporting documents have been submitted, a SAIS staff member or representative will visit your school. You are responsible for travel expenses associated with this school visit.

STEP 5: CANDIDATE STATUS
After your school has been accepted as a candidate, you will receive an invoice for annual dues based on your school's operating budget and more information about the accreditation process. The accreditation page is located at http://www.sais.org/ACC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidacy Criteria</th>
<th>Supporting Documentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Has education as its primary mission</td>
<td>• List of board members including their relationship to the school (e.g., parent, community leader, alumni)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has at least two consecutive years of operating experience</td>
<td>• Faculty roster including title/position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers an academic program and curriculum that serves at least three successive grade levels across the K-12 continuum</td>
<td>• Articles of incorporation (may be held by a church or other governing authority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employs at least the equivalent of one full-time professional faculty member per grade level offered</td>
<td>• Bylaws (the school MUST be operating under the provisions of the bylaws that are submitted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has bylaws</td>
<td>• Non-discriminatory admissions policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Operates under non-discriminatory admissions and employment policies in accordance with state and federal law</td>
<td>• Non-discriminatory employment policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Matriculates students in a physical plant</td>
<td>• Most recent professional external audit or review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is financially sustainable</td>
<td>• Approved budget for the current school year showing revenues and expenses (summary not detail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is financed almost exclusively by private rather than public funds</td>
<td>• Current balance sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has articles of incorporation (may be held by a church or other governing authority)</td>
<td>• Cash flow statement showing actual numbers from the beginning of your current fiscal year to the present and projections for the present to the end of your fiscal year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has an organizational structure that includes separate entities that carry out the distinct functions of governance and day-to-day management</td>
<td>• Current accreditation certificate(s), if applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has a head of school who is not the chair of the governing body</td>
<td>• Written evidence that the organizational structure includes separate entities that carry out governance and day-to-day management of the school. Evidence of this may be shown through bylaws or the board policy manual.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conducts a majority of the instruction in the school's facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers less than half of the curriculum online (if any is offered)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Has a total enrollment of 50 or higher for each of the past two years</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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### THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS: TIMELINE OVERVIEW*

*for schools having established SAIS membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 18-24 months before visit | • Attend a SAIS accreditation workshop – **REQUIRED.**  
• Read the SAIS Accreditation Guidebook.  
• Submit request for participation (RFP) / schedule visit:  
  o Fall visits are to occur between Labor Day and Thanksgiving, but NOT during the SAIS Annual Conference in October.  
  o Spring visits are to occur between mid-January and mid-April.  
• Receive access to **SAIS Accreditation Portal** from the SAIS office.  
• Assign responsibilities related to Standards and Indicators, self-study, school report, and administration of process.  
• Conduct stakeholder surveys and/or focus groups and other relevant data collection (like the SAIS Value Narrative and Governance Surveys).  
• Formulate major goals for school improvement. |
| 6-9 months before visit | • Conduct preliminary visit with chair and possibly assistant chair.  
• Provide completed draft of responses to standards and indicators and evidence for review in the SAIS Accreditation Portal.  
• Continue self-study / begin narrative writing of self-study report. |
| 2-4 months before visit | • Prepare and edit school report.  
• Prepare logistics of team visit:  
  o Finalize schedule  
  o Travel and lodging arrangements |
| 4 weeks before visit | • Submit final draft of school report and final draft of responses to standards/indicators in the SAIS Accreditation Portal. |
| 2 weeks before visit | • Finalize last-minute details. |
| During the visit | • Breathe a sigh of relief – the visit is finally here! |
| Post visit | • Visit report completed by team within 10 days of end of visit.  
• School reviews report for factual accuracy approximately one week after report has been completed.  
• Within three months of the visit, the Accreditation Review Committee makes recommendation regarding accreditation status. Decision ratified by SAIS Board of Trustees at its regular meetings. |
| Follow up | • School maintains compliance with SAIS accreditation standards and protocols every year.  
• Schools must document progress towards their own strategic goals and to the recommendations left them by the visiting team.  
• SAIS will send schools a reminder at the beginning of the semester (fall or spring) two years after their accreditation took place. The two-year report is due at the end of that semester. |
**NEXT STEP: RFP and CHAIR ASSIGNMENT**

A school seeking initial accreditation from SAIS is considered a candidate school.

The candidate school appoints an Accreditation Coordinator. This individual serves as the liaison between SAIS and the school throughout the accreditation process. This person is responsible for submitting all necessary accreditation materials per the stated guidelines. The accreditation coordinator may or may not be the head of school. Additional tasks of the accreditation coordinator are determined by the school. The accreditation coordinator also serves as the primary contact for the school’s visiting chair and visiting team and manages the visit logistics. Most of the communication from SAIS regarding the school’s accreditation process will be directed to the accreditation coordinator via e-mail.

The accreditation coordinator and/or key staff are required to attend an accreditation workshop hosted by SAIS at a regional location or may request an onsite workshop for their school staff. Schedules and registration are available at [http://www.sais.org/ACCworkshops](http://www.sais.org/ACCworkshops).

The candidate school must complete the **Request for Participation (RFP)** online at least three to four semesters prior to the requested team visit date. Fall visits are to occur between Labor Day and Thanksgiving (NOT during the SAIS Annual Conference in October – dates are available at [http://www.sais.org/events](http://www.sais.org/events)). Spring visits are to occur between mid-January and mid-April. After the RFP is submitted and the dates are confirmed, your school will be given access to the SAIS Accreditation Portal (see Appendix 1, Accreditation Portal Basics).

After completing the RFP, the school must register for a SAIS Accreditation Workshop. All schools whether initial or re-accreditation must participate in a workshop as our process is updated annually.

The candidate school can and should begin its self-study as soon as possible upon deciding to seek SAIS accreditation. Additional guidelines for the self-study and the school report that results from the self-study are found in this Guidebook.

SAIS confirms a team visit date and assigns the chair of the visiting team. At this time, SAIS will give the chair access to the school’s SAIS Accreditation Portal. SAIS will respond as quickly as possible with the chair assignment after receipt of the RFP. SAIS will assign your chair approximately 12 months prior to your visit date (See Appendix 2, Role of the Chair).

Once SAIS has connected the school and the chair, each side is responsible for fostering good communication. The candidate school will make initial contact with the appointed chair.

A consultant is not necessary for the SAIS process, but schools sometimes use a consultant for strategic visioning or planning.

The accreditation fee is paid when the RFP is submitted. Other costs include travel and lodging for the chair and team members.

SAIS maintains relationships with many organizations with which member schools may choose to seek additional accreditations.

SAIS works with co-accreditors to provide a seamless experience for your school. When you submit your RFP, please indicate any co-accreditations. Common co-accreditors include AdvancED (SACS, NCA, and NWAC are accreditation divisions of AdvancED) and MSA (Middle States Association of Colleges and
Schools). For these accreditations, the school has no additional reporting responsibilities; the visiting
team and the SAIS office manage the reporting. Other co-accreditors include state associations such as
FCIS (Florida), VAIS (Virginia), MAIS (Mississippi), or specific pedagogies such as AWSNA (Waldorf) or AMS
(Montessori) or specific faith-based organizations such as NCSA or ACSI.

Typically, in order to be accredited by a SAIS partner, the school must pay dues to both organizations and
follow the protocols set from SAIS and the partner organization. Some partners require representation
on the team or additional reporting. SAIS will coordinate accreditation protocols with cooperative
accrediting agencies.

Through the SAIS Accreditation Portal, SAIS can incorporate a co-accreditor’s unique requirements and
reporting mechanisms into one protocol.

Through working with schools and other associations, SAIS can also provide a framework for establishing
an endorsement for a variety of assurances including: Early Learning Program, Catholic Identity, Glasser
Quality School, Episcopal Identity, and the Global Education Benchmarking Group (GEBG). Many of these
develop from a school’s desire to test itself against various components of its mission.

**THE SELF-STUDY**

The school now begins the process of reviewing the **Standards and Indicators** and preparing their
responses and accompanying support data to be entered in the **SAIS Accreditation Portal**.
Simultaneously, the school is compiling additional data which will be used to develop the **School Report**.

Independent schools by nature are different from one another. Therefore, they must be studied from
different points of view in order that distinctions of their quality programs become evident. With that
assumption in mind, SAIS schools are asked to choose a method of reflection that most closely aligns with
the regular, ongoing visioning or planning under way at the school. Self-study and planning are indicators
that the school has committed itself to a path to improvement and is actively engaged with current
realities and future aspirations through the lens of its mission.

A school’s self-study may be almost any rational form of self-study that a school chooses which best suits
its community and culture (**see Appendix 3, Self-Study Vignettes**). The three basic requirements of any
self-study are that it is mission focused or mission driven, comprehensive of all aspects of school life, and
inclusive of representatives of all stakeholder groups. **The self-study process should result in the
identification of specific and meaningful institutional goals.** A school can use any self-study method
generally recognized in the independent school world: a strategic visioning process, school improvement
plan, school renewal process, long-range planning, school wide SWOT analysis, as guided by a consultant,
etc. Choosing your own path is one of the distinctive features of the SAIS accreditation process. Self-study
methodologies have in common an analysis and response to accreditation standards, engagement of
stakeholders, analysis of data and data collection processes, benchmarking and environmental scanning,
and mission relevance and mission fulfillment data. The school report (**page 22**) requires that a school
identify, demonstrate, and document a continuous process of improvement.

Choosing its own best method of self-study may be one more example of an expression of a
school’s independence.
One of the keys to the success of self-study is that a school has established and uses benchmarks. The benchmarks should consist of recognized indicators that may be used as a basis for determining whether a school shows improvement from year to year. The school’s planning documents should clearly indicate the benchmarks and dashboard indicators chosen by the school. The following suggest some possible benchmarks for you to consider, some of which are available to participants in the SAIS benchmarking survey:

- Application history trends, new enrollment as a percentage of acceptances, and attrition rates
- Faculty turnover as a percentage of total faculty
- Changes in scores on tests given: AP, SAT, PSAT, ACT (PLAN, EXPLORE), ERB (CTP, CPAA, Writing), Stanford Achievement Test, ITBS, CWRA, etc.
- Staff development funds as a percentage of operating budget, number of staff using staff development funds for specific targeted purposes
- Percentage of constituency making donations to the school
- Academic and discipline area specific benchmarks as set by regional and national organizations
- Self-benchmarking against longitudinal studies of various aspects of the schoolmission
- Appropriate, regular, and reliable opinion measures such as the SAIS Value Narrative Survey
- College acceptance and awards trends
- SAIS Questionnaires on Governance, Financial Wellness, and Student Safety (See Appendix 7, SAIS Questionnaires)

As a result of studying yourself, you will realize that there are things you want to start doing, things you want to do better, and things you want to stop doing. These form the basis of the school’s goals for itself to which the school should apply the “four critical questions” and craft its school report.

The school report tells the school’s story and offers a clear view of the school from several perspectives and aspirational goals. The basis of the school report is the school’s self-study efforts. It describes the vision the school has for itself over the course of the next accreditation cycle, expresses its plans and progress in the area of school improvement, and presents its methodology toward quality assurance (See Appendix 4, Building the Report).

**CHAIR PRELIMINARY VISIT**

1. The chair and possibly an assistant chair conduct a preliminary visit to the school six to nine months prior to the team visit. The length of a preliminary visit varies – most last about a full day and require an overnight the previous evening. The school is responsible for all travel and lodging costs.

2. The candidate school should have completed its responses to the Standards/Indicators (See Appendix 8, Standards and Indicators) and provided evidence at least two weeks prior to the chair’s preliminary visit (via the SAIS Accreditation Portal). SAIS requires a response to each indicator affirming compliance, describing how the school is compliant, and providing evidence of compliance. Artifacts and other evidence should represent the school’s best evidence, not exhaustive evidence. A list of documents and evidence that, if absent, will slow the accreditation process, may be found on our website [http://www.sais.org/acc_documents](http://www.sais.org/acc_documents) and in the SAIS Accreditation Portal. For the purposes of the pre-visit, the standards document needs to be as complete as possible. The pre-visit standards check will focus most closely on compliance with indicators related to operational issues such as safety, finance, and governance. Please contact the SAIS accreditation team if you have questions about how to address standards and indicators. Your access to the SAIS Accreditation Portal will be sent with your RFP confirmation. ALL standards responses must be entered into the SAIS Accreditation Portal.
3. Additionally, the chair may choose to utilize the SAIS Questionnaires on Governance and Finance (see Appendix 7, SAIS Questionnaires) in a meeting that includes board leadership.

4. In most cases, the preliminary visit will occur before the school completes the school report although much of the work of self-study will have been accomplished.

5. At the preliminary visit, the chair will:
   a. Tour the school and determine the best space for the team room and for stakeholder meeting space. The meeting space should be determined by the methodology used in conducting the meetings; it is typically either one large table or several smaller tables.
   b. Review compliance with standards and indicators in conjunction with the head of school, accreditation coordinator, representative faculty, admissions officer, business officer, advancement officer, representative trustees, and other staff as needed.
   c. Meet with board leadership to discuss governance and finance.
   d. Provide basic guidance on the format of the school report as necessary.
   e. Confirm focus areas the school is studying and working towards describing in the school report (this is the basis for SAIS to assign team members who are a good fit for the school).
   f. Determine logistics of the visit: schedule, team room, technology needs, and accommodations. It is preferable if the team hotel has meeting space available and offers breakfast.
   g. Discuss expenses of visit: the school is responsible for all travel and accommodations for the pre-visit and for the visit. The team typically goes out to dinner on the second night and the pre-visit provides a good time to talk about expectations regarding reasonable expenses and alcohol policies the school may have.

6. The chair will communicate with SAIS once the preliminary visit has occurred. At that time, visiting team members will be assigned and/or confirmed by SAIS. The focus areas on the RFP are generally used to match the school’s current areas of study with peers of a similar background. The visiting team will consist of five peer educators (chair and four team members). In some instances, the team may be smaller or larger depending on the needs of the school.

7. Four weeks prior to the visit, the candidate school should complete and submit a copy of its school report and final responses to standards and indicators via the SAIS Accreditation Portal.

**Suggested Pre-Visit Schedule**

Most chairs like to start the pre-visit first thing in the morning, which is what this schedule suggests. The pre-visit is meant to give the school an opportunity to have all their responses to standards and indicators reviewed by the chair and provide a forum to address any areas of compliance that need strengthening.

The pre-visit is also a very compressed time, so it is important that the materials are ready to be reviewed at least two weeks prior to the pre-visit and that the chair and school manage the time together wisely.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evening prior to pre-visit</td>
<td>Arrive at hotel. Most chairs like to have dinner the evening before the pre-visit with the head of school, the accreditation coordinator, and possibly the board chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 AM-8:00 AM</td>
<td>Arrive at school in time to see carpool/drop off procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 AM-8:30 AM</td>
<td>Facility tour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 AM-9:30 AM</td>
<td>Standards review with accreditation coordinator, representative faculty: Standard 1 (Mission).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 AM-11:00 AM</td>
<td>Standards review with academic leadership, representative faculty, and admissions professionals: Standard 3 (Teaching and Learning) and elements of Standard 5 (Resources and Support Systems).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 AM-11:30 AM</td>
<td>Standards review with advancement and communications professionals, volunteers or volunteer organizers: Standard 4 (Communications).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 AM-12:00 PM</td>
<td>Break/Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 PM-1:30 PM</td>
<td>Standards review with head of school, representative board / leadership: Standard 2 (Governance and Leadership).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 PM-2:30 PM</td>
<td>Standards review with business officer, representative staff: Standard 5 (Resources and Support Systems) and the financial elements of Standard 2 (Governance and Leadership).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 PM-3:00 PM</td>
<td>Review visit logistics and schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Depart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE TEAM VISIT**

SAIS accreditation is based on a peer review model that derives its greatest benefit from peer educators reviewing the school’s self-study and responses to standards/indicators and evaluating them in light of the school’s mission and evidence gathered during the team visit.

Individual team members are selected for the professional experiences and capacities they bring to the accreditation process. The team serves the needs of the school and checks its own ego and mission at the door in order to remain focused on helping the school meet its own goals and fulfill its own mission.

**Responsibilities of Visiting Team Members**

The chair will assign tasks for individual team members, usually during the orientation period at the beginning of the visit or prior to the visit via email. Though there are many ways that members of visiting teams can be useful in the process, the primary duties assigned to all team members as part of this collaborative effort are:

- Review and evaluate the school’s report. The school report should be thorough and accurate, and effectively communicate the school’s “story” as it relates to the accreditation standards and process and its commitment to its growth mindset. The self-study will be accessible to team members via the SAIS Accreditation Portal for review at least four weeks prior to the visit.
- Review the school’s responses to standards and indicators. The chair of the visiting team has done most of the checking of compliance before the visit occurs.
• Help write the visit report. The visit report is the responsibility of the chair but is written in a collaborative fashion with each team member contributing to the final document. The report serves as the feedback to the school and includes commendations and recommendations based on the school report and the team visit. The report is also the document that recommends the school’s accreditation status to the SAIS Accreditation Review Committee.

• Display a high degree of professionalism and ethical behavior, fully engaging with the school through the lens of its own unique mission.

International School Visits
In countries where the State Department threat level is rated as a 3 or higher, the following procedures will be followed:

If the threat level is 3 or higher and involves a part of the country where the school is located, the school visit will be postponed, and the school’s accreditation will be extended for an additional year. If the threat level remains a 3 or higher after one year, the school will be advised to seek alternative accreditation.

If the threat level is 3 and involves a part of the country separate from the school’s location, the school will be required to submit security plans for the visiting team and to reimburse SAIS for any additional travel insurance. Prospective members of the visiting team will be informed of the situation and will be required to sign a consent form stating that they have been so informed.

Planning for the Visit

• Finalize the schedule (See Appendix 5, Sample Schedule)

• Ask for any special needs/requests/dietary restrictions from the team members.

• Provide directions and parking information for the school and hotel. Provide parking permits or notify security as necessary.

• Provide directional signs on campus if appropriate.

• Share emergency (home/cell) contact information for school coordinator/host. Gather emergency information for each team member as well.

• Prepare name badges for members.

• Provide paper/pencils/pens.

• Provide computer access. Determine whether team members will bring their own laptops or if you will need to set up access to school laptops or the computer lab.

• Provide water, coffee, and snacks in the team room.

Items that might be useful for the team to have in the team room:

• Items that reflect the culture of the school such as yearbooks, magazines, newsletters, student-created works, admissions materials, alumni magazines, etc.

NOTE: Your standards compliance documents will have been checked at the preliminary visit and should be linked or uploaded into the SAIS Accreditation Portal. Your chair and team members will have read these materials prior to the visit. There is no need to provide a lengthy “document box” or binders of additional artifacts.

Similarly, the school’s Report for Growth will be presented in digital format – so there is NO NEED to print these documents.

The SAIS Accreditation Portal is the web-based tool schools use to address standards and provide their school report for growth. Visiting teams use it to access the school’s materials and compose the visit report. All users have their own login. There are many help files located in the Portal. (See Appendix 1, SAIS Accreditation Portal Basics)
DURING THE VISIT

1. The candidate school should provide access to the following:
   - all supporting materials and documents related to the self-study and the school report (in the portal)
   - faculty, staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders

2. Team visits should last a minimum of 2.5 days but may be longer if the chair and the head of school feel more time is necessary. In consultation with the head of school, the visiting team chair will determine the most appropriate visit schedule and format.

3. The school must provide an adequate and secure workspace in which the visiting team can examine evidence, deliberate, and construct the final report. Given the confidential nature of the visiting team’s work, the space must not be accessible to the school’s staff without permission from the chair. Necessary equipment and supplies for the workspace should be determined in consultation with the chair.

4. The school should provide adequate space for stakeholder meetings and interviews.

5. At the end of or immediately following the visit, all travel expenses of the team and chair should be paid through the school’s normal reimbursement process. The expenses should be reimbursed directly to the team members and the chair.
   a. Occasionally team members will add personal travel to the beginning or end of the accreditation visit – the school is only responsible for expenses directly related to the accreditation visit.
   b. Dinner on the second day of the visit is usually only for team members. If this is the case, the chair and the school should discuss limits on expenses and alcohol policies prior to the dinner.
   c. Mileage is to be reimbursed at the current IRS rate.
   d. Gifts to the team members are not required; however, if the school decides to do so, tokens of appreciation should be small and meaningful (a book or gift certificate, student artwork or thank you note, etc., usually not school logo items).

... think of the pre-visit as assessing the school’s OPERATIONS and the visit as assessing the school’s ASPIRATIONS.

Both have meaning and equally contribute to the school’s mission fulfillment.
THE VISITING TEAM REPORT

1. Within 10 days of the visit, the chair will submit the visit report via the SAIS Accreditation Portal. The visit report will contain the visiting team’s recommendation regarding accreditation.

2. Approximately one week after receiving the report, SAIS will forward it to the head of school and the accreditation coordinator. The school will then have up to 10 calendar days to respond to the factuality of the report.

3. The SAIS Accreditation Review Committee will then accept or reject the accreditation recommendation of the visiting team. If the recommendation is accepted by the SAIS Accreditation Review Committee, this decision will be ratified by the SAIS Board of Trustees and the candidate school will receive SAIS accreditation. If the recommendation is rejected by the SAIS Accreditation Review Committee, specific reasons will be given, and the school may be given a time frame and assistance to address deficiencies as per the accreditation appeal policy and process outlined below.

Accreditation Appeal Process

- If the visiting team recommendation is rejected by the review committee, specific reasons will be noted, and the school may be given a time frame and suggestions to address deficiencies.
- The decision of a review committee may be appealed in writing by the head of school, referencing specific area(s) in which the school was found deficient.
- A subsequent review committee will review the original findings and the head of school’s appeal letter.
- If the decision is upheld, the decision may be appealed in writing by the head of school to the SAIS Board of Trustees.
- The school’s accreditation status will remain unchanged during an appeals process.
- The judgment of the SAIS Board of Trustees is final.

MATERIALS/RECOGNITION FOR ACCREDITED SCHOOLS

As an accredited member of SAIS, you can proudly display the SAIS logo on your website and in your print materials. Various resolutions and formats plus a sample press release are available at www.sais.org/logos. You will also receive a window cling decal each year with your certificate of accreditation.
ONGOING REQUIREMENTS

1. **Interim Report Requirements:** Accredited schools must submit a two-year interim report to SAIS after the team visit. This report ensures continued compliance with standards/indicators and documents efforts made in addressing the visiting team’s recommendations and the school’s self-study goals.

2. **Member in good standing:** Schools must remain a member in good standing, demonstrate continued compliance with all standards, and abide by policies and procedures.

3. **Notification of change of substantive change/head of school change:** Accredited schools must notify SAIS in a timely manner of substantive changes using the form at http://www.sais.org/change. Changes may include: head of school change, other leadership changes, adding or contracting grade levels, merger, name change, mission change, major construction, crisis situation, litigation, school closure, and other changes. *In the event of a substantive change, SAIS may request additional information or conduct a visit to the school.*

4. **Statement on retention of student records if a school closes:** SAIS schools are required to implement and maintain a records retention system that meets applicable governmental requirements for all operating, financial, personnel, and student records (SAIS Indicator 5.12). The records retention system applies to paper and electronic records, includes appropriate back-up systems, and details consistent processes for records destruction. In states where no guidance is provided by governmental agencies, schools should consult with SAIS to ensure appropriate access and maintenance of all relevant records in the event of school closure.

5. **Term of accreditation and re-accreditation:** Terms of accreditation are for five years commencing on July 1 and concluding on June 30. Schools must host a visiting team prior to the expiration of their current accreditation term and during the same semester of their previous accreditation if a re-accreditation visit and within three years of becoming a candidate for accreditation if an initial accreditation. Any variance to an accreditation timeline must be approved by SAIS. The visit will demonstrate the school’s integrity and trustworthiness in complying with standards and responding to previous recommendations. A new self-study reflecting evidence of continuous improvement is required for each five-year period. SAIS will notify schools of their upcoming re-accreditation visit 18-24 months prior and will ask the school to complete a request for participation form.

6. **Non-compliance:** Stakeholders may file a non-compliance inquiry with SAIS if they believe a standard has been violated. Upon receipt and verification of a non-compliance inquiry, the school will be given an opportunity to respond. The inquiry, response, and any subsequent written correspondence on the matter may be made available to the visiting team chair on the next accreditation visit. However, an immediate investigative visit to the school may be undertaken if the response by the school is unsatisfactory or an accumulation of complaints indicates that a school’s response is inconsistent with a preponderance of evidence. As is frequently the case, if a school’s practices are bordering on non-compliance, the discussion that is triggered by the inquiry is often a catalyst to remedy such practices. In the event that a school is not compliant, a series of actions will be undertaken including but not limited to a request to remedy the non-compliance issue, placing the school on warned status or probation, and/or rescinding the school’s accreditation.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How many goals should the school have?
There is not a prescribed number of goals. Some schools are working on changing mindsets rather than specific goals as a method of transforming culture. Others have selected several discrete and attainable goals for themselves. Some schools are engaged in tackling “big, hairy, audacious goals” and others are engaged in strengthening their commitment to elements of their current operations or mission. Whatever you decide, it should fit your school’s culture.

Symptoms/Causes: You may discover that you have generated a significant number of goals to work on – 10, 20, 30 individual items you want to accomplish. It is very likely that there are patterns or themes that will help you categorize goals into broader elements that school stakeholders will be better equipped to understand. You are encouraged to use the accreditation process to think deeply and as a means of analyzing root causes and creating plans that address them.
Operational efficiencies are symptoms and are mostly addressed in standards. Aspirational goals can be transformative and can help lead a school to future success.

Are we required to count the number of professional development hours?
SAIS requires a program of continuous professional development for all faculty and staff that is meaningful and related to the school’s mission, culture, and goals for the future. The school determines the specifications. The school must also comply with any state regulations that apply.

What type of certification or credentials do our teachers need?
All faculty and staff are required to be ‘qualified and competent’ to do the jobs they were hired to do. The school is responsible for determining what this means in light of its mission. The visiting team should be able to review what the school has determined that satisfies this requirement and may review job descriptions in addition to the individual’s specific qualifications for a given position.

Do we need a full audit, or will a review or compilation do?
Indicator 2.17 requires that the school complete a full opinion GAAP audit during the closest possible year prior to the accreditation visit and that an independent licensed accountant conducts the audit. A review (conducted according to GAAP standards by an independent licensed accountant) is sufficient for the off years, although we recommend annual audits. Audit, review, and compilation are
technical terms that are defined by an organization such as the American Institute of CPA’s. "Independent" is defined as not an employee or board member of the school. Refer to the help file located in the Accreditation Portal at Indicator 2.17.

How many contact hours are required?
As a general rule, 120-130 hours per subject equal one credit – this is the Carnegie unit, which is a measure of seat time. This is usually set by state law or by your state’s university system. The number of days of school required by SAIS may be lower or higher than what is required by your state. Refer to the help file located in the Accreditation Portal at Indicator 3.7.

What is required for my two-year report?
Two years from the time of your visit, you are asked to address the recommendations that were made by the team, to describe the progress you have made on self-study goals, and to confirm that you remain in compliance with SAIS standards/indicators. You will receive access to the portal to complete your two-year report.

What are the requirements to be a Chair?
In order to qualify as an accreditation chair in SAIS, one must attend a chair training session, which includes a thorough discussion of the accreditation materials and process.

A chair must also:
• Serve as a head or administrator from a SAIS member school. Retired heads and administrators can continue to serve as chairs for an appropriate time following retirement.
• Attend the SAIS chair training workshop and required update meetings.
• Have experience as an accreditation team member.
• Not accept chair assignments at schools where a conflict of interest exists. Examples of conflicts of interest might include previous work experience as head or a senior administrator at the school to be chaired, a sense of personal obligation to the head of school related to career advancement, any current or expected consulting or financial relationship with the school to be chaired, and any special interest in having the school become accredited or disaccredited. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis if there are extenuating circumstances.
• Act ethically at all times throughout the accreditation process. Be honest and sincere with all participants. Treat the school and the participants as you would like to be treated.
• Hold the discoveries of the visit in strictest confidence.

What are the requirements to be a Visiting Team Member?
In order to serve as a team member for SAIS visits, one must:
• Be employed by a school accredited by SAIS, a partner accrediting agency, or an agency approved by the International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA). Exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis.
• Attend the SAIS team training orientation, which is led by the team chair and takes place at the beginning of each accreditation visit and contribute meaningfully to the work of the team.
• Not accept team member assignments at schools where a conflict of interest exists. Examples of conflicts of interest might include previous work experience as head or a senior administrator at the school to be visited; a sense of personal obligation to the head of school related to career advancement, any current or expected consulting or financial relationship with the school to be visited, and/or any special interest in having the school become accredited or disaccredited. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis if there are extenuating circumstances.
• Act ethically at all times throughout the accreditation process. Be honest and sincere with all participants. Treat the school and the participants as you would like to be treated.
• Maintain confidentiality.
APPENDIX 1: ACCREDITATION PORTAL BASICS

Once you have received notice that your portal is “open” log in to portal.sais.org to ensure that you have access. If you have difficulties, contact the director of accreditation immediately. We recommend using Mozilla Firefox as your browser for the SAIS Accreditation Portal.

Click on the blue “Edit” button next to your school name to access your page. Please check your accreditation dates and contact information for the head of school and the accreditation coordinator(s).

Review the “School and Team Resources” page linked to the white task bar at the very top of the page.

Click on the blue rectangle button near the top of the page labeled “Control Panel.” From there you click “Manage Access” to add or remove school personnel access.

There are three sections of the portal: the School Snapshot, the Standards and Indicators, and the School Report, Visit Schedule, Other Files. All three sections must be completed.

In the School Snapshot and the Standards and Indicators sections, click the blue “Open” buttons to view and respond to each item. When you have answered an item completely, click on the “Mark Complete” button on your main page next to that item.

Your Standards and Indicators section must be complete with all required and additional evidence uploaded at least two weeks before your scheduled pre-visit. You must click the green “Submit Report” button at that time. This will lock your portal. The portal will be unlocked two days after your pre-visit so that you may add the other sections of your report.

The School Report, Visit Schedule, and Other Files section is a file library where you will upload your completed School Report as well as other information such as:

- The visit schedule
- A map of the school
- The daily school schedule
- Teachers’ schedules
- Logistical information about transportation and lodging

All of this must be in the portal no later than one month prior to your team visit. Click the green “Submit Report” button at the top of the page again to submit this information and lock your portal.

If at any time you need the portal unlocked, please send an email to the director of accreditation.

Please direct all questions regarding the SAIS Accreditation Portal to the director of accreditation.
APPENDIX 2: ROLE OF THE CHAIR

Accreditation is based on a peer review process that encourages educators to view their efforts as a collegial duty within the independent school community, ensuring the sustained quality of independent education. In the SAIS process, the visiting team chair assumes the primary leadership role.

The chair’s role includes:

- Coordinating logistics with the candidate school.
- Conducting a preliminary visit and confirming the school’s compliance with standards.
- Facilitating the visit.
- Preparing the team for the visit through communications and a comprehensive orientation.
- Managing the team and assigning meaningful tasks and responsibilities.
- Overseeing the writing of a visit report that responds to the school’s stated goals and makes meaningful and attainable recommendations to the school.
- Recommending to the SAIS Accreditation Review Committee whether or not the candidate school should be accredited.
- Adhering to the timelines for completion set by SAIS.
- Serving, as requested, as an accreditation reviewer.

This role involves coordinating the school’s process from the time of the preliminary visit through the writing of the visit report. The chair is expected to engage the visiting team members in meaningful discussion and activities, but the ultimate responsibility for the accreditation visit and report belongs to the chair. Chairing a visit is a leadership opportunity and the chair is expected to help groom the next generation of leaders in SAIS.

APPENDIX 3: SELF-STUDY VIGNETTES

SCHOOL ALPHA
As School Alpha approached its centennial year, they came to understand that they were academically strong, financially secure, and fortunate in their successful students, dedicated parents, and committed faculty. Yet living in a world of constant change, they intentionally decided to focus as much on their planning process as on specific initiatives. They engaged in a deliberate transition from conventional strategic planning to a greater reliance on “strategic thinking.” The key difference is the responsiveness of a planning process where the creation of new initiatives is a vital part of the life of the school. The prior model tended to be more static, generating and relying on documents that were intended to map out five years. Often these plans were outdated after a year or two and required so much time and energy to create that there was little enthusiasm for revisiting and updating. The school spent a year shifting the focus of the board to allow for more generative and strategic conversations and approximately 80 faculty members, staff, and administrators visited with innovative schools and organizations around the globe meeting with noted experts and forming partnerships to work on collaborative learning. The school spent the next year engaging the entire community to determine how best to thrive in the changing world. Structured discussions led to a very specific dynamic: the school should be a leader in educational innovations, but also remain committed to core principles of community, character development, and interpersonal relationships. The core principles served as the foundation for the development of specific initiatives, as well as a new plan for strategic communication. Rather than developing predictable outcomes and outcomes that were destined to be outmoded even before implementation, the school chose to cultivate
a constructive culture committed to changes rooted in their values and the primacy of interpersonal relationships. Rather than reacting to events as they occurred or placing bets on specific and highly uncertain trends and developments, they designed a school culture that helps them shape their future. Specifically, the school developed short-term initiatives in the realms of: creating a collaborative, team oriented culture (reflecting on diversity, globalization, technology, customized education, and collaboration); developing new facilities; developing and molding new leadership from within the faculty and administration; developing more integrated, intentional and strategic communications; building short and long-term sustainable financial models. The school also engaged in developing methodologies of measuring and charting their progress that rely on both traditional means (test scores, WISC, CTP, SAT, AP) and more qualitative means (CWRA, alumni surveys, ongoing competitive market analysis).

SCHOOL BETA
School Beta conducted a three-phase, year-long visioning exercise following design thinking methodologies. In phase I, stakeholders (students, faculty, alumni, parents, board members, community leaders, vendors, college admissions officers, etc.) first created annotated silhouettes of the portrait of the successful student and their impact in the world, then classified the characteristics garnered from more than six hundred visual responses into two main categories: elements that were “burning desires” and elements that were “ripe for change.” Student leaders were trained and led several of the activities to collect data. In phase II, the “compass phase,” the leadership committee collated emerging themes, continued data collection through a public blog and a public visioning wall, conducted surveys and interviews and tested themes with peer school conversations, round tables, and open forums. Phase III articulated the vision and defined future possibilities around five institutional goals that would lead the school to distinguish itself in the 21st century. For each of the five goals that emerged, the school described where they were, where they wanted to go, how they would get there, and what measures they would use along the way to chart their progress.

SCHOOL GAMMA
School Gamma decided to focus on their strengths and conducted school wide “strengths” activities – somewhat based on the SWOT analysis techniques. The school chose to examine what they were already good at and leverage these practices, habits, and institutionalized effective practices. Constituent groups spent time discussing the five to eight things most core to the school and its mission and identity. Groups were then asked to frame statements in student-oriented language:

- “Our students learn...”
- “Our students experience...”
- “Our students have the opportunity to...”
- “Our students become...”

A survey committee collated and distilled these findings into a strengths survey that was administered widely throughout stakeholder groups. Next the leadership committee formed vision statements around the most prevalent characteristics of the school: faith, academic growth, community service, leadership, experiential learning, and lifelong relationships. The six strength statements were shared with a wide variety of groups of constituents who were asked to address three questions for each one: What are the most compelling ways we live this out? Is there anything we need to do in order to be more effective or efficient in this area? How could we promote and share this work more broadly and effectively to internal and external audiences? This engagement led to clear and measurable steps and action items for continuing to strengthen the school in the pursuit of its mission.
In all three examples, the SAIS visiting team responded to the process and the school-wide goals, seeing the school through the lens of their own self-determined mission and understanding the school using its own history, culture, and language. The team helped the school celebrate its method of self-study, offered commendations and recommendations, and posed questions to the school for possible further areas of study based entirely on the team’s reaction to the school’s chosen model of self-study and the concordant results of the self-study.

APPENDIX 4: BUILDING THE SCHOOL REPORT

The school report tells the school’s story and offers a clear view of the school from several perspectives and aspirational goals. The basis of the school report is the school’s self-study efforts. It describes the vision the school has for itself over the course of the next accreditation cycle, expresses its plans and progress in the area of school improvement, and presents its methodology toward quality assurance.

The school report should be a comprehensive yet concise document. Though the school has the freedom to convey these points in the format of its choosing, this document will be the basis for the visiting team’s understanding of the school. Please organize your report so that it is clear.

The school report should include:

- **Introduction**
  
  - **Goal 1**
    - Profile of Goal 1: *How did this goal materialize? Where is the school now with this goal?*
    - Vision for Goal 1: *Where does the school want to go with this goal?*
    - Plan for Goal 1: *How does the school propose achieving the goal?*
    - Results for Goal 1: *What measurements will the school use to measure progress?*
  
  - **Goal 2**
    - Profile of Goal 2: *How did this goal materialize? Where is the school now with this goal?*
    - Vision for Goal 2: *Where does the school want to go with this goal?*
    - Plan for Goal 2: *How does the school propose achieving the goal?*
    - Results for Goal 2: *What measurements will the school use to measure progress?*
  
  - **Goal 3** (repeat as necessary)

- **Conclusions and Summary**

Please note that the profile and the quality assurance structure/assessment portion of the report should reflect comprehensive data collection efforts. These inform and support the narrative assertions and should include data elements, such as survey results, focus groups, test scores, placement results, and other items representing student achievement gains. Understandably all facets of the school’s programs are not quantifiable, so qualitative support is not only appropriate but highly encouraged as derived from appropriate and reliable methodologies. It is also important to consider longitudinal data and historical trends. The plan of school improvement and striving towards aspirations is truly the heart and soul of the self-study and of the school report and informs the school in its efforts.

The School Report for Growth should be robust – it is what the visiting team will be concentrating their efforts on to leave you with high-level feedback and to try to pose questions you might not have thought to ask. The school is responsible for maintaining the master copy of the school report.
Your materials that will be assessed by your visiting team consist of three elements which are entered into the SAIS Accreditation Portal:

**School Snapshot**
The School Snapshot is a very brief overview of the school: mission, brief history, leadership structure of the school, methodology of the self-study, and the institutional goals the school has chosen to address in its School Report for Growth. This snapshot of the school serves as the introductory material for the visiting team and is automatically ported into the team’s final visit report (See Appendix 6, School Snapshot).

**Response to Standards and Indicators**
The SAIS standards for accreditation were first developed and deployed in 2001. Since that time, the standards and the approach to confirming compliance have remained mostly intact. SAIS uses the standard and indicator model whereby the school demonstrates adherence to all indicators and therefore, by definition, meets the particular standard. To address an indicator, the school makes a statement affirming adherence, describes how it adheres to the indicator, and offers its best evidence – artifacts, procedures, other documentation or studies – that clearly supports its claim that it meets an indicator. Schools respond to all indicators in the SAIS Accreditation Portal.

In the most recent standards review process, SAIS examined the nature of each indicator to determine if it was a “growth” or a “fixed” indicator. What was revealed is that the SAIS Standards contain a blend of each type of indicator – there are binary, yes/no indicators, such as 2.17 (the school has an audit), and there are also more flexible indicators, such as 5.4 (professional development opportunities – schools certainly have PD, but could it be more tightly aligned with current and long range goals, needs assessment, and mission?).

A school must demonstrate compliance with ALL SAIS standards and indicators in order to be accredited, reaccredited, or maintain accreditation. Adhering to all standards and indicators denotes that the school is vigorously attentive to its operational efficiencies. The responses to standards and indicators are initially read and confirmed by the visiting team chair at the time of the pre-visit and fully confirmed by the visiting team at the time of the visit.

**School Report for Growth**
The visiting team will focus most of their efforts responding to your School Report for Growth. It should reflect the aspirations of the school during this planning cycle and should be presented as a continuous narrative rooted in the school mission and reflective of the characteristics of the school community. In the SAIS Accreditation Portal, the school is able to upload their report directly or indicate to the visiting team how they are to access it.

**School Report SAMPLE Format**

**Introduction/Opening Section (suggestions)**
- Brief introduction or cover letter to visiting team
- Lists of board of trustees, major contributors to the school’s accreditation efforts
- You may choose to copy the responses to the School Snapshot and expand upon the elements such as a deeper history of the school, more narrative regarding the process the school followed in its self-study, etc.
- Executive update of the last few years (note that this section is intended to provide a high-level overview of the school’s recent past)
  - Initial accreditation: brief summary of major initiatives in the last five years
Re-accreditation: brief summary which includes both progress on goals since last self-study and response to previous visit recommendations

- Expanded student statistics: grade levels served, number of students and any other relevant student statistics (boarding, day, international, gender, etc.)
- Deeper description of the school’s self-study process that led to discovering and validating the major areas of school improvement the school is working on (these are the goals or vision the school has identified as a result of self-study)

For each of the school’s identified areas of improvement, address the four critical questions. Schools usually format these sections one goal at a time although sometimes with each critical question and the goals described therein.

**Goal 1**

1. **Profile – Where is the school right now?**
   Take a deeper look into where the school is in relation to this specific meaningful goal that as realized as a result of self-study. This deeper look is likely to be informed by committee work and/or an analysis of data and benchmarks that might include:
   - Demographics and community or stakeholder characteristics as related to specific goals
   - Analysis of the portrait of the graduate (i.e. mission outcomes)
   - Stakeholder perspectives (results of surveys and focus groups)
   - Student performance data and an analysis of strengths and limitations in areas of student learning, school performance

2. **Vision – Where does the school want to go?**
   Logically progressing from the profile, the vision is a well-informed and articulated look at where the school wants to go in relation to the specific goal that was realized as a result of self-study. It is significant to articulate how the school arrived at its vision(s) for itself especially as related to the mission and beliefs of the school.

3. **Plan – What is the school’s plan to achieve the vision?**
   The plan is a description for ongoing engagement with the goal the school has laid out for itself. It is typically presented in narrative format, although charts and graphs are common also.
   - What steps will the school take to realize its goals? How will the school manage internal systems, organizational planning, scheduling, and allocation of resources to ensure the greatest opportunity for success in achieving goals?
   - How will the school regularly communicate progress, setbacks, and any changes of direction to the stakeholder community?

4. **Results – How will the school measure its level of success in achieving the vision and continue to use data to inform its future?**
   Your results are documented evidence demonstrating successful implementation of strategies that result in accomplishment of the school’s improvement goal.
   - How will the school set up systems to continuously monitor and analyze relevant and meaningful information and data?
   - Will you include stakeholder perspective and involvement: faculty, parent, student, other constituent surveys?
   - How will you use relevant and meaningful data-informed school improvement (test scores, survey results, benchmarking, focus group responses, storytelling, etc.)?
Goal 2

1. Profile – Where is the school right now?
2. Vision – Where does the school want to go?
3. Plan – What is the school’s plan to achieve the vision?
4. Results – How will the school measure its level of success in achieving the vision and continue to use data to inform its future?

Goal 3

Repeat for additional goals.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

While a concluding section is not specifically necessary, the school may wish to consider broadly the challenges or barriers that could prevent it from achieving its stated goals or perhaps further considerations of what is achievable now or at some point in the future.

The school is encouraged to utilize new technologies in creating and delivering the school report. In the SAIS Accreditation Portal, the school uploads the report or indicates to the visiting team how they are to access and read the school report. Methods include uploading as a PDF, giving access to a website the school has created, publishing as an e-book, sharing access to files and folders, etc.
### APPENDIX 5: SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR TEAM VISIT

This schedule assumes an afternoon start on the first day, typically a Sunday.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>Team members check into the hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Team orientation meeting (approximately 2 hours long: <em>The chair leads this meeting, usually at the hotel</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE AN LCD PROJECTOR FOR THE PRESENTATION</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:30 PM</td>
<td>Team arrives at school campus; welcome by head of school, accreditation coordinator, and administrative team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:00 PM</td>
<td>Campus tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Reception with trustees, steering committee, faculty members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:30 PM</td>
<td>Dinner with the team, trustees, steering committee, and administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 PM</td>
<td>Team working session; review plans for Day 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 AM</td>
<td>Team breakfast and meeting at hotel or at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:00 AM-10:00 AM</td>
<td>Classroom observations – team members spread out among the school and keep a list of teachers/grade levels/subject areas observed staying about 5-7 minutes in a classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:00 AM-10:30 AM</td>
<td>Team meeting to debrief about observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:30 AM-12:00 PM</td>
<td>Team meets with stakeholder groups (meetings are typically 45 minutes): <em>suggested groups: academic leadership team, student groups</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:00 PM-12:30 PM</td>
<td>Team meeting to debrief about stakeholder meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:30 PM-1:00 PM</td>
<td>Lunch with faculty and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:00 PM-3:00 PM</td>
<td>Individual or small group appointments as determined by chair and head of school: finance, facilities, athletics, advancement, counseling, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:00 PM-3:30 PM</td>
<td>Team meets to debrief about appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:30 PM-5:00 PM</td>
<td>Team meets with stakeholder groups (meetings are typically 45 minutes): <em>suggested groups: faculty, alumni</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:00 PM-5:30 PM</td>
<td>Team meets to debrief about stakeholder meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:30 PM-6:00 PM</td>
<td>Team wrap up for the day, planning for dinner conversation, evening work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:00 PM-10:00 PM</td>
<td>Transfer to hotel, dinner. Team continues to work individually or in groups at hotel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 AM</td>
<td>Team breakfast and meeting at hotel or at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:00 AM-10:00 AM</td>
<td>Team meets with stakeholder groups (meetings are typically 45 minutes): <em>suggested groups: parents and trustees</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:30 AM-11:00 AM</td>
<td>Team meeting to debrief about stakeholder meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:00 AM-12:00 PM</td>
<td>Classroom observations – team members spread out among the school and keep a list of faculty/grade levels/subject areas observed staying about 5-7 minutes in a classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:00 PM-3:00 PM</td>
<td>Team working lunch; individual or group meetings as needed; concerted writing time to agree on standards compliance and recommendations in final report. <em>The chair meets with the head of school.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Chair (and usually the full team) provides oral exit report. Head of school and chair work together to determine the format: meeting with head of school and/or the steering committee and/or full faculty and trustees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>Team visit concludes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 6: SCHOOL SNAPSHOT

The School Snapshot provides a brief and high-level glimpse at the school and quickly acquaints the team members with the major structure and character of the school. Complete each of the sections in the SAIS Accreditation Portal. Responses should be brief and directly address each question.

MISSION
What is the school’s mission statement? How does it inform decision making in the school?
After providing the school’s mission statement, briefly describe the relationship between the mission statement and the decision-making process at the school – Standard 1 deals more thoroughly with the mission of the school, so be brief in this section.

BRIEF HISTORY
Give a brief history of the school and provide current school statistics (grade levels, number of students, and number of faculty/staff).
Describe the founding of the school and its history up to the present day. Provide the current demographics. The full history of the school can be included in the School Report for Growth, this section is for a quick overview of the school.

LEADERSHIP
What is the current leadership model? How does it relate to the governance structure?
This section provides an opportunity to describe the operational leadership of the school (a president/headmaster model, head of school and division leaders, etc.) and the governing leadership of the school (board rotation schedule, board committee structure, etc.) and briefly discuss the relationship between the two.

SELF-STUDY
Briefly describe the school’s model of self-study.
The school should describe the model and timeline of self-study employed during this accreditation cycle. Refer to the section of the SAIS Accreditation Guidebook on self-study models.

IMPROVEMENT
What are the school’s major areas of school improvement?
As a result of studying itself, the school will arrive at one or more institutional areas of improvement for mission fulfillment. List these goals or strategic growth areas. Reserve the full description of analysis and plans for implementing and measuring for the school report – this section is only for listing and briefly describing the major areas. These major areas will form the basis of the visiting team’s report to the school.
APPENDIX 7: SAIS QUESTIONNAIRES

SAIS Governance Questions
1. Do board members maintain strict confidentiality of all board discussions?
2. Does the board hear appeals from families dissatisfied by the head of school’s decision?
3. Does the board have a clear sense of the difference between governance and operations?
4. Outside of the boardroom, do board members speak with one voice?
5. Does the board actively engage in strategic planning?
6. Does the board regularly evaluate itself?
7. Does the board develop policies consistent with the school’s mission?
8. Is the board involved in any personnel decisions, other than hiring or firing the head of school?
9. Does any other school employee directly report to the board?
10. Does the board review its bylaws and policies on a regular basis?
11. Do board members serve as advocates for the school in the larger community?
12. In what ways does the board show that it feels responsible for the success of the head of the school?
13. Do individual trustees make personal requests of the head of school?
14. Do board members ask to see specific information on individual employees?
15. How is the board prepared to maintain stability during transitions of leadership?

SAIS Financial Wellness Questions
1. Does the school have a balanced budget in current year, w/o reserves?
2. Did the school have a balanced budget in the prior year, w/o reserves?
3. Does the school anticipate a balanced budget next year, w/o reserves?
4. Are any unrestricted assets/accumulated surpluses available for a budget deficit?
5. Does the school use deferred tuition to pay for current year expenses?
6. Does the school maximize auxiliary programs for additional revenue?
7. Is the school able to meet the current year annual fund budget?
8. Has the annual fund budget declined over the last three years?
9. Does the school have a target endowment per student?
10. Is the school able to realize the net tuition goals in each of the last three years?
11. Have the net assets on the audit report increased over that of the prior year?
12. Is the school able to meet the debt service ratio?
13. What are the salaries/benefits as a percentage of the operating budget?
14. What is the tuition as a percentage of the total revenue?
15. Is application volume consistent year-to-year?
16. Is the acceptance rate decreasing?
17. Is the yield rate increasing?

SAIS Child Protection Questions
1. Has the school developed and adopted an appropriate definition of child abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual), including inappropriate behavior of children toward other children?
2. Does the school have a policy that describes its commitment to preventing and responding appropriately if children are harmed, or if allegations of harm to children are made?
3. Has the school developed structured procedures for reporting suspected or disclosed maltreatment or abuse?
4. Does the school have specific child protection policies, practices, and faculty and staff training programs to ensure the safety and welfare of all students, including as appropriate: trips, student exchanges, boarding facilities, homestay and residential arrangements?
5. Does the school engage in periodic internal/external reviews and revisions of policies, protocols, and practices pertaining to all facets of student safety?
6. Does the school have formal procedures for determining the character of adults who interact with students? Do these procedures include: obtaining and verifying references and conducting background checks?
7. Does the school have a scheduled program of regular, systematic professional training for all adults who have unsupervised contact with students (i.e. volunteers, contractors, faculty, and staff) on boundary setting between adults and students, recognition, intervention, reporting, and responding to allegations of sexual misconduct?
8. Does the school regularly provide developmentally appropriate training for students on recognizing and reporting sexual misconduct?
9. Does the student safety plan address clear lines of responsibility, procedures for both immediate and follow-up actions, a communication plan, identification of community and outside resources, and a record of actions taken?

APPENDIX 8: STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

STANDARD 1: MISSION
The school commits to a mission that leads to continuous improvement for teaching and learning.
An SAIS accredited school’s mission guides decision-making, allocation of resources, and the building of community.

STANDARD 2: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP
The school provides a governance, leadership, and organizational structure that promotes its mission.
In an SAIS accredited school, trustees and administrators clearly understand their roles and are advocates for the school’s mission, vision, and continuous improvement. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders.

STANDARD 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING
The school provides a curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement of all students in support of its mission.
An SAIS accredited school provides a curriculum that reflects best practices, strategies, and activities. The curriculum includes clearly defined expectations for student development that are subject to review and revision at regular intervals.

STANDARD 4: STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS
The school develops and maintains effective communication and relationships to further its mission.
An SAIS accredited school communicates clearly and accurately with its stakeholders and encourages collaboration to further its mission.
STANDARD 5: RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The school has the resources, services, and policies necessary to support its mission.

An SAIS accredited school has sufficient human and material resources, employs a qualified and competent staff, and provides ongoing professional development. The school has well-defined and communicated policies and procedures to promote a safe, healthy, and orderly environment.

The commentary in italics after each indicator and the suggested evidence is provided to help you assemble the appropriate artifacts as you respond to the indicators in writing and prepare for your chair and visiting team. They are by no means exhaustive nor do they represent restrictions placed on schools as they creatively address their operational efficiencies. In responding to indicators, the school must indicate that it believes itself to be in compliance with the indicator, provide a description of HOW the school complies, and provide evidence or artifacts that support its claim.

STANDARD 1: MISSION

The school commits to a mission that leads to continuous improvement for teaching and learning.

An SAIS accredited school’s mission guides decision-making, allocation of resources, and the building of community.

STANDARD 1 – INDICATORS:

1.1 Establishes in collaboration with its stakeholders a mission for the school that guides all planning and decision-making and ensures the mission is congruent with principles of academic scholarship: permitting and encouraging freedom of inquiry, diversity of viewpoints, and academic independent, critical thinking.

The mission of the school is an essential written foundation on which all programs and organizational structures are based. The mission statement should be reflected in all offerings, activities, and personnel within the school. The mission statement is what sets a school apart from others. It is a statement of the unique culture of the school. It permeates the school in places such as the beginning of the school’s charter or bylaws, in its handbooks and viewbooks, in its admissions materials, on the walls of classrooms and offices, and in the minds and hearts of the entire school community.

1.2 Assures that goals are aligned with and advance the mission of the school.

The goals should be aligned with and reflective of the mission of the school and congruent with all aspirations that guide SAIS member schools. Examples of such alignment can typically be found in the school’s strategic plan, its self-study, minutes of meetings about school policy and administrative/faculty decisions, etc. Schools should ask themselves, “Will this goal help us carry out and fulfill our mission?”

1.3 Ensures the beliefs and mission guide the instruction and curriculum throughout the school and reflect research and best practices concerning teaching and learning.

Regular discussions about educational philosophy, developmental psychology, and
organizational design should clearly reference the mission. Debate about new directions or new methods of teaching/learning should evidence consideration of the mission.

1.4 Regularly reviews its mission and revises when appropriate.

A forceful, vital mission requires that schools and their governing boards review the mission statement periodically. Without regular review and reconsideration, a mission can become nothing more than a historical landmark in the school’s existence. This indicator should not be taken as an expectation that the mission statement will be changed each year; many remain useful for decades. But missions do require maintenance and careful consideration if they are to influence the work of the school. The intervals and timing for such review are up to the school.

1.5 Provides evidence that no form of bias or prejudice is allowed or practiced within the mission scope of the school in order to promote an equitable, just, and inclusive community that inspires students to respect and value diversity.

This indicator ensures that all SAIS schools model equity and justice in their daily practices, in their recruiting approaches, and in their curriculum.

Documents Relative to Standard 1:
NOTE: This is an abbreviated list of documents taken from the indicators. The absence of documents marked by an asterisk may delay the accreditation process.

**Evidence of nondiscrimination policies in handbooks, website, employment information, student applications, school publications**
**Evidence of regular mission review**
**Statement of how freedom of inquiry is approached within the context of the school’s mission**

Other documents that may be used to show evidence of compliance with indicators:
- Description of how mission drives decision making at the school
- Bylaws
- Handbooks
- Admissions materials
- Survey/focus group results
- Minutes from meetings of divisions, departments, administration
- Professional growth opportunities
- In-service programs

**STANDARD 2: GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP**

The school provides a governance, leadership, and organizational structure that promotes its mission.

*In an SAIS accredited school, trustees and administrators clearly understand their roles and are advocates for the school’s mission, vision, and continuous improvement. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders.*
STANDARD 2 – INDICATORS:

2.1 Operates within the jurisdiction of a governance structure or civil authority and, when necessary, has a charter, license, or permit to operate within that jurisdiction.

Schools will operate independently with the necessary charter, license or permit as required by the relevant jurisdiction. Schools that function under the authority of another 501(c)(3) authority, such as an ecclesiastical bishop or national organization, or as a proprietary school must show the location of evidence that such authority has been delegated to the school.

2.2 Complies with all applicable statutes and governmental regulations.

The school will comply with applicable statutes and governmental regulations (federal, state, local) including those related to programs for young children. It should be remembered that noncompliance with some regulations could put the school in legal and financial jeopardy.

Schools offering extended day programs and/or serving children younger than (senior) kindergarten shall provide evidence that they know and meet applicable state statutes and requirements related to pre-k programs. Typically, a state agency prescribes regulations for these programs and schools may or may not qualify for exemptions. To be considered for SAIS accreditation, these programs must be part of the overall school program and included in the school’s standards compliance and self-study and must be operating in full compliance with the state agency and/or must demonstrate exemption from regulation.

2.3 Obtains necessary information about the legal requirements and obligations that exist in the state, federal, or other jurisdictions in which it operates.

Leaders in a school should demonstrate that they have access to the information regarding legal requirements necessary to operate a school. The name(s), affiliations, and relationships should be indicated in the school records.

2.4 Establishes by its governing process policies to ensure no conflict of interest between businesses, professional or parental roles and duties to the school.

No economic or other advantage must come to a trustee (or employee) because of his or her role or affiliation with the school. Board members should not participate in discussions that relate to conflicts of interest involving their businesses, or themselves, or their family relationships. Annual signed consent forms, orientation, and on-going training are typical methods of demonstrating adherence.

2.5 Assures that the governance structure supports and models inclusive decision-making methods.

A governance best practice is for boards to follow procedures during meetings that allow for open and confidential conversations; and likewise, to develop protocols to speak as one voice outside of meetings.

2.6 Assures that the governance structure establishes comprehensive monitoring of overall school policies.

The governing board establishes regular methods for monitoring policies while balancing the need for the managers of the school to address day-to-day concerns.
2.7 The school engages in formal and regular strategic thinking and planning aligned with its vision, mission, and beliefs and provides for the continuity of mission.

Evidence of visioning and planning must be made clear and a current strategic plan must exist and be available for review. A strategic planning process that is mission-driven, comprehensive of all facets of the school, and inclusive of representatives of all stakeholder groups, could serve as the basis for the school’s self-study and school report as a required component for accreditation.

2.8 The school is prepared to maintain stability during transitions of leadership for both trustees and the head of school. (effective fall 2019)

Orderly succession planning and practice helps to ensure the continuity of mission. Succession plans must account for board member and board leadership transitions as well as head of school transition. Succession plans must include provisions for training for a first-time head of school and a newly appointed trustee.

2.9 Assures that the governance structure clearly defines roles and responsibilities for board members and the head of school and provides procedures and evidence for: orientation; continuous growth, renewal and training; and evaluation of both the board and the head of school.

Clear evidence of distinction between the roles of the board and head of school is required.

2.10 Has an organizational structure that includes separate entities that carry out the distinct functions of governance and day-to-day management.

The school employs best practices in determining the roles of the board and the head of school. Typical responsibilities of the governing board include: employ, nurture, support, and evaluate the administrative head of the school; manage the investments and commission the audit of the school; assume fiduciary responsibility for the school; set policy for the school. Typical day-to-day responsibilities of the administrative head of school include: oversight of personnel, curriculum (as well as extra and co-curricular offerings), student life, and administration of the approved budget. Policy manuals, employment documents, bylaws, admissions materials, board handbook statements can be used to demonstrate adherence to this indicator.

2.11 Establishes policies and procedures that recognize and preserve the executive, administrative, and leadership prerogatives of the managers of the school and assures that the governance structure does not interfere with the day-to-day operations of the school.

The school demonstrates a clear distinction between policy and management.

2.12 Assures that the administrative head of the school allocates and aligns the human, instructional, financial, and physical resources in support of the vision, mission, and beliefs of the school. The head of school shall have responsibility for the expenditure of all funds raised in the name of the school by booster clubs and other related organizations of students, parents, alumni, or supporters.

Provide evidence of alignment of allocation of funds and mission of the school. Ensure that the administrative head of the school has the authority to manage the school’s board.
approved budget. Ensure that all entities of the school that raise funds operate under the authority of the administrative head of school.

2.13 Assures that the governing body provides adequate risk management policies for the protection of the school and adequate documentation of insurance or equivalent resources to protect its financial stability and administrative operations from protracted proceedings and claims for damage.

Descriptions of risk management practices and policies, copies of insurance policies, agreements with pro bono or retained counsel, description of equivalent resources are possible resources to documents adherence.

2.14 Assures that debt service or lines of credit are managed in such ways as to ensure that fiscal responsibility remains under the control of the governing authority.

The school maintains and enforces policies, which ensure fiscal responsibility.

2.15 Assures that the school is not in, nor in prospect of moving into, financial reorganization under the protection of bankruptcy.

The school operates without excessive debt and within a balanced budget for more than one year.

2.16 Budgets sufficient resources to support its educational programs and plans for improvement and to fund a maintenance reserve. (effective fall 2019)

The financial reports of the school must be made available to the visiting team while on the campus. The evidence of a reserve fund in place indicates that the school takes this need seriously and although there is not a specific amount to be set aside, fiscally prudent and sound schools provide for future maintenance or programmatic needs based on the school’s financial capacity, its physical plant size and age, and the complexity of its programs.

2.17 Maintains its accounts in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Its accounts are reviewed or audited annually by an independent licensed accountant. A full audit is conducted in the year before the visit.

Business manuals, procedure handbooks, a copy of the audit, board minutes accepting the audit, etc. can provide evidence of this. To be in compliance, a school must hold a full audit for the fiscal year as close as possible to their accreditation visit (usually the year immediately prior) and minimally reviews in the intervening years. “Independent” means not an employee of the school. It is a best practice to conduct audits annually.
Documents Relative to Standard 2:
NOTE: This is an abbreviated list of documents taken from the indicators. The absence of documents marked by an asterisk may delay the accreditation process.

**Governance Documents**
- **Bylaws**
- **Board policy manual**
- **Evidence that the board has engaged in conversations about leadership transitions**
- **Evidence of annual board governance training**
- **Succession plan which includes provisions for training for a first-time head of school and a newly appointed trustee**
- **Articles of incorporation**
- **Most recent strategic plan**
- **Head of school annual evaluation procedure**
- **Board development plan and evaluation procedure**
- **Conflict of interest statements signed by all trustees and key employees**

**Facility and Safety Documents (see also Standard 5)**
- **Licenses or permits for the school to operate (if required in your municipality, city, or state)**
- **Documents demonstrating adherence to fire, safety, and health codes**
- **Documentation of annual training of all faculty and staff in identifying and reporting suspected sexual abuse**
- **Extended care and day care license or exemption from license (if applicable)**
- **Institutional risk management plans (including if applicable: vehicle safety, requirements for drivers, chemical handling and storage, preventative maintenance and inspections, field trips, sports programs, outside contractors, use of facilities)**
- **Insurance documents**
- **A statement of how the school maintains continuous compliance with applicable local, states, and federal legal requirements**

**Financial Documents – must be available, not required to be uploaded**
- **Annual school budget**
- **Financial audit**
- **Current financial statements: financial position, activities, cash flow**
- **Description of lines of credit**
- **Copy of filed tax documents (typically IRS Form 990)**
- **Financial procedures handbook**

**Other documents that may be used to show evidence of compliance with indicators:**
- Names and contact information for school attorney and accountant
- Name and contact information for Department of Child Protective Services
- Documents that show the authority of the governing board
- Policy statements regarding conflicts of interest, recusal, or contract bidding and awarding processes
- Evidence of board training related to decision making
- Descriptions of successful decision-making processes
- Bylaws, board meeting agenda items
- Description of monitoring method
- Minutes of planning and visioning meetings, retreats, etc.
- Meeting minutes that demonstrate discussions of succession planning
- Meeting minutes which include board approval of audit
- Policies that describe safety procedures (see also standard 5)
The school provides a curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement of all students in support of its mission.

An SAIS accredited school provides a curriculum that reflects best practices, strategies, and activities. The curriculum includes clearly defined expectations for student development that are subject to review and revision at regular intervals.

STANDARD 3 – INDICATORS:

3.1 Develops and aligns the curriculum and instructional design with the school’s mission and expectations for student performance.

The visiting team will be looking for evidence that the curriculum and instructional methods are aligned with student expectations and the mission of the school. The mission language should show up often in minutes or official notes of division meetings and in the descriptions of how the school organizes its instructional program to accomplish its objectives.

3.2 Designs curriculum to encourage students to reach their potential.

Encouraging students to reach their potential may suggest a comprehensive academic program and co-curricular activities, differentiation, AP, Honors, IB programs, dual enrollment, or a myriad of other opportunities and approaches. Independent schools commit to the uniqueness of students and have designed curriculum with individuals in mind.

3.3 Provides for articulation and alignment across all subject areas and levels of schools.

The visiting team will be looking for evidence in conversations and written statements and curriculum guides about the coordination of the teaching and learning philosophy of the school. Cohesive mission language should show up often in minutes or official notes of instructional and curriculum meetings and in the descriptions of how the school organizes its instructional program to accomplish its objectives.

3.4 Implements curriculum based on clearly defined expectations for student learning.

There are numerous approaches to expectations for student learning. These expectations should be understood by all and should be enumerated, as best as possible in admission materials, handbooks, curriculum guides, etc. and should be the subject of minutes of faculty or department meetings. Note that this curriculum must be implemented.

3.5 Emphasizes elements of collaboration and collegiality that include honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, responsibility, citizenship, self-discipline, and respect for others. Evidence of these attributes in the mission, objectives, program, curriculum, co-curricular activities, and the overall culture among staff and students are useful pieces of information. Surveys can provide an important means of assessing the effectiveness of the school’s efforts to emphasize these elements.
3.6 Schedules instructional time to support student learning.

Apart from requirements of state law, such time should be evident in the scheduling documents for the school.

3.7 Plans a mission appropriate academic calendar with a minimum of 170 days, or more if required by state law, during which students and teachers engage in teaching/learning activities (Note: for half-day kindergarten programs, one-half day is equivalent to one full day in meeting the 170-day standard). See DOE website: U.S. Department of Education (DOE).

Evidence of compliance with state law is adequate, along with a copy of the school’s calendar. Note that although state law differs, generally the requirement is a minimum of the equivalent of 180 days of instruction at 4-6.5 hours per day (720-1170 total hours).

3.8 Assures that the curriculum relies on sound learning principles, based on relevant research and provides a mission appropriate, well-balanced variety of educational experiences for all students.

The heart and soul of a school is teaching and learning and its commitment to engaging the relevant research regarding teaching and learning. In-service programs, professional development, and/or other faculty seminars can assure attention to these principles and experiences.

3.9 Assures that the curriculum promotes the active involvement of students in the learning process, including opportunities to explore application of higher order thinking skills and to investigate new approaches in applying learning.

The school must provide examples (written and/or observable) of such activities.

3.10 Assures ready access to instructional technology and a comprehensive library/media collection integrated to support learning goals.

While differences and limitations may exist in the volume of technology or resources a school is able to obtain, the salient feature of this indicator is how instructional technology and media/library resources are being used to enhance and support learning goals.

3.11 Assures that the school has a policy and procedure for responding to challenged materials.

Modern challenged materials may include books, websites, art, social media, etc. Operational guidelines for addressing a variety of situations in a mission appropriate manner should exist.

3.12 Provides a comprehensive system for assessing student progress based on clearly defined student results for learning.

Curriculum guides, benchmarking assessments, report cards, standardized tests, progress reports, and rubrics can provide a framework for assessment. Knowing each student individually is a hallmark of independent education.

3.13 Uses assessment data for making decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes.
Examples of documented uses of data for student placement, teacher preparation, and curriculum adjustments are sources of evidence.

3.14 Conducts a systematic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness and uses the results to improve student performance.

“Systematic” may include an analysis of surveys and focus groups, assessment data, benchmarking studies, teaching and learning profiles, etc. Regular reviews (by semester or annually or other) in appropriate groups (division, grade level, or other) and the results of those reviews could provide evidences of compliance.

Documents Relative to Standard 3:

NOTE: This is an abbreviated list of documents taken from the indicators. The absence of documents marked by an asterisk may delay the accreditation process.

**Curriculum guides/curriculum map**
**List of course offerings**
**Academic Profile/Academic Quick Facts Sheet**
**School calendar**
**Daily/weekly schedules**
**Description of challenged materials process**
**Statement of how the school’s mission is reflected in its expectations for student learning**

Other documents that may be used to show evidence of compliance with indicators:

- Curriculum scope and sequence
- Lesson plans
- Syllabi
- Minutes of grade level, department, division meetings
- Professional development opportunities
- List of co-curricular offerings
- College acceptances
- Instructional and curriculum meeting minutes/notes
- In-service agendas
- Character or leadership programs
- Team building activities among faculty and/or students
- Advisory meetings
- Student council agendas/minutes
- Technology plan
- Media/resources plan
- Operating budget related to this indicator - technology
- Technology acceptable use policy
- Standardized tests or other regular assessments
- Progress reports
- “Mission Skills Assessment” rubrics
- Report cards, portfolio assessments
- Analysis of student assessments through curriculum and instructional meeting minutes/notes
- Adjustments in placement, teacher preparation, curriculum are documented in the above meeting minutes/notes
- Surveys of parents, teachers, students
The school develops and maintains effective communication and relationships to further its mission.

An SAIS accredited school communicates clearly and accurately with its stakeholders and encourages collaboration to further its mission.

STANDARD 4 – INDICATORS:

4.1 Fosters collaboration with community stakeholders to support student learning.

The school must demonstrate involvement with the community through discussions, presentations, communications, and outreach activities with internal and external stakeholders such as students, parents, faculty, key civic groups and leaders.

4.2 Assures that communications among and between school staff, stakeholders, and alumni are clear and effective.

Clear and consistent communication is key to an effective mission driven school and should exist in formats and methods that address the needs of those with whom communication is taking place.

4.3 Uses the knowledge and skills of parents to enhance the work of the school.

Minutes from periodic parent meetings along with an organized volunteer program would be good indicators of compliance. There must be evidence that parent input is received, reviewed, and, where applicable, implemented – while not overstepping the operational authority and responsibility of the school.

4.4 Assures that there is ongoing evidence of communication with appropriate agencies, such as public health, mental health, physicians, and other professionals.

The school should be able to demonstrate that it has established relationships with appropriate external community resources so that both routine and emergency services in a wide variety of fields are readily available (see Indicator 5.11).

4.5 Assures that the school’s advertising and promotional materials reflect accurate information about the school’s programs and accomplishments.

Admissions materials, viewbooks, web and other internal and external marketing materials should align with physical and testimonial evidence and should be accurate and true representations of the school. Claims made regarding school accomplishments should be able to be documented.

4.6 Gathers information about graduates and other former students, using the resulting data to inform the school.

Retention and attrition studies of students, results of alumni surveys, exit interviews with families that leave prior to graduation, and written summaries of interviews with parents
provide evidence. Surveys of faculty/staff and students can also provide important data to help improve the school.

### Documents Relative to Standard 4:

**NOTE:** This is an abbreviated list of documents taken from the indicators. The absence of documents marked by an asterisk may delay the accreditation process.

**Communication to and from community resources such as police, fire department, city/urban planning offices, child protective services, state and local emergency management, mental health resources, and other agencies and service providers as appropriate**

**Relevant examples of communication with various stakeholders**

**Other documents that may be used to show evidence of compliance with indicators:**

- Volunteer guidelines and/or handbook
- News stories
- Exit interviews
- Coffee talks
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Newsletters
- Parent night schedules
- Emails
- Social media
- Magazine
- Communications schedules and plans
- Minutes from parent meetings
- Minutes from administrative meetings where parent input is discussed
- Statements in handbooks indicating relationships with community resources
- Note that confidential examples of medical or other referrals need NOT be shared
- Website content
- Publications
- Survey data and analysis
- Examples of database information
- Examples of how information gathered is used for school improvement and mission fulfillment
The school has the resources, services, and policies necessary to support its mission.

An SAIS accredited school has sufficient human and material resources, employs a qualified and competent staff, and provides ongoing professional development. The school has well-defined and communicated policies and procedures to promote a safe, healthy, and orderly environment.

**STANDARD 5 – INDICATORS:**

5.1 Provides written policies covering recruitment, employment, assignment, evaluation, and termination of service to all school personnel.

*Handbooks and other materials should describe all phases of faculty and staff members’ association with the school. Note that the concepts in Indicator 5.1 are expanded upon in Indicators 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5. Regular reviews of personnel practices will help keep the school current on the most recent laws and requirements. HR policies and procedures should also include consideration of volunteers: in the school, as chaperones, on the fields, as host or homestay families, etc.*

5.2 Assures that administrative, instructional and support staff are qualified and competent to perform the duties assigned to them in the school in order to meet the needs of the total school program and the students enrolled.

*The focus here is on three characteristics of excellence at independent schools – qualifications of employees, competence of employees, and meeting the needs of students. Clear position descriptions are the best evidence, coupled with specific qualifications of the individual regarding their suitability for the work assigned. Apart from credentialing, certification, or alternative preparation and subject matter accumulation, heads or division leaders must be able to explain reasons for hiring.*

5.3 Assures that there is an effective orientation program for faculty and staff new to the school.

*Program description with agendas and minutes provide a good explanation. Consider how the school assesses the effectiveness of the orientation program and its continuation throughout employee’s period of being “new.”*

5.4 Assures that all staff members participate in a continuous program of professional development.

*All staff, including but not limited to faculty, administrators, administrative, custodial staff, boarding and or homestay families are part of this requirement. While the specifics of the program are up to the school and may differ based on the employee’s role at the school, there must be evidence that a formal method is in place which may include: how individuals are made aware of this requirement; how fulfillment of this requirement is recorded;*
descriptions of what professional opportunities are made available and how they are aligned with the strategic vision of the school; and how professional development is funded.

5.5 Implements an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel.

Programs of evaluation of performance can take many forms and should be developed to support the growth and development of employees within the mission context of the school. There is no one correct way to do this. A thorough written description of the evaluation system provides good evidence. Consider how the school assesses the effectiveness of the evaluation program.

5.6 Provides well-defined and written student policies encompassing recruitment, admissions, administration of financial aid, conduct, discipline, and separation.

Student materials should describe all phases of student’s association with the school. Consistency and compliance with state law are necessary. Note that the concepts in Indicator 5.6 are expanded upon in Indicators 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9.

5.7 Assures that there are well-defined, published admissions and financial aid/scholarship processes including criteria upon which decisions are made, and that professional ethics are strictly observed in the process.

Review of documentation along with interviews with parents will support this indicator.

5.8 Accepts students for whom there is a reasonable expectation of success from the program.

Evidence of compliance should demonstrate admissions decisions based on a student’s compatibility with the school’s mission, program, and academic guidelines.

5.9 Assures that guidelines for student conduct, attendance, and dress, and discipline are written and communicated to all students, parents, and members of staff.

Written notices are key indicators of compliance. As an example: where uniforms are required, the team should easily be able to compare the written dress code with the actual implementation of it by the student body.

5.10 Provides counseling services that meet the needs of students.

Counseling services may include college counseling, emotional counseling, learning differences, spiritual counseling, etc. However provided, these must show alignment with mission and needs of students. Faculty should be aware of procedures in place and of their role in the process.

5.11 Assures that students whose needs cannot be met in school are referred to appropriate agencies or resources for assistance.

Having existing relationships with outside agencies and resource providers (see Indicator 4.4) allows a school to continue to assist students whose needs the school cannot meet fully.
5.12 The school maintains secure, accurate, and complete records of operations, finances, personnel and students in accordance with state and federal regulations including both paper and electronic records. The school has a plan to ensure appropriate access and maintenance of all relevant records in the event of a school closure.

SAIS schools are required to implement and maintain a records retention system that meets applicable governmental requirements for all operating, financial, personnel, and student records. The records retention system applies to paper and electronic records, includes appropriate back-up systems, and details consistent processes for records destruction. In states where no guidance is provided by governmental agencies, SAIS schools should consult with the SAIS office to ensure appropriate access and maintenance of all relevant records in the event of school closure.

5.13 Has a written crisis management plan.

A written plan that is understood and practiced by faculty, staff, and students and that is regularly reviewed and evaluated is the best evidence.

5.14 Provides documentation of ongoing health and safety procedures and inspections.

This can be satisfied with certificates of inspection from agencies that are charged with inspecting and certifying the campus on safety matters.

Schools offering extended day programs and/or serving children younger than (senior) kindergarten shall provide evidence that they know and meet applicable state statutes and requirements related to pre-k programs. Typically, a state agency prescribes regulations for these programs and schools may or may not qualify for exemptions. To be considered for SAIS accreditation, these programs must be part of the overall school program and included in the school’s standards compliance and self-study and must be operating in full compliance with the state agency and/or must demonstrate exemption from regulation.
Documents Relative to Standard 5:
NOTE: This is an abbreviated list of documents taken from the indicators. The absence of documents marked by an asterisk may delay the accreditation process.

**Personnel documents**
- Employee handbooks
- Employment agreements
- Employee applications
- Description and documentation of hiring process including screening and background check procedures (both initial and periodic) for employees
- Description of professional development
- Employee evaluation process
- Termination policy
- Description of expected qualification of employees
- Job postings and job/position descriptions
- Credentials, experience, professional development, and demographics of current faculty
- Faculty orientation schedule and topics addressed
- Evidence of faculty training as required for CPR, first aid, child protective services issues and reporting, etc.
- Description of the connections between strategic initiatives, assessment of employee needs, and allocations of time and resources dedicated to professional learning
- Evidence of ongoing training for adults in recognizing and reporting of sexual misconduct

**Additional Requirements for Virginia Schools**
- Description of process for assessment and management of concussions
- Procedures for prevention and mitigation of bullying
- Evidence of training in medication administration

**Student Documents**
- Admissions materials
- Student and parent handbooks
- Financial aid materials
- Standards of ethical admissions practices
- Evidence of ongoing, age-appropriate training for students in recognizing and reporting of sexual misconduct
- Boarding or homestay program handbook (if applicable)
- School crisis plans (facilities, communications, media, transportation, health, continuity, etc.)
- Certificates from health department, fire department, elevator inspections, etc.
- License or exemptions from appropriate state agencies as required
- Data security protocols
- Document retention policies
- Plan for permanent access to documents (student records, employee records, etc.)
Other documents that may be used to show evidence of compliance with indicators:

- Volunteer handbooks
- Volunteer agreements
- Volunteer applications
- Description of screening and background check procedures (both initial and periodic) for volunteers
- Description of professional development program
- Volunteer evaluation process
- Mentoring program
- Minutes of meetings demonstrating support for employees new to the school
- Minutes from faculty meetings where professional growth opportunities are discussed - could include any number of growth opportunities such as pedagogical approaches, content area information, health and wellness training, mandatory reporting procedures and student safety, etc.
- Notifications of opportunities for training/professional development
- Reports given by employees regarding professional learning
- Descriptions of PLC or Critical Friends groups
- Analysis of staff participation in professional learning for a defined period of time
- Descriptions of the successful candidate as aligned with mission and academic goals of the school
- Evidence of pertinent assemblies, grade meetings, advisory groups, student community building activities, etc.
- Descriptions of counseling services in parent and student handbooks
- Written procedures of referrals in faculty handbooks
- Evidence of faculty orientation to referrals
- Written agreements with outside providers for student referrals
- Schedule of drills and analysis of efficiency/adequacy
The SAIS Value Narrative Survey measures school culture and school climate using reliable and validated questions and methods. With over 50,000 unique respondents, this instrument is a leading tool to help you understand what matters to your stakeholders and their perceptions of how well you are delivering on your promise.

*Replacing loud data with good data.*

http://www.sais.org/surveycenter

The SAIS governance survey measures the board and the head's commitment to the five domains of governance: separation, confidentiality, board-head relationship, strategic mindset, and board operations.
http://www.sais.org/booklets

{HeadLines}

Sign up at http://www.sais.org/enlsignup

The SAIS eNewsletter is your resource for articles, blogs, statistics, book reviews, top tweets, and community news.

http://www.sais.org/news
SAIS Annual Conference
The SAIS Annual Conference is the premier event for independent school leaders in the Southeast. Enjoy the hospitality, comprehensive professional growth, independent ideas that matter, and networking time with friends and colleagues.

http://www.sais.org/AC
The mission of SAIS is to strengthen member schools by providing high-quality accreditation processes, comprehensive professional growth opportunities, and visionary leadership development programs.

SAIS invites you to add your name to the list of potential visiting team members by registering at http://www.sais.org/SignMeUp