



# Middle States Association

## HANDBOOK FOR ACCREDITATION DECISION MAKERS **2023 Edition**

MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS COMMISSIONS  
ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

St. Leonard's Court | 3819-33 Chestnut Street, Suite 310 | Philadelphia, PA 19104-3171

**phone:** 267.284.5000 | [accreditation@msa-cess.org](mailto:accreditation@msa-cess.org)

All rights reserved. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, retain full copyright ownership, rights, and protection of all material contained in this document. This document is to be used for accreditation purposes only. No part of this document may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval systems, for any other purposes without the written permission of the Middle States Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
The Accreditation Decision-Making Process	3
Ethics for Decision Makers	5
Middle States and Accreditation	6
MSA-CESS Foundation Documents	7
The Requirements for Accreditation	8
Definitions	10
The Accreditation Decision-Making Protocol	16
Reviewing the Standards for Accreditation	17

# THE ACCREDITATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

## General

A critical element of the credibility of the Middle States Association's accreditation process is that decisions made regarding the accreditation of institutions are based on consistent applications of the Standards for Accreditation, the policies and procedures of the Association, and the expectations of the accreditation protocol.

The purpose of this protocol is to guide the Visiting Team and accreditation decision-makers as they make accreditation recommendations and decisions. It is critical to the credibility of the Middle States accreditation process that the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools' Standards of Accreditation, policies, and the expectations of its accreditation protocol are rigorously and consistently applied when making accreditation recommendations and decisions.

It is important to note at the outset that the primary means by which the Commissions ensure that its Standards for Accreditation, Indicators of Quality, and requirements of the protocol are applied consistently in the accreditation decision-making process is the four-step review process that leads to a decision by the Commissions. This process requires reviews by:

- A Visiting Team of qualified educators reporting the evidence of compliance with the Standards, Indicators, and requirements it observed during its onsite visit on which it bases an accreditation recommendation;
- The Commissions' staff in which it studies the evidence of compliance presented by the institution in its self-study and by the Visiting Team in its written report upon which it bases an accreditation recommendation;
- An Advisory Committee consisting of qualified educators that studies the evidence of compliance presented by the institution in its self-study and by the Visiting Team in its written report and the recommendation of the Commissions' staff upon which it bases an accreditation recommendation; and
- The Membership and Accreditation Committee of the Commissions consisting of Commissioners who study the evidence of compliance presented by the institution in its self-study and by the Visiting Team in its written report, the recommendation of the Commissions' staff, and the recommendation of the Advisory Committee upon which it bases an accreditation recommendation;

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools then consider the reports and recommendations of all agencies of the four-step review when they take an accreditation action.

## The Visiting Team

In this regard, the Visiting Team plays a critical role, because it is the Team that:

- Observes first hand the evidence of compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, the Indicators of Quality, and the expectations of the accreditation protocol presented by the institution in its self-study and observed by the Team during its onsite visit;
- Uses that evidence to make professional judgments whether the institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol; and
- Based on those judgments, recommends an accreditation action to the Commissions.

This decision-making protocol prescribes how the Team will:

- Gather the evidence to determine if an institution complies with the Standards for Accreditation, the Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the protocol;
- Decide whether the institution is in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the protocol;
- Decide what accreditation action it will recommend to the Commissions.

## **The Commissions' Staff**

The Commissions' staff plays a critical role, because it is the staff that:

- Is the first reader of the Visiting Team's written report and recommendation for an accreditation action;
- Uses the evidence of compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, the Indicators of Quality, and the expectations of the accreditation protocol presented by the institution in its self-study and the evidence observed by the Team as reported in the its written report to make a professional judgment whether the evidence demonstrates that the institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol; and
- Based on this judgment, recommends an accreditation action to the Commissions.

This decision-making protocol prescribes how the Commissions' staff will:

- Decide whether the institution is in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the protocol; and
- Decide what accreditation action it will recommend to the Commissions.

## **The Advisory Committees and Readers**

The Advisory Committees and Readers play a critical role, because it is the Committees/Readers that:

- Are the second readers of the Visiting Team's written report and recommendation for an accreditation action;
- Use the evidence of compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, the Indicators of Quality, and the expectations of the accreditation protocol presented by the institution in its self-study and the evidence observed by the Team as reported in the its written report to make a professional judgment whether the evidence demonstrates that the

institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol;

- Review the recommendation of the Commissions' staff;
- Use the evidence presented by the Visiting Team and the Commissions' staff to make a professional judgment whether the evidence demonstrates that the institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol; and
- Based on this judgment, recommend an accreditation action to the Commissions.

This decision-making protocol prescribes how the Advisory Team will:

- Decide whether the institution is in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the protocol; and
- Decide what accreditation action they will recommend to the Commissions.

## **The Membership and Accreditation Committees of the Commissions**

The Membership and Accreditation Committees of the Commissions play a critical role, because it is the Committees that:

- Are the third readers of the Visiting Team's written report and recommendation for an accreditation action;
- Use the evidence of compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, the Indicators of Quality, and the expectations of the accreditation protocol presented by the institution in its self-study and the evidence observed by the Team as reported in the its written report to make a professional judgment whether the evidence demonstrates that the institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol;
- Review the recommendation of the Commissions' staff;
- Review the recommendation of the Advisory Committee/Reader;
- Use the evidence presented by the Visiting Team, the Commissions' staff, and the Advisory Committee/Reader to make a professional judgment whether the evidence demonstrates that the institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol; and
- Based on this judgment, recommend an accreditation action to the Commissions.

This decision-making protocol prescribes how the Membership and Accreditation will:

- Decide whether the institution is in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the protocol; and
- Decide what accreditation action it will recommend to the Commissions.

## **The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools**

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools plays a critical role, because it is the Commissions that:

- Use the evidence of compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, the Indicators of Quality, and the expectations of the accreditation protocol presented by the institution in its self-study and the evidence observed by the Team as reported in the its written report to make a professional judgment whether the evidence demonstrates that the institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol;
- Review the recommendation of the Commissions' staff;
- Review the recommendation of the Reader or Advisory Committee;
- Review the recommendation of the Membership and Advisory Committee;
- Use the evidence presented by the Visiting Team, the Commissions' staff, the Reader or Advisory Committee, and the Membership and Accreditation Committee to make a professional judgment whether the evidence demonstrates that the institution complies with the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the accreditation protocol; and
- Based on this judgment, the Commissions take an accreditation action.

This decision-making process prescribes how the Commissions will:

- Decide whether the institution is in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, Indicators of Quality, and the requirements of the protocol; and
- Decide what accreditation action they will take.

# ETHICS FOR DECISION MAKERS

Following is the ethical code for all who are involved in the process of evaluating institutions, making recommendations to the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, and making accreditation decisions:

The decision maker:

- Is ethical in carrying out all responsibilities;
- Uses only 1) the Middle States Standards for Accreditation, 2) the Indicators of Quality for Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Student Performance, and 3) the requirements of the protocol as the criteria for all recommendations and decisions;
- Ensures that all recommendations and decisions are based only on the evidence presented by 1) the institution in its self-study and 2) the written report of the Visiting Team (and the institution's response to the report, if submitted).
- Refrains from comparing the institution being evaluated with the decision maker's own institution;
- Maintains confidentiality regarding all aspects of the evaluation and accreditation process, all documents provided by the institution, the Visiting Team's report, and all deliberations of the Commissions and their reviewing agencies;
- Refers all inquiries regarding the accreditation of all institutions to the Chairs or the President of the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.



## **MIDDLE STATES AND ACCREDITATION**

- The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools is a non-governmental, nonprofit, peer-administered organization.
- MSA provides leadership in school improvement for its member schools in six states in the United States and in the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, the subcontinent of Asia, and Africa.
- The word “accreditation” is derived from middle French, old Italian usage.
- The first meaning of its root term is “trustworthiness.”

# MSA-CESS FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS

## MISSION

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, building on the rich history of the Middle States Association, aspire to improve the quality of education in the United States and around the world by assisting schools to achieve excellence through the process of accreditation, by affirming to the public a member school's trustworthiness and commitment to continuous improvement, by providing the network and resources for the promotion of proven practices.

## BELIEFS

We believe that:

- Education is important to the quality of life in our global society.
- All children deserve access to a quality education.
- All schools can achieve excellence in both teaching and learning through innovation.
- The process of self assessment, external validation, and accountability is essential to school improvement.
- Achieving excellence through accreditation promotes a commitment to a shared vision of continuous improvement, diverse stakeholder support, and sustained effort over an extended period of time.
- Accreditation is a collaborative partnership grounded in professionally recognized and accepted research-based standards.

## PROFILE OF AN ACCREDITED INSTITUTION

An accredited institution:

- Adheres to the Middle States Standards for Accreditation;
- Uses its mission, beliefs, and goals as the basis for daily decision-making;
- Operates in the public interest and in accordance with ethical practice;
- Accepts responsibility for the level of performance of its students;
- Remains committed to continuous improvement in student learning and to its capacity to produce the levels of learning desired and expected by its community;
- Operates in a collegial and collaborative way with all of its stakeholders;
- Sustains its focus on implementing recommendations, addressing monitoring issues and correcting stipulations that may be part of its notification of accreditation and fulfills its maintenance requirements to the Commissions

# THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCREDITATION

Although the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools offer institutions several options for their self-study and accreditation protocol, all institutions must meet the following requirements to be accredited:

- Meet the Middle States Standards for Accreditation appropriate to the institution;
- Meet the applicable Middle States Indicators of Quality appropriate to the institution;
- Meet the requirements of the protocol selected by the school for self-study and accreditation.

-

## THE MIDDLE STATES STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

To ensure consistent application of the Standards for Accreditation, it is extremely important that all involved in the accreditation process understand the purpose and importance of the Standards.

1. The Standards for Accreditation were developed through a consensus process that involved heads of member schools, other educators in member schools, members of Commissions' Advisory Committees, the Commissions' staff, and Commissioners. The Standards and Indicators reflect general agreement about what constitutes the good practices with which an educational institution must be in compliance to be able to assure its community of stakeholders that it provides quality programs and services to its students.
2. The Standards for Accreditation are the yardstick used to evaluate the institution. It is important to remember that the Standards and their Indicators of Quality set an expected and acceptable level of quality, not the maximum, highest, or ideal level of quality.
3. The goal of accreditation is not to standardize educational institutions based on a single model, but to ensure that they meet accepted standards of educational quality. Therefore, it is important to accept that there are a variety of ways in which an institution might demonstrate that it complies with the Standards and Indicators of Quality.
4. In applying the Standards for Accreditation, the goal of each component involved in the evaluation and review process to achieve consistency in the application of the Standards across all institutions evaluated and accredited by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, which makes the final decision regarding an institution's accreditation. This is important because, to be fair, all institutions must be evaluated according to the same expectations. This means that all involved in the evaluation and accreditation process must put aside personal opinions and preferences and assess *objectively* whether the institution meets the Standards and Indicators.

5. To be fair and objective, all involved in the evaluation and review process must avoid disagreeing about the Standards and Indicators themselves. The Standards and Indicators are what have been adopted by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools and are to be used as the yardstick against which institutions are evaluated. The Standards and Indicators are revised periodically, and opportunities to provide suggestions for revision are provided following each stage of the evaluation and review process.
6. Decisions on whether the institution complies with the Standards for Accreditation and Indicators of Quality must be based only on the evidence presented by the institution and observed and reported by the Visiting Team during its onsite visit.

## **INDICATORS OF QUALITY FOR CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT**

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools have adopted Indicators of Quality for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment that are used to evaluate the quality of an institution's implementation of those areas.

The Commissions have added Indicators of Quality that are specific to career and technology institutions and these Indicators also include Indicators for student performance. The Indicators for career and technology institutions are included in Appendix H.

-

## **THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROTOCOL**

Each self-study and accreditation protocol approved by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools includes a specific set of requirements that must be met for the institution to be accredited.

# DEFINITIONS

Terms used by the Middle States Association in its accreditation process have specific meanings and, therefore, must be defined and used carefully. Following are definitions for terms that will be used by the Visiting Team, the Middle States review committees, and the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.

## **When Determining Whether a School Meets the Standards, Indicators of Quality, and Requirements of The Protocol**

***For all institutions, except career and technology institutions using Reflections on Standards of Quality (Career and Technology Version)***

**Exceeds.** The evidence collected confirms that the institution exceeds the requirement(s) of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement and there is reasonable assurance the institution will continue to exceed the requirements. If the institution exceeds requirements, the Team may include a commendation for the Standard/Indicator/Requirement of the Protocol.

**Meets.** The evidence collected confirms that the institution meets the requirement(s) of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement and there is reasonable assurance the institution will continue to meet the requirements.

**Partially Meets/In Need of Improvement.** The evidence collected confirms that the institution only partially meets the requirement(s) of the Indicator/Requirement. There is not a complete absence of the requirements of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement; however, the institution must either continue to develop what it has started or improve what is already in place before the institution can fully meet the requirement(s).

- If the institution partially meets/is in need of improvement of an Indicator, the Team may recommend the Indicator/Requirements is included in the Team's report as a Monitoring Issue.

**Does Not Meet.** The evidence collected confirms clearly there is a complete absence of the requirements of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement and, therefore, does not meet the requirement(s) of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement.

- If the institution does not meet an entire Standard, the Team must recommend that the school is granted Probationary Accreditation.
- If the institution does not meet an Indicator of Quality or a Requirement of the Protocol, the Team must recommend that correcting this area is included either as:
  - A Stipulation to the institution's accreditation; or

- o A Monitoring Issue.

***For career and technology institutions using Reflections on Standards of Quality (Career and Technology Version)***

**In Compliance.** The evidence collected confirms that the institution is in compliance with the requirement(s) of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement and there is reasonable assurance the institution will continue to be in compliance the requirements.

**Partially Meets/In Need of Improvement.** The evidence collected confirms that the institution is only partially in compliance with the requirement(s) of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement. There is not a complete absence of the requirements of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement; however, the institution must either continue to develop what it has started or improve what is already in place before the institution can be in full compliance with the requirement(s).

- If the institution does not meet an Indicator, the Team must recommend that correcting this area is included as:
  - o For *Reflections on Standards of Quality (Career and Technology Version)*, a Stipulation to the school's accreditation.
  - o For *all other protocols*, a Monitoring Issue.
- If the institution does not meet the entire Standard, the Team must recommend that the school is granted Probationary Accreditation.

**Not in Compliance.** The evidence collected confirms clearly there is a complete absence of the requirements of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement and, therefore, the institution is not in compliance with the requirement(s) of the Standard/Indicator/Requirement.

- If the institution does not meet an Indicator, the Team must recommend that correcting this area is included as:
  - o For *Reflections on Standards of Quality (Career and Technology Version)*, a Stipulation to the school's accreditation.
  - o For *all other protocols*, a Monitoring Issue.
- If the institution does not meet the entire Standard, the Team must recommend that the school is granted Probationary Accreditation.

**When Making an Accreditation Recommendation**

***For all institutions, except career and technology institutions using Reflections on Standards of Quality (Career and Technology Version)***

**A. If the institution has previously been accredited by the Middle States Association, the accreditation options are:**

**Accreditation.** An “Accredited” institution is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. The institution agrees to adhere to the requirements for maintenance of accreditation, and there are no outstanding issues related to the Standards or requirements of the protocol that would require monitoring or onsite visits beyond the normal expected events required by the protocol utilized.

**Accredited with Stipulations.** An institution “Accredited with Stipulations” is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. However, the institution has been given significant stipulations in one or more areas that require follow-up and monitoring in order to ensure that the stipulations are met. In such cases, MSA will identify the stipulations and specify the nature, purpose, timelines, and scope of any corrective action required or additional information to be submitted to the Commissions by the institution. Subsequent reports and/or onsite visits may be required to provide the Commissions with assurance that appropriate corrective action has been taken. Corrective action must take place within the specified time limit unless otherwise approved by the President.

**Probationary Accreditation.** An institution granted Probationary Accreditation is a previously MSA accredited educational organization that does not meet one or more of the MSA Standards for Accreditation, does not adhere to applicable MSA policies, and/or does not follow the requirements of the self-study protocol used. The institution is provided with specific corrective actions that must be followed in order for the institution to have its accreditation in good standing reinstated with MSA. Subsequent reporting and/or onsite visits confirming those corrective actions are required within defined time limits in order for the entity to remove probation and gain accreditation for the full term as specified by the protocol used. Probationary Accreditation is typically granted for a period of one year, but shall not exceed a maximum of three years.

**B. If the institution has not been accredited by the Middle States Association previously, and is a Candidate for Accreditation, the accreditation options are:**

**Accreditation.** An “Accredited” institution is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. The institution agrees to adhere to the requirements for maintenance of accreditation, and there are no outstanding issues related to the Standards or requirements of the protocol that would require monitoring or onsite visits beyond the normal expected events required by the protocol utilized.

**Accreditation with Stipulations.** An institution “Accredited with Stipulations” is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. However, the institution has been given significant stipulations in one or more areas that require follow-up and monitoring in order to ensure that the stipulations are met. In such cases, MSA will identify the stipulations and specify the nature, purpose, timelines, and scope of any corrective action required or additional information to be submitted to the Commissions by the institution. Subsequent reports and/or onsite visits may be required to provide the Commissions with assurance that appropriate corrective action has been taken. Corrective action must take place within the specified time limit unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director.

**Accreditation Postponed.** An institution with Accreditation Postponed is an educational organization, not currently accredited by MSA, for which an accreditation action is postponed because one or more of the Standards for Accreditation are not met, applicable MSA policies are not adhered to, and/or deficiencies in the self-study process were identified during the team visit. Specific corrective action will be required. An onsite visit may be required to verify that the specified corrective action has been taken. If evidence of progress in taking corrective action is not evident within one year, the institution will be presented to the Commissions for a review of its continued Candidacy.

**Accreditation Denied.** An institution with Accreditation Denied is an educational organization, not currently accredited by MSA, for which accreditation is denied when there are significant violations of Standards for Accreditation, applicable MSA policies are not adhered to, and major shortcomings in the self-study process are identified during the team visit. Violations will be specifically identified by MSA. Membership will be terminated. The institution will be permitted to reapply for candidacy only when the deficiencies have been corrected and an onsite visit confirms that corrective action has been taken. The institution may not reapply for candidacy for at least one year and must initiate the candidacy process from the beginning.

***For career and technology institutions using Reflections on Standards of Quality (Career and Technology Version)***

**A. If the institution has previously been accredited by the Middle States Association, the accreditation options are:**

**Accreditation.** An “Accredited” institution is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. The institution agrees to adhere to the requirements for maintenance of accreditation, and there are no outstanding issues related to the Standards or requirements of the protocol that would require monitoring or onsite visits beyond the normal expected events required by the protocol utilized.



**Accredited with Stipulations.** An institution “Accredited with Stipulations” is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. However, the institution has been given significant stipulations in one or more areas that require follow-up and monitoring in order to ensure that the stipulations are met. In such cases, MSA will identify the stipulations and specify the nature, purpose, timelines, and scope of any corrective action required or additional information to be submitted to the Commissions by the institution. Subsequent reports and/or onsite visits may be required to provide the Commissions with assurance that appropriate corrective action has been taken. Corrective action must take place within the specified time limit unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director.

**Probationary Accreditation.** An institution granted Probationary Accreditation is a previously MSA accredited educational organization that does not meet one or more of the MSA Standards for Accreditation, does not adhere to applicable MSA policies, and/or does not follow the requirements of the self-study protocol used. The institution is provided with specific corrective actions that must be followed in order for the institution to have its accreditation in good standing reinstated with MSA. Subsequent reporting and/or onsite visits confirming those corrective actions are required within defined time limits in order for the entity to remove probation and gain accreditation for the full term as specified by the protocol used. Probationary Accreditation is typically granted for a period of one year, but shall not exceed a maximum of three years.

**B. If the institution has not been accredited by the Middle States Association previously and is a Candidate for Accreditation, the accreditation options are:**

**Accreditation.** An “Accredited” institution is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. The institution agrees to adhere to the requirements for maintenance of accreditation, and there are no outstanding issues related to the Standards or requirements of the protocol that would require monitoring or onsite visits beyond the normal expected events required by the protocol utilized.

**Accreditation with Stipulations.** An institution “Accredited with Stipulations” is an educational organization that meets all MSA Standards for Accreditation, adheres to applicable MSA policies, and meets the requirements of the self-study protocol used. However, the institution has been given significant stipulations in one or more areas that require follow-up and monitoring in order to ensure that the stipulations are met. In such cases, MSA will identify the stipulations and specify the nature, purpose, timelines, and scope of any corrective action required or additional information to be submitted to the Commissions by the institution. Subsequent reports and/or onsite visits may be required to provide the Commissions with assurance that appropriate corrective action has been taken.

Corrective action must take place within the specified time limit unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director.

**Accreditation Postponed.** An institution with Accreditation Postponed is an educational organization, not currently accredited by MSA, for which an accreditation action is postponed because one or more of the Standards for Accreditation are not met, applicable MSA policies are not adhered to, and/or deficiencies in the self-study process were identified during the team visit. Specific corrective action will be required. An onsite visit may be required to verify that the specified corrective action has been taken. If evidence of progress in taking corrective action is not evident within one year, the institution will be presented to the Commissions for a review of its continued Candidacy.

**Accreditation Denied.** An institution with Accreditation Denied is an educational organization, not currently accredited by MSA, for which accreditation is denied when there are significant violations of Standards for Accreditation, applicable MSA policies are not adhered to, and major shortcomings in the self-study process are identified during the team visit. Violations will be specifically identified by MSA. Membership will be terminated. The institution will be permitted to reapply for candidacy only when the deficiencies have been corrected and an onsite visit confirms that corrective action has been taken. The institution may not reapply for candidacy for at least one year and must initiate the candidacy process from the beginning.

## **Other Definitions**

**Recommendation.** Crafted as part of the team report, a Recommendation is given to the school by the Visiting Team and indicates an action the school SHOULD address. Typically, in the professional opinion of the members of the Team, the action would enhance the effectiveness of the school and would result in further improvements. It may be a revisiting of findings by the school through its self-study or may be a new suggestion provided as a result of the external peer review process.

Examples of Recommendations include: 1) ...consider the growing ethnic population when designing new student activities...2) ...add the concept of “family” to the school’s belief statements...3) ...examine the workload of the counseling staff with an eye toward better balance and service....

**Monitoring Issue.** Occasionally, a school will be working toward full implementation of an Indicator of Quality and/or Requirement of the Protocol used for self-study, but additional monitoring is REQUIRED to ensure that appropriate follow-through is taken by the school. This monitoring will typically take place at the next regularly scheduled accreditation maintenance activity, such as at the mid-term review. Typically, Monitoring Issues are for actions that a school needs to implement as planned, expand upon, or redo.

Examples of Monitoring Issues include: 1) ...expanding the Planning Team/Steering Committee structure to include greater broad based stakeholder involvement...2) ...continue the curriculum review process until all academic departments have been included...3) ...redo the self-assessment of compliance with the accreditation standards to reflect appropriate input from a larger sample of stakeholder.

A Monitoring Issue does not have an effect on the accreditation action taken by the Commissions.

**Stipulation.** A more serious monitoring issue is a Stipulation. A stipulation is assigned when a crucial or critical component is missing or inadequate. A stipulation can address either an Indicator of Quality or a Requirement of the Protocol used for self-study. A stipulation requires a school to either submit a report and/or host a representative of Middle States prior to the next regularly scheduled accreditation maintenance activity to demonstrate that the Stipulation has been addressed satisfactorily.

Examples of Stipulations include: 1) ...taking action to correct inappropriate access to hazardous chemicals in the science labs...2) ...demonstrating that a crisis policy has been implemented...3) ...submitting baseline data for the measurable performance objectives required by the self-study protocol...

A stipulation can be identified by the Team or at any other stage of the review and accreditation action process.

If the Commissions identify one or more Stipulations, the institution's accreditation status will be Accreditation with Stipulations.

# THE ACCREDITATION DECISION-MAKING PROTOCOL

The protocol for making decisions regarding whether an institution meets the appropriate Standards for Accreditation, the applicable Indicators of Quality, and the Requirements of the Protocol consists of the following steps:

- Step #1: Considering all of the evidence presented by the institution and seen/heard by the Visiting Team during the onsite visit
- Step #2: Determining whether the institution meets the applicable Indicators of Quality
- Step #1: Determining whether the institution meets the applicable Standards for Accreditation
- Step #3: Determining whether the institution meets Requirements of the Protocol used for self-study and accreditation
- Step #4: Determining the Accreditation recommendation that is supported by the evidence

## **REVIEWING THE STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION**

At the conclusion of each Visiting Team visit and after each meeting of the groups involved in the review and accreditation decision-making, process, the participants are given the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the clarity, reliability, comprehensiveness, and appropriateness of the Middle States Standards for Accreditation. The results of these reviews are collected for use during the Commissions' formal review of the Standards every five years.