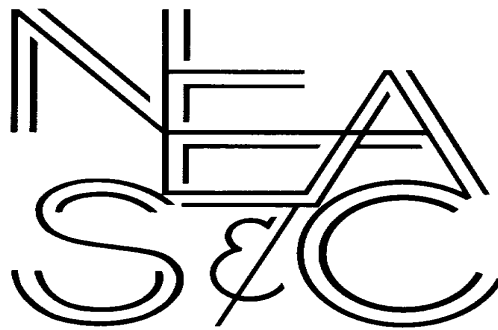


**Commission on Public
Elementary and Middle Schools**

**Policy
Handbook**



The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools engages its member schools in continuous school improvement through a standards-based, self-assessment process by monitoring and supporting each school's ongoing progress. (2006)

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I. THE COMMISSION

Its Composition and Responsibilities

A. Authority of the Commission

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools derives its authority from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. No policy, procedure or guideline of the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall be in conflict with or supersede the policies of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

B. Mission Statement

The Mission Statement for the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools is:

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools engages its member schools in continuous school improvement through a standards-based, self-assessment process by monitoring and supporting each school's ongoing progress.

C. Composition of the Commission

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall be composed of a minimum of twenty-four members who may be educators from member schools or their districts or administrators from districts that have at least one member institution in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. It is the intent of the Commission to ensure fair representation from each of the six (6) New England states as well as among those educational positions represented within the member institutions and their districts.

To the extent possible, the Commission membership shall reflect the following:

At least one member from each of the six New England states,

A minimum of six (6) teachers or non-administrative personnel from member schools,

A minimum of six (6) building administrators or supervisors from member schools,

A minimum of six (6) central office administrators from member schools, and

A maximum of two (2) public members who have not been active professional educators in, or directly affiliated as employees of, a member school for a period or periods totaling five years and who, within the past five years prior to election, has not been an active professional educator during said five years.

Reference: Association By-Laws - Article IV

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall have two standing committees, the members of which shall be drawn from the composition of the Commission:

*The Committee on Public Elementary Schools, and
The Committee on Public Middle Level Schools.*

The combined membership of the two committees shall form the Commission.

D. Term of Office of Commission Members

The term of office for Commission members shall be no longer than three (3) years. No person shall serve more than six (6) consecutive years as a Commission member. This restriction may be waived for specific individuals with the approval of the Board of Trustees.

A rotation system of election will be created to ensure that no more than forty (40) percent of the members' terms expire in any one year.

Reference: Association By-Laws - Article IV

E. Selection of Commission Members

The Chair of the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall appoint a Nominating Committee that will solicit nominations for open Commission positions through the office of the Commission director, including suggestions from the chief administrative officers of each of its member institutions. The Nominating Committee will develop a slate of nominees (including public member nominees) congruent with the needs of the two committees (elementary and middle level) and present that slate for open Commission positions to the Commission for its approval. The Commission will present the approved slate at the Annual Business Meeting of the Commission. There shall be an opportunity for delegates to the Annual Business Meeting to propose nominations from the floor. A majority vote of the delegates to the Annual Business Meeting is required for election.

It is the intent of the Commission to seek candidates for election from among persons who have experienced at least one accreditation team visit, and priority shall be given to nominees from currently accredited institutions or institutions undergoing the accreditation process.

Reference: Association By-Laws - Article IV

F. Commission Vacancies

In the event that a vacancy on the Commission occurs, the Nominating Committee will solicit nominations for open Commission positions through the office of the Commission director, and, at the next meeting of the Commission following the announcement of the vacancy, shall recommend a selection to the full Commission. The Commission shall take action on the nomination. The Nominating Committee shall take into consideration the composition of the Commission and its committees (elementary and middle level) as stated in Article C. If approval is forthcoming from the Commission, the Chair of the Commission will bring the matter to the Board of Trustees for its approval at its next regular meeting.

The appointment to a vacancy shall expire at the next Annual Business Meeting upon election of a successor.

Reference: Association By-Laws - Article IV

G. Commission Responsibilities

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall formulate and maintain written statements of standards for accreditation as well as procedures for candidacy and initial accreditation of public elementary and middle level institutions, subject to approval by the Board of Trustees. The Commission shall have the responsibility and duty to recommend to the Board of Trustees its affirmative decisions regarding the affiliation of candidates for accreditation and the election to initial accreditation of public elementary and middle level institutions. The Commission shall have the responsibility and duty to make decisions that are adverse to an institution's accreditation status, (herein "adverse decision") including denial of candidacy for accreditation, denial of accreditation, placement of an institution on probation or termination of accreditation. All recommendations and decisions of the Commission shall be reported to the Trustees. The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall comply with the applicable provisions of the due process statement then in effect as provided in Article III, Section 10 of the NEASC By-Laws. It shall also have jurisdiction of such other matters as pertain to its own institutional members which are not of concern to one or more other commissions. Subcommittees may be appointed to deal with any phase of the Commission's work.

H. Commission Meetings/Attendance

The Commission conducts a minimum of three meetings annually - fall, winter and spring - the dates of which are set at the fall meeting. The meetings are open only to Commission members, Association officers and staff. In order for the Commission to act on business at Commission meetings, there shall be a quorum of two-thirds of the Commission membership present.

During Commission meetings, no Commission member shall vote on or participate in any discussion of matters affecting any school or school district in which the Commission member is, or has been, employed. The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools has adopted the Association's Conflict of Interest Policy as its own policy. (cf. Appendices)

Meetings of the Commission will be conducted in accordance with parliamentary procedures as specified in Roberts' Rules of Order, Newly Revised.

An Annual Business Meeting of the Commission is held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Association. In order for the membership to act on business at the Annual Business Meeting, the quorum shall be a majority of the certified delegates present. The agenda for the Annual Business Meeting shall include the election of Commission members for the next calendar year.

It is the policy of the Commission to urge its membership to be in attendance at all Commission meetings in order to ensure a continuity of comprehensive deliberations, discussions beneficial to member schools and effective decision-making in accordance with the important role the Commission plays in the Association's evaluation/accreditation process.

The Commission members' attendance at the Annual Business Meeting, while not mandatory, is strongly encouraged.

Reference: Association By-Laws - Article II, IV

I. Commission Chair

The Chair of the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall be elected from among the membership for a term of one year and may be re-elected once to the position. The Nominating Committee shall solicit nominations from the Commission membership, and the election of a Chair shall take place at the fall meeting. The term of office shall, generally, coincide with the calendar year.

Responsibilities of the Commission Chair

1. Prepares the agenda for each Commission meeting with the Director of the Commission;
2. Presides over Commission meetings and the Annual Business Meeting of Public Elementary School delegates;
3. Presents the Chairperson's Report at Commission meetings;
4. Represents the Commission at all meetings of the Board of Trustees of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges;
5. Presents all recommendations of the Commission, both affirmative and adverse, to the Board of Trustees;
6. Appoints Ad Hoc/Standing Committees as deemed necessary;
7. Represents the Commission at public meetings when appropriate; and
8. Makes decisions on issues that require action between Commission meetings and reports such action to the full Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

J. Commission Members

Commission members are expected to be in attendance at all Commission meetings and to be familiar with all Commission processes and procedures. They are expected to participate on Ad Hoc or Standing Committees when asked and to conduct Commission business in accordance with Commission policy and Association By-Laws. Commission members are expected to maintain confidentiality about all deliberations of the Commission and ensure that they excuse themselves from any discussion concerning their own school or school district that might be perceived as a conflict of interest. In addition, Commission members will not participate in committee discussions about any school for which he/she has served as visiting committee member for an initial or decennial visit.

Commission members will be elected to serve on one of the two major committees within the Commission and will be assigned by the Chair of the Committee to a Review Team.

K. Public Member Responsibilities

The public member's primary responsibility is to represent the public interest in the work and deliberations of the Commission. In doing so, the public member should provide an external perspective of the accreditation process itself, assist in the efforts of the Commission to foster school improvement and assess the internal mechanisms and procedures that drive the efforts of the Commission. If there are two public members, one of the two will be assigned to the Policy Committee by the Commission chair.

Public members will:

1. Participate fully in the work and deliberations of the particular committee to which he or she is assigned to include acting as a primary reader and team member.

2. Participate in the work of other internal committees to which he or she may be assigned.
3. Serve on the Policy Committee.
4. Advocate for those constituencies served by the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools
5. Bring to the Commission issues of major concern to the public at large as they relate to the accreditation process
6. Act as liaison between the assigned committee and the community at large, especially as this relates to the school and community relationships.

L. Commission Committees

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools shall consist of two committees:

The Committee on Public Elementary Schools and the Committee on Public Middle Level Schools

The Committee on Public Elementary Schools shall be comprised of no more than sixteen members of the Commission, who are elementary school teachers or non-administrative personnel, elementary building administrators or supervisors and central office administrators. To the extent possible, the Committee on Public Elementary Schools will include a minimum of five teachers or non-administrative personnel, five building administrators or supervisors and five central office administrators.

The Committee on Public Middle Level Schools shall be comprised of at least seven members of the Commission, who are middle level school teachers or non-administrative personnel, middle level building administrators or supervisors and central office administrators. To the extent possible, the Committee on Public Middle Level Schools will include a minimum of two teachers or non-administrative personnel, two building administrators or supervisors and two central office administrators.

To the extent possible, each committee shall include one member from each of the six New England states among its membership.

The number of committee members from each state will, to the extent possible, be based on the distribution of membership.

M. Chairs of the Committees

Each of the two Committees (elementary and middle level) will elect a Chair from among its own membership. The Commission's Nominating Committee shall solicit nominations from the respective Committee's membership, and the election shall take place at the fall meeting. The term of office shall, generally, coincide with the calendar year. The term of office will be for a period of one year and the person may be re-elected once to the position. The Commission's Nominating Committee shall solicit nominations from the respective Committee's membership, and the election shall take place at the fall meeting. The term of office shall, generally, coincide with the calendar year.

Responsibilities of the Chairs of the Committees

1. Prepare the agenda for each Committee meeting with the Chair of the Commission and the Commission Director;
2. Facilitate the Committee meetings;

3. Assign committee members to review teams;
4. Present all recommendations of the Committee to the Commission;
5. Appoint members to subcommittees when necessary; and
6. Serve as a member of the Commission Policy Committee.

N. Commission Standing Committees

The standing committees of the Commission are:

1. Policy Committee
2. Nominating Committee
3. Annual Meeting Committee
4. Appeals Committee
5. Standards Review Committees (elementary and middle level)

Ad Hoc committees may also be appointed as needed by the Commission Chair.

1. Policy Committee

The Policy Committee shall consist of the Commission Chair, the two Committee Chairs, the team leaders and at least one public member. The Policy Committee is appointed annually at the first Commission meeting following the Annual Business Meeting.

The goals of the Policy Committee are to foster consistent and equitable practices by the Commission in serving the member schools and to make recommendations to the Commission, which affect public elementary and middle level school accreditation. The responsibilities of the Policy Committee are:

- a. to review Commission and Committee policies and procedures periodically; and
- b. to ensure that Commission and Committee policies and procedures are consistent with policies stated in the By-Laws of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

2. Nominating Committee

The Chair of the Commission shall appoint a Nominating Committee composed of a representative from each of the six New England states. This Committee is appointed annually at the first Commission meeting following the Annual Business Meeting. Members of the Nominating Committee should reflect the membership of both Committees (elementary and middle level).

The responsibilities of the Nominating Committee include:

- a. determining the eligibility of each Commission member with an expiring term for continued service on the Commission;
- b. soliciting, through the Director of the Commission, nominations for all openings from all member schools/districts;
- c. presenting the slate of nominees to the delegates at the Annual Business Meeting of the Commission for a membership vote;
- d. nominating a Commission Chair to the Commission;
- e. nominating Committee chairs; and
- f. nominating persons for appointment to Commission vacancies that may occur during the course of a year.

3. Annual Meeting Committee

The responsibilities of the Annual Meeting Committee include assisting the Director of the Commission in the planning and implementation of workshops for the NEASC Annual Meeting.

4. Appeals Committee

The Board of Trustees will appoint an Appeals Committee for the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools when the needs arises in accordance with the Association by-laws. The function of the Appeals Committee is to review an adverse recommendation for accreditation status that has been appealed and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees regarding its disposition.

5. Standards Review Committees

The chair shall annually appoint two Standards Review Committees: one to represent the elementary standards, and the other to represent the middle level standards. The appointments are made at the first Commission meeting following the Annual Business Meeting.

The purpose of the Standards Review Committee is to ensure that the respective Standards for Accreditation are current and useful.

The Standards of Accreditation shall undergo a formal review and update every five years. At that time, the Standards Review Committee should be expanded to include persons from member schools who are not members of the Commission.

6. Review Teams

The Chairs of the respective Committees shall appoint an appropriate number of Review Teams for each Committee. Each Review Team shall consist of a Leader, Primary Reader(s) and Resource Member(s).

The Leader of the Review Team is responsible for seeking input and leading discussion among members of the Review Team, achieving consensus or taking votes, where necessary, to bring closure to the work of the Review Team, preparing a summary report of the Review Team's findings and recommendations for each of the considered reports and presenting those summary reports to the full Committee.

A Primary Reader is specifically responsible for the particular schools assigned to him/her. As a result of the Primary Reader's reading and reflection, he/she is responsible to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the school's report, assess the degree to which the school adheres to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation, prepare recommendations for accreditation status and present this work to the Review Team for its consideration and discussion.

Members of a Review Team are responsible for reading all Visiting Committee reports, progress reports, or special progress reports assigned to that Review Team. Review Team members listen to the Primary Readers present their findings, participate in discussion and reach consensus on a recommendation for accreditation status, requirements of special progress reports and the identification of commendations and recommendations which should be included in the letter of notification.

II. THE COMMISSION

Its Responsibilities to Affiliated and Member Schools

A. Terminology

1. *Accreditation Definition*

Accreditation signifies that a school is meeting the Commission's Standards for Accreditation and adheres to all policies and procedures required of membership. To achieve and maintain accreditation the school must be engaged in a process of continuous improvement relative to the Commission's Standards that includes a comprehensive self-study, peer review, and engagement in Follow-Up activities in response to Commission actions.

2. *Candidacy for Accreditation*

Any public elementary and/or middle level school seeking candidacy status from the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools must meet the following conditions:

- a. have completed at least one year of operation;
- b. be tax supported;
- c. complete and submit a candidacy application form to the Commission office, and
- d. host a candidacy visit from a Commission representative(s).

The Commission shall review the application at its next regularly scheduled meeting and shall determine if it will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for approval. Any recommendation for approval will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for action at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

Upon receiving candidacy status, the institution must make a commitment to accreditation by conducting a self-study and hosting a Visiting Committee within three (3) years of becoming a candidate. The school is entitled and encouraged to make public its candidacy status in its publications and correspondence.

3. *Continued Accreditation Status*

Once a school has achieved accreditation, it remains in that category given the following stipulations:

- a. All interim and special progress reports, which are used to address recommendations, have been submitted to, and approved by, the Commission;
- b. all substantive changes in the school which negatively impact educational standards have been reported to the Commission and have been addressed in a timely manner; and
- c. the annual membership dues payment is up to date.

Approximately two to three years prior to the decennial self study and team visit, the Commission office will notify the accredited institution of the dates on which it will begin the self study and host the Visiting Committee.

4. *Warning Status*

Warning is a Commission action signifying that an accredited school raises Commission concerns about its ability to meet one of more of the Standards for Accreditation or has failed to follow all accreditation policies or procedures. The school shall respond to the Commission's concerns within a reasonable period of time as established by the Commission.

5. *Probation Status*

Probation is an adverse action taken by the Commission following a thorough review and discussion of the school's information and submissions, because the Commission has determined that the school is severely deficient in meeting one or more Commission Standards or has failed to adhere to the policies or procedures of the Commission to an extent that it brings concern to the Commission. The respective Committees (elementary and middle level) will bring a recommendation for probation forward to the full Commission prior to any action being taken. If identified concerns are not resolved within a reasonable period of time, the school's accreditation may be terminated. Probation is a public status.

B. Accreditation Process

When a candidate school commences the process of seeking regional accreditation with the Association, it commits itself to an ongoing, long-term process of self-improvement composed of three phases:

1. *Self-Study (initial, decennial)*

A self study is a broad-based introspection which must be undertaken every ten years and which usually takes 15-18 months to complete. Under the direction of a school-based steering committee, the school assesses itself in relation to the Commission's Standards of Accreditation. A comprehensive set of written materials to be completed by the school is provided by the Commission, and all procedures for the process are reviewed with the school by a Commission staff member. A self-study is a rigorous task, which, in addition to requiring a good understanding of the evaluation/accreditation process, requires the participation of teachers, administrators, students, parents, central office, and school committee.

2. *On-Site Visitation*

The on site visit by a committee of peer professionals to the school seeking accreditation takes place after the school has completed all required self-study documents. Educators are selected for service on a Visiting Committee on the basis of demonstrated abilities in their own school settings around New England. Recommendations for service on a Visiting Committee are solicited yearly by Commission staff.

The committee's objectives during the visit include the following:

- a. to validate that the school has conducted a comprehensive self-study;
- b. to determine to what degree the school's offerings are being carried out in relation to its statement of Mission and Expectations;
- c. to determine how the school demonstrates adherence to the Standards for Accreditation; and

- d. to make judgments, based on evidence, and prepare commendations and recommendations designed to drive school improvement.

3. *Follow-Up*

These reports are prepared by the teachers and principal of a school in the second and fifth year following accreditation. They should follow the appropriate Committee's guidelines and provide evidence to demonstrate specifically what has transpired in the school with regard to all recommendations written in the Visiting Committee's Report. Other types of interim progress reports may be required by the Committee, prior to and following, the five-year report.

C. Standards for Accreditation

The Commission has developed the following Standards for Accreditation for public elementary and middle schools. They focus on seven important areas: Mission and Expectations, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Leadership and Organization, School Resources for Learning and Community Resources for Learning.

D. Commission Reports

Member schools receive certain reports from the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools and, at the same time, are required to submit certain reports to the Commission. It is the responsibility of the school to submit its reports to the Commission on time.

These reports include:

1. *Self-Study Document*

This document must be completed by a school seeking initial or continued accreditation during the self-study phase. All materials for the self-study are provided by the Commission. Since this completed document becomes the primary resource for the Visiting Committee during the on site visit, a copy of the completed self study must be submitted to the Commission office prior to the committee visit.

2. *Visiting Committee Report*

This report is prepared by the Visiting Committee and presented to the school principal, with copies to the Commission and Committee as well as the superintendent of schools, after the team's visit to the school. The report is the result of the Visiting Committee's work to develop its perceptions, commendations and recommendations. The school principal is provided an opportunity to recommend changes to reflect factual accuracy. The school uses the Visiting Committee's Final Report to develop an action plan for school improvement following the accreditation visit. The Commission and Committee use the Visiting Committee Report, along with other materials submitted by the Chair of the Visiting Committee, to determine the accreditation status of the member school. Other materials submitted by the Chair of the Visiting Committee for the Commission's and Committee's consideration are used in an advisory capacity only. They include the Visiting Committee's consensus on the school's adherence to the Standards for Accreditation, the Visiting Committee's recommendation to the Commission and Committee regarding accreditation status as well as any other relevant comments, which will assist the Commission and Committee in determining its action.

3. Notification Letter

Subsequent to the Commission's review of the Visiting Committee Report, a notification letter will be sent to the school stating the Commission's decision regarding the school's accreditation status as a result of the Commission's review. The letter will outline the Commission's expectations of the school, what reports are due and when as well as any particular issues which must be addressed. The notification letter will include "highlighted recommendations" which must be addressed and reported on in the Two Year Follow-Up Report.

4. Two Year Follow-Up Report

At the completion of the second year of the ten-year cycle of accredited status, the school is required to submit a Two Year Follow-Up Report. This report specifically details the actions taken by the school to address the "highlighted recommendations" contained in the Notification Letter. In addition, the school must report any other actions taken to address the recommendations found in the original Visiting Committee Report. The purpose of the report is to ensure the Commission and Committee that the work for school improvement through productive follow-up activities is well underway

5. Five-Year Follow-Up Report

In the fifth year of the ten-year cycle of accredited status, the school is required to submit a Follow-Up Report informing the Commission and Committee of the status of the recommendations contained in the Visiting Committee Report. It is expected that all the recommendations will have been addressed and/or completed by the Five-Year Follow-Up Report.

6. Special Progress Report

After receiving the Visiting Committee Report, the Two and Five Year Follow-Up Reports, or any other Progress Reports, including a Report of Substantive Change, the school may be asked by the appropriate Committee to submit a Special Progress Report to clarify or explain a concern. The length of time to prepare the report will depend on the immediacy of the issue to be addressed. Such reports may be required of a school at any point in the evaluation/accreditation cycle.

6. Focused Visit Report

At its discretion, the appropriate Committee may send representatives, at a time other than the decennial evaluation at the school's expense, to evaluate a school's compliance with one or more of the Standards for Accreditation.

7. Annual School Updates

To maintain current information, each member school will submit an Annual School Update in the fall of each school year. The report consists of an update of general school demographic information, the names of persons who can serve as Visiting Committee members and new information on substantive change (s) not previously reported.

8. Substantive Change Report

Principals of member schools are to report to the Commission any substantive change in the school that has an impact on the school's ability to meet any of the Standards for

Accreditation within sixty (60) days of its occurrence. The report must describe the change and its impact on the quality of education in the school. The Commission will consider the report and make a decision as to any action that must be taken.

9. Fire/Health/Safety Updates

Fire/Health/Safety updates may be requested at any point in the evaluation/accreditation cycle if the Commission determines that a report's recommendations or school's update indicates a clear and present danger to the staff or students at a member school.

When the Director learns, through a visiting committee report or a substantive change report, that a significant health/safety issue exists at a school, the Director shall take action and inform the school and its district that such issue exists and request that the school provide a schedule for remedial action to be submitted to the Director in a timely manner.

10. Show Cause Report

This report is the school's response to a request from the Commission that the school "show cause" why it should not be placed on probation. It is the Commission's responsibility to review the school's response along with any other pertinent materials and to determine if the school should be placed on probation.

E. Commission Actions

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools is responsible for recommending to the Board of Trustees its decisions regarding the affiliation of candidates for accreditation, the election to initial accreditation of candidates and the termination of accreditation of any member school that failed to maintain currently approved standards. In addition, the Commission complies with the due process procedures voted by the Board of Trustees.

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools, then, may take any of the following actions but must recommend them to the Board of Trustees for official approval:

1. Granting initial institutional accreditation,
2. Denying initial institutional accreditation,
3. Awarding candidacy status,

The Commission also has specific jurisdiction over other matters that do not affect the Board of Trustees or any other Commission within the Association. It may take any of the following actions and report them to the Board of Trustees for informational purposes:

1. Continued accreditation,
2. Acceptance of two year and five-year progress report or special progress reports,
3. Rejection of two year and five-year progress report or special progress reports,
4. Deferral or postponement of any action or requirement,
5. Request for special progress reports and/or focused visits,
6. Acceptance of letters of substantive change,
7. Placement of school on warning,
8. Removal of school from warning; and
9. Request for show cause letter.

F. Re-Activation Process

If an accredited school voluntarily withdraws itself from membership in the Commission and, at a later time, wishes to reactivate its membership, it must adhere to the following procedures:

1. A letter requesting re-admittance with continued accreditation status must be submitted to the Commission. The Commission, in turn, will present the school to the Board of Trustees for acceptance.
2. If it has been more than five years since the most recent committee visit, the institution must begin the self-study process in anticipation of a team visit within no more than three years.
3. If it has been five years or less since the most recent team visit, the institution must host a focused visit from representatives of the Commission, at the school's expense, to review the status of the recommendations, in a report prepared by the school, from the original Visiting Committee report. The focused visit team will submit a report, including perceptions and recommendations, to the Commission with a recommendation for further action.

G. Accreditation of Newly Formed Schools

A newly formed school may apply for accreditation provided that one of the following conditions applies:

1. the school has been formed by a merger of one or more NEASC accredited schools, or
2. the school is a new institution, which draws its students from one or more NEASC, accredited schools.

Schools seeking accreditation through this policy must submit a formal application to the Commission including pertinent information in the six (6) areas listed below. The school must host a visit from representatives of the Commission, at the school's expense to validate the information contained in the application.

1. a statement of mission and expectations
2. grade levels/subject areas including learning media/library services;
3. school facilities;
4. student body composition;
5. administrative structure; and staffing patterns.

Once the application has been received and approved by the Commission, the school must conduct a comprehensive self-study and host a Visiting Committee within five years of its date of application.

Specific situations may exist which will not require a school to conduct a self study and host a Visiting Committee within five years and must only comply with the procedures outlined above. Other changes may simply require the school to submit a substantive change report. Decisions regarding a particular school's status along with the procedures to be followed will be made by the Commission based on the letter of application and the information provided therein.

H. District Evaluation Policy

If a school district seeks to alter the accreditation process in any way to achieve a district evaluation, it must receive the permission of the Commission to do so. Whole district or multi-school self-studies must be justified in terms of the positive long-range effects of the process for each individual school. While the Commission remains open to and encourages member school districts to experiment with alternate methods for worthwhile self-evaluation, it firmly believes that the value of accreditation rests with the unique characteristics of each school within the district.

I. Public Disclosure

The policy of the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools requires a school to make the Visiting Committee Report, in its entirety, public within sixty (60) days of its receipt in final form.

The Commission makes available certain information on schools that are members of the Association, candidates for accreditation or that have sought accreditation. The specific information relates to school data and Board of Trustees and/or Commission actions.

School Data

1. Mailing addresses;
2. Date of initial accreditation;
3. Date of most recent team visit and continued accreditation;
4. Grade levels within the school;
5. Chief administrative officer of the school;
6. Probationary status;
7. Candidacy status;
8. Interruption of accreditation.

J. Appeals Process

Any member school that wishes to appeal an adverse action of the Commission may do so by following the Appeals Procedure adopted by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The Commission shall make procedure available to all member schools as part of its materials of membership.

K. Request for Postponement

A member school may request a postponement of a scheduled visit by submitting the request in writing to the Director, stating the reasons and/or the conditions on which the request was sought. The request for postponement must be signed by the principal and the superintendent. A request for change in date prior to the decennial date may be granted by the Director. A request for postponement beyond the decennial date must be approved by the Commission.

A member school may request a deferral of the submittal date for a particular report requested by the Commission. This deferral must be submitted in writing, stating the reasons or conditions on which the deferral was sought and signed by the principal and superintendent. The deferral may be granted by the Director until the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Commission. Continued deferral must be approved by the Commission.

L. Dues and Fees

1. Dues Structure

The annual dues for schools belonging to the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools are set by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the by-laws of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Other fees may be assessed by the Commission.

2. Fees

At minimum, the following fees will be assessed to schools as described:

a. Candidacy Fee

A candidacy fee must accompany the Candidacy Application submitted by each applicant school.

b. Pre-Candidacy Fee

In instances when a school is not ready for full candidacy, it may receive technical support from the Commission office as a pre-candidate. A fee, negotiated by the Commission Director, based on expenses and materials, will be established prior to the provision of any technical assistance. Any school which undergoes pre-candidate assistance and moves to candidacy within a two year period, will not be assessed the candidacy fee.

c. Administrative Fee

The school is assessed an administrative fee during the fiscal year in which a visiting team conducts its review for initial of decennial accreditation. The fee is equal to the annual dues for that year.

M. Commission Guidelines

The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools has established certain guidelines for schools to use when creating plans for the accreditation visit and/or subsequent school improvement. While guidelines do not require absolute adherence, they do set expectations for successful accreditation experiences and a positive implementation of the Standards.

- 1. Handicapped Accessibility** - The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools expects that the entire school facility is accessible to the handicapped, whether, students, parents or others. If the facility is not fully handicapped accessible, the school shall provide the Commission information on how it meets the needs of the handicapped students in compliance with state and federal law and regulation. If the school is unable to meet the needs of the handicapped, it shall provide an action plan and proposed timeline to make the building and grounds as well as all programs fully accessible to the handicapped.
- 2. Counselor/Counselee Ratio** - The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools encourages each of its member schools to establish a counselor/counselee ratio which meets the full range of needs for all students at their particular developmental levels. In the absence of state education department recommendations, the NEASC advocates a counselor/counselee ratio is 1:250. If the suggested caseload is exceeded, it is incumbent on the school to demonstrate how the full range of student needs is being met, including but not limited to responsive services, individual and group planning, personal and

academic counseling, family intervention and implementing the guidance curriculum.

3. **Health Services** - The Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools expects that each member school will make health services available in the building throughout the school day to provide preventive health services and direct intervention for students. Those services should include but are not limited to: maintenance of general health records for each student; provision of physical examinations as required by state statute; assurances that immunizations are current; provision of health screenings for students; the administration of medications as required by state and local law; maintenance of an appropriate referral procedure; establishment of appropriate emergency response procedures; and opportunities for ongoing student health assessments. If a school does not have such services, it is incumbent on the school to demonstrate how the full range of services will be provided.
4. **School Librarian/Media Specialist** - Each member school with 400 or more students should have a full time librarian/media specialist. If a school does not meet this guideline, it shall indicate how adequate library services are being provided. In all cases, the library and its programs shall be under the supervision of a certified public school librarian or media specialist.
5. **Guidelines on Gifts** - The Commission does not expect and discourages schools undergoing a peer review visit for initial or decennial accreditation from bestowing gifts on members of the visiting committee in gratitude for their time and commitment. The visiting committee is discouraged as well.