



Commission on Membership and Accreditation

Handbook for Visiting Team Chairs

**P.O. Box 614
23 E. Main Street
Mystic, CT 06355**

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Introduction

This Handbook is a companion brochure to The CAIS Accreditation Process, The CAIS Handbook for Visiting Teams, and The CAIS Manual for School Accreditation.

The Visiting Team Chair leads the evaluation process and is critical to the quality of its product. The Chair is not only responsible for the accuracy and literary merit of the report, but for the School's relationship with the Visiting Team--which bears directly on the report's eventual effectiveness as an instrument for educational improvement.

CAIS Visiting Team Chairs are assumed to bring experience and skill to this task, as educators, evaluators, and leaders.

THE TASK OF THE CHAIR

I. **Sequence of Events** (refer to The CAIS Accreditation Process in The Handbook for Visiting Teams).

a. **Appointment of Chair.** The Chair is invited to serve. The Chair may be a current CAIS Head of School, a member of the Commission on Membership and Accreditation (CMA), or other qualified and experienced educator. After the appointment is made, a notification letter is sent to the Head of the School to be evaluated announcing the appointment.

b. **Appointment of Vice Chair.** A member of the CMA will be appointed to serve as Vice Chair unless the Chair is a member of the Commission. The Chair and Vice Chair work together to ensure that the accreditation process is the best it can be for both the School and the Visiting Team (VT). Unless the Chair is a CMA member, the Vice Chair is responsible for presenting the Visiting Team report to the Commission. The Vice Chair is responsible for handling the forms used by CAIS to evaluate members of the Visiting Team. The Vice Chair may assist the Chair in matters of confidentiality.

c. **Preliminary Visit.** The Chair contacts the Head of School to arrange a pre-evaluation visit to the School at a mutually convenient time. The occasion should be used by the Chair to become familiar with the School, to meet the key people involved in the Self Study, to establish a preliminary schedule for the work of the Visiting Team, to review where the members will be housed on and off campus and to review logistics including a time for the VT to be introduced to the School. The Chair may invite the Head of the School to share any concerns and/or to identify areas for team focus. The Head should be asked to inform faculty that the VT will make every effort to speak with various members of the professional staff but will not visit all classes. The expense of this visit is borne by the School.

d. **Visiting Team Notification.** CAIS notifies VT members of their appointment. A copy of each letter is sent to the Chair. A list of the VT members is sent to the Head of School, Chair and each VT member. The members also receive all other relevant CAIS materials.

e. **Preliminary VT Meeting.** The Chair contacts the VT and invites them to a briefing session at her/his school or arranges to conduct a meeting by conference call or Zoom. Alternatively, the meeting can take place at the hotel on Sunday of the visit. At this session, which should not take more than two hours, the schedule

and administrative structure of the evaluation visit are established. The Chair distributes copies of the Standards to the members of the VT.

f. School Sends Self Study. At least one month prior to the date of the evaluation, the School will mail to each VT member a copy of its Self Study prepared in accordance with the instructions in the CAIS Accreditation Manual and the CAIS Handbook for Visiting Teams. The Chair's mailing will also include (for schools seeking renewed accreditation) certain confidential items not sent to other members of the VT (see CAIS Manual, "Supplementary Material Inventory").

g. Preliminary Review of Self Study. The Chair and the CAIS Executive Director and the Director of Accreditation Services scan the Self-Study within 72 hours of receipt to assess whether it is fundamentally responsive to the instructions of the Manual and the Handbook. If substantial problems emerge, the Executive Director will confer with the Chair, the Head of the School to be evaluated and the Chair of the CMA to determine whether corrections of oversights may be made quickly, or if the scheduled visit must be postponed.

h. The Visit. The visit will begin no later than Sunday afternoon and will end on the following Wednesday afternoon. The Chair should be prepared to make introductions and say a few words to set the tone for the visit at the opening reception and at any school assembly. During the visit, the Chair will make sure the VT members conduct their inquiry in a thorough and professional way.

i. Conclusion. At the close of the visit, the Chair will:

- Ensure that the VT has agreed on the major recommendations to be made to the School as well as a recommendation regarding CAIS institutional membership and accreditation.
- Voting on Standards: The VT must take and record a vote on each standard. The record of these votes is sent by the Chair to the CAIS Executive Director and to the Director of Accreditation Services on the form provided. Copies of this record will be included in the material sent to the School. Votes on standards should be recorded by specific numbers pro and con for each standard.
- The Visiting Team Report must support the votes on the standards, and vice-versa. In particular, a negative vote on any standard must relate to commentary in the report's text.

- Expenses: The Chair is asked to collect a statement of all expenses (with travel reimbursement consistent with IRS guidelines for mileage) from each team member, and compile these expenses in a summary that is sent to the Head of School (documented wherever possible with receipts) no later than two weeks after the visit. The School will reimburse each member directly. (Note: Any cash expenses for producing the Visiting Team Report are also to be billed directly to the Head of School by the Chair.)
- Evaluation Form: The Chair is asked to work with the Vice Chair in filling out the form used by CAIS to evaluate VT members.
- Exit Interview: The Chair, on behalf of the Visiting Team, must meet following the visit with the Head of School to review the major recommendations of the VT. Other members of the Team may join this meeting, and other members of the School's staff may be included, at the discretion of the Head of school and the Chair. The Chair should not discuss the votes on standards for accreditation or the recommendation to the CMA concerning accreditation status. The Chair will indicate that a confidential draft of the VT report will be sent to the Head of School for review of factual accuracy only.

j. Visiting Team Report. The VT should stay together until the report is well structured and the recommendations are agreed upon. The report in its initial draft should be virtually complete before the VT disbands.

The Report should include a specific statement from the Chair indicating the following:

- Corporate Status: the School's corporate structure has been verified and (if not-for-profit) documentary evidence of IRS approval has been observed.
- Admission to the School complies with applicable state and federal laws.
- Information regarding the financial responsibilities of the parent/guardian or student to the institution is clearly stated in writing and is made available prior to enrollment.
- Fire and Health: documents have been observed verifying that the physical facilities meet state and local health and fire regulations.

- Compliance with State and Federal Guidelines: documents and policies have been observed demonstrating compliance in the areas of employment, records, and safety. Checklist available on CAIS website.
- The first page of a CAIS Visiting Team Report is a transmittal form, as specified in the Appendix .
- Following this transmittal form is the Title Page. Following that page, and prior to the first page of the report itself, include a photocopy of the Mission Statement and the number and grades of the students currently enrolled in the School. The text thereafter should follow the sequence provided by the Manual.
- Within two weeks after the completion of the visit, one completed copy of the draft Visiting Team Report must be sent via email with the vote on standards to the Executive Director of CAIS and one copy via email to the Director of Accreditation Services. Important: this final copy must be checked carefully for spelling, syntax, typographical and grammatical errors. A separate cover letter should accompany the Report, containing the recommendation of the Visiting Team as to CAIS membership for the school being evaluated. If there is any question as to this recommendation or the way it should be couched, check with the Executive Director.
- Do not send a copy of the draft or the completed report to the School. The Executive Director will do so.
- Do not send expense data to CAIS. These statements and accompanying receipts go directly from the Chair to the Head of the evaluated school, who will arrange for direct reimbursement to VT members.
- Please remind VT members that they are asked to destroy all materials relating to the evaluation, including the Self Study, following the visit.

II. Notes for the Chair:

- Keep social activities to a minimum. Social gatherings are expensive for the School, and are not the most effective way to carry on an objective evaluation.
- Stress in preliminary communications that all VT members must have read the School's entire Self Study carefully before arriving at the School and should be familiar with the material in the "Handbook for Visiting Teams", particularly the pages on the VT report.

- Stress that all VT members are expected to arrive for the opening of the visit and stay for the full visit and reside in the accommodations provided by the School.
- Invest time at the preliminary meeting in building relationships within the VT members. Ask members to introduce themselves to the others and share something about their background, responsibilities and interests.
- Meet regularly with the entire VT during the visit to compare notes and make sure all of the areas have been covered. The Chair would do well to ask each member to brief the group on progress at these times.
- Ensure that enough classes are visited to be representative. Extensive classroom visiting can take an undue amount of time. Classroom observations are also less relevant to the aims of the evaluation process than a systematic pursuit of information arising from information developed in the Manual and the Self Study. Institutional evaluation is also not meant to pass judgment on or offer consolation regarding an individual's performance. It examines the institution in terms of stated purposes and objectives, and regarding the standards found in the CAIS Manual.
- Keep in mind that the Visiting Team is on site to validate information contained in the School's Self Study in order to make a judgment as to whether or not the School meets the CAIS Standards for Membership and to offer recommendations for school improvement. All of its actions and reports must serve this dual purpose.
- Refer to the *Accreditation Style Guide* in the Appendix at the end of this document for expectations of the VT Report. Factual accuracy, documentation, and scrupulous fairness are critical to an effective report. It should also be readable, direct, and as succinct as possible. Good prose is part of the Chair's responsibility. Be willing to ask for a rewrite or to revise where needed, and to edit rigorously. A fine professional evaluation will command little attention if it is unclear, unsupported by evidence or analysis, banal, jargon-ridden or too long.
- Keep in mind the following three questions when compiling and reviewing the final draft of the VT Report:
 - Is each statement directly relevant to the CAIS Standards or the Self Study?
 - Is each recommendation or supported in detail by the text of the report?
 - Do summary recommendations include items demanding a high priority?

It is strongly recommended that the Chair collect all material necessary for the report from VT members before dismissing them on Wednesday. The goal should

be to share a preliminary draft before members leave in order to save having to contact VT members again.

When in doubt, contact Rick Branson, CAIS Executive Director, branson@caisct.org, (860) 572-2950 or Guy Bailey, Director of Accreditation Services, guybailey@aol.com, 203-219-5212

APPENDIX

Chair's Letterhead

Date:

Executive Director
CAIS
P.O. Box 614
23 E. Main St.
Mystic, CT 06355

Dear _____:

In accordance with instructions from your office, I am, on behalf of the Visiting Team for <school, city, state>, transmitting the following:

1. A letter outlining the Visiting Team recommendation as to <continued/institutional> accreditation of <school> in the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools.
2. A composite vote on the several Standards for Membership in the Association.

3. A completed copy of the Visiting Team Report for <school> and a copy on a computer disk.

I trust this completes the assignment. If any questions arise, please feel free to contact me.

Warm regards,

/s/

Chair, Visiting Team

Chair's Letterhead

Date

Executive Director
CAIS
P.O. Box 614
23 E. Main St.
Mystic, CT 06355

Dear _____:

The Visiting Team that conducted the evaluation of <school, city, state> for purposes of <continued/institutional> accreditation in The Connecticut Association of Independent Schools <is pleased to> <hereby> recommend [s] that the School (be granted <continued/institutional> membership) (be placed on probation for a period of one year) (be placed on warning).

If there are any questions regarding this recommendation, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair, Visiting Team
For the _____ Team

Form for Report Cover Sheet

**CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS**

Visiting Team Report for _____ (school)

Date submitted: _____

Report Reviewed by the CAIS Commission on Membership and Evaluation on:
_____ (CAIS will fill in this space)

School location: _____ (address, town and county)
Type of School: _____ Enrollment: _____

Date of founding: _____

Incorporated (not for profit) (for profit) on _____

First accredited by CAIS: _____

Last evaluated by CAIS on _____

Name of Head of School: _____

Name of Board of Trustees Chair: _____

(If the School is subsidiary to or overseen by any other entity, such as a Diocese or Congregation or other Corporation) Parent Organization to which the School belongs: _____ (include full name and address)

Submitted by: _____
Chair, Visiting Team

TITLE PAGE

Report of the Visiting Team

Name of School

Dates of the Evaluation:

Team Members:

Name _____ ; Chair
School _____

Name _____ ; Vice Chair
School _____

Followed by the rest of the Team members:

Name _____
School _____

Accreditation Style Guide

The School Name should be spelled out on the first reference in each major section with the abbreviation following. After the first reference, an abbreviation should be used:

Happy Valley Community School (HVCS) – first reference; HVCS – second

When referring specifically to the School, capitalize School....i.e. the School offers financial aid. Otherwise, lower case...i.e. parents expressed displeasure with the school year calendar.

The name of specific constituent bodies within a school should be given its full title in each major section and then can be shortened as appropriate:

The Board of Trustees - first reference; The Board - second and subsequent references

The Parent Association (PA); The PA, second and subsequent references.

School departments are capitalized; subjects (unless a proper noun) are lowercase; courses are capitalized:

The Math Department teaches all kinds of cool math including Algebra I but it does not teach Latin.

School divisions are capitalized when the reference is to the specific entity: the Lower School, Admissions Department.

Titles are capitalized before a name and lower case after a name:

Head of School Jane Jones; Jane Jones, head of school.

Accreditation references should be capitalized when the reference is school specific, but lower case when it is being used in a generic fashion. This includes the terms such as the Self Study, the Visiting Team, the Visiting Team Report, the Action Plan:

The HVCS Self Study included a reference to . . .

When completing an action plan . . .

Be cautious with all nouns that are singular but appear plural and use the proper antecedent:

The Board of Trustees voted to amend its evaluation process . . .

(Members of the board state their intention to . . .)

The Faculty voted to adopt its own procedures for using a technology . . .

(Faculty members expressed their satisfaction with . . .)

Avoid using specific products or services as schools can change vendors during the life of an accreditation cycle and should not be committed to product positively recognized in a report:

The Visiting Team compliments the School on the use of the IBM Selectric...

(The Visiting Team compliments the School for using advanced technology..)

Avoid complimenting a specific person or department unless it appears appropriately in commendations.

NO: The Visiting Team applauds the work of Coach Smith who daily goes over and beyond his time commitment with students as compared to other coaches . . .

Numbers one through nine are generally spelled out, and 10 on are generally used as numerals.

Standards for Accreditation

Standard 1 (Mission): There is congruence between the School's stated mission and core values and its actual program, policies, planning, and decision-making at the operational and governance levels.

Standard 2 (Governance): The School has an appropriate system of governance that assures that the School remains true to its mission and that it has the necessary resources to support its present and prospective operations.

Standard 3 (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice):

The School has created and continues to foster a program, culture and inclusive community of students, families, trustees, faculty and staff that embrace the multitude of perspectives, cultures, backgrounds and identities in our world.

Standard 4 (Program): The School provides a comprehensive program of intellectual, aesthetic, and physical activities that stems from the School's beliefs about teaching and learning, is appropriate to support its mission and core values, and effectively addresses the needs of the range of students admitted. Program planning is informed by relevant research regarding how students learn and the knowledge and capacities they will need to lead purposeful and constructive lives.

Standard 5 (Early Childhood Program): The early childhood program enriches the social, intellectual, and developmental needs of its students by providing appropriate programs, adequate staffing, and sufficient resources and facilities.

Standard 6 (Residential Program and/or Homestay Program): The residential program and/or homestay program provide for an intentional curriculum, appropriate facilities, engaging activities, and adequate supervision to meet the needs of each student.

Standard 7 (Resources to Support the Program): Given the School's mission, there are adequate resources (space, equipment, technology, materials, and community) to support the School's program.

Standard 8 (Experience of the Students): The School actively considers individual students and has developed plans, policies, programs, and pedagogy to nurture, support, and encourage all students to reach their potential and to participate in the life of the School.

Standard 9 (Faculty): The School ensures that there are sufficient and trained administrators, faculty, and staff members dedicated to supporting students and their families across all cultures. The School follows a comprehensive and defined program of professional development that supports enhancement of teachers' skills.

Standard 10 (Administration): The administration provides leadership and maintains a structure to facilitate the effective functioning of the School, including the participation of faculty in decision-making.

Standard 11 (Communication): The School maintains effective systems of external and internal communication and record keeping that inform all constituents and facilitate participation.

Standard 12 (Enrollment): The admissions process assures that those students who enroll are appropriate, given the School's mission, and are likely to benefit from their experience at the School.

Standard 13 (Evaluation and Assessment): The School engages in forms of programmatic assessment consistent with fulfilling its mission and core values. This data is used to inform decision-making and planning.

Standard 14 (Infrastructure): There are adequate resources (personnel, finances, facilities, equipment, and materials) to provide for the overall institutional needs of the School

Standard 15 (Health and Safety): The School is a safe and healthy place for students and faculty.

Standard 16 (The Accreditation Process): The School is fully committed to institutional improvement

and to the process of accreditation. The School completed an inclusive Self Study, conducted in

a spirit of full disclosure and following CAIS guidelines; responds to recommendations from the

Commission on Membership and Accreditation, and the requirement to meet all Standards; and

Participates fully in the peer review process, hosting a visiting committee, and sending personnel

to serve on visiting committees to other institutions.