

SELF-STUDY AND ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR POST SECONDARY CAREER & TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS

Section 1: Self-Study and Accreditation Protocols

To ensure that the diverse, developmental needs of MSA-CESS accredited and candidate schools are met effectively, the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools shall provide a choice of self-study and accreditation protocols.

- A. Approval Process. The Commissions shall approve, after review and analysis by the Commissions' staff and the Commissions' Membership and Accreditation Committees, all self-study and accreditation protocols authorized for use by schools seeking MSA-CESS accreditation and reaccreditation.
- B. Criteria. The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools may approve self-study and accreditation protocols that meet the following criteria:
 - a. Well-aligned and consistent with the MSA-CESS Standards for Accreditation;
 - b. Meet the needs of accredited and candidate schools;
 - c. Of high quality, well-written, and effectively designed;
 - d. Encourage schools, school systems, and other education institutions to base self-study and accreditation efforts on accomplishing the purposes and functions outlined in their own foundation documents; and
 - e. Promote continuous growth and improvement in student performance and/or organizational capacity.
- C. Revision. Self-study and accreditation protocols developed by the Commissions shall be reviewed and revised regularly to reflect current practices in education and accreditation and the needs of accredited and candidate schools.
- D. Self-Study and Accreditation Protocol. The Commission shall provide a self-study and accreditation protocol expressly designed for career and technical institutions. The protocol shall be reviewed and revised as necessary on an ongoing basis to keep it current with the requirements for recognition of the Commission by the U.S. Secretary of Education and current trends in the career/technical education field.
 - All eligible institutions that have declared their intention to use their MSA-CSS accreditation to establish eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA, federal student loan programs are required to use the comprehensive, self-study and accreditation protocol approved by the Commission on Secondary Schools for that purpose.
 - Any institution intending to use its accreditation to establish eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA, federal student loan programs must submit a Declaration of Intent prior to beginning self-study.

- Content of the Required Self-Study and Accreditation Protocol. The required self-study and accreditation protocol includes procedures for the institution's self-assessment and evaluation of:
 - a. The effectiveness and quality of each career and technical program offered by the institution;
 - b. The degree to which the institution complies with the Standards for Accreditation and their Indicators of Quality;
 - c. Student and Organizational Performance, including program completion rates, program completer job placement rates, licensing examination passing rates, and student loan default rate; and the Requirements of the Protocol;
 - d. Assessment of educational quality and the institution's continuing efforts to improve educational quality; and
 - e. The institution's plans to address weaknesses and to improve areas identified as priorities for growth and improvement.

Section 2: Self-Study Process

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools grant accreditation to schools based on information gathered from the school's self-study and from information gathered and observations made during an onsite accreditation visit conducted by a team of peer reviewers appointed by the Commissions. Some of the requirements of the self-study and accreditation process are dictated by the protocol used.

A. Protocol Usage.

- a. Schools conducting a self-study as part of the accreditation process must use a protocol approved for use by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.
- b. Changes to Self-Study and Accreditation Protocols. Schools may not make changes to the approved protocols without prior permission from the Commissions' staff.

B. Timeline for Completion of the Self-Study. Schools that are Candidates for Accreditation must conduct a self-study, host an onsite accreditation visit, and be granted accreditation prior to the date set by the Commissions for Candidacy to expire. Schools previously accredited by the Commissions must conduct a self-study, host an onsite accreditation visit, and be granted reaccreditation prior to the date set by the Commissions for the school's accreditation to expire.

- a. MSA-CESS Policies: Expectations for Accredited Institutions and Accreditation Maintenance, set forth the requirements for accredited schools to maintain their accreditation during the term of accreditation set by the Commissions and the consequences for failure to meet those requirements.

C. Adequacy of Self-Study Document. The school's self-study document is a fundamental aspect of the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools' accreditation process. It provides the basis on which the team of visitors appointed by the Commissions makes its accreditation recommendations to the Commissions. Therefore, if the Chair of the Visiting Team and the President of the Commissions or his/her designee concur that the school's self-study document is incomplete, inadequate, or not received in time for the visiting team to prepare for a visit, the visit may be cancelled or postponed until such time as the school is deemed ready to proceed. Any additional costs incurred by such cancellation or rescheduling shall be assumed by the school.

D. The Self-Study Document.

- a. Distribution of the Self-Study Document. The school shall distribute, well in advance of a team visit, complete copies of its self-study document to the Commissions' staff, to the Chair of the Visiting Team, and to all members of the Visiting Team.
- b. Retention of the Self-Study Document. The school may request that members of the Visiting Team, with the exception of the Chair of the Visiting Team, no longer have access to the self-study document at the end of the team's visit.
- c. Ownership of the Self-Study Document. The content of the self-study document is the property of the school. Any distribution of the self-study document outside of the accreditation process is at the discretion of the school. The Commissions will retain a copy for historical records.

Section 3: Visiting Teams

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools' accreditation process includes a visit by a team of peer reviewers appointed for that purpose by the Commissions.

A. Composition of Teams.

- a. The Visiting Team should represent multiple schools with a diversity of viewpoint.
- b. The size of the team should reflect each volunteer's workload and the school's budget.
- c. All visiting teams to postsecondary, non-degree granting career and technology institutions that use or intend to use their Middle States accreditation to establish eligibility to participate in federal Title IV financial aid programs shall include a mix of academic (with subject matter experts in the occupational fields within the institution) and administrative educators.
- d. The size and composition of the Accreditation Visiting Team shall be determined by:
 - i. The number of the institution's programs, staff members, students, and campuses,
 - ii. The distance between campuses, and
 - iii. Whether the purpose of the visit is for initial accreditation or reaccreditation as guided by the following parameters:
 1. The number of team members will be adequate to perform the required tasks and to conduct a thorough accreditation evaluation of the institution;
 2. Team members will possess education and expertise in one or more of the career and technical or academic programs provided by the institution;
 3. Team members may be assigned to evaluate a cluster of similar programs; and
 4. The team may include public members or a member of the Commission's staff.
- e. Accreditation Visiting Teams shall be composed of members representing all the following categories:
 1. Educators with administrative experience;
 2. Educators with a teaching experience and expertise in the career/technical fields within the institution they are assigned to evaluate;
 3. If the institution to be evaluated delivers all or part of its education program by one or more distance modalities, an appropriate portion of the members of the Accreditation Visiting Team must have expertise and experience relevant to distance education.

B. Qualification of Team Members.

- a. Eligibility. Team Members from current MSA member schools should be nominated by their head of school. Team Members from non-member schools should have relevant experience and appropriate clearance as determined by the Commissions' staff.
 - b. Characteristics. Team members should be educators with direct teaching or administrative experience, exhibit strong skills in reading, writing, and speaking in English, and possess qualities of cooperation, kindness, and perception.
- C. Selection of Team. The Visiting Team is chosen based on geography, similarity of school type, lack of conflict of interest or competition, and representation of diverse viewpoints on the team. Volunteers must accept to participate in the Visiting Team and must be approved by the school being visited.
- D. Training of Team Chairs. Team Chairs should complete the training provided by the Commissions' staff each year.
- E. Training for Visiting Teams. All members of an Accreditation Visiting Team will be trained prior to the start of an accreditation visit using Commission-developed training materials that include training in the following:
 - a. The Commission has prepared a Power Point program and accompanying script that provides the training required for all members of an Accreditation Visiting Team to a career and technical institution. Chairs of Accreditation Visiting Teams must use these training materials to ensure that all Accreditation Visiting Teams receive the same training for all elements of the required training.
 - b. The required training for members of the Accreditation Visiting Team to a career and technical institution is provided to the Chair of the Team as a Power Point training program and an accompanying script so the chair can project the Power Point program and read the accompanying script.
 - c. The training presentation and accompanying script includes:
 - i. Introduction to the Middle States accreditation process and the importance and ethics of the Visiting Team;
 - ii. The Self-Study and Accreditation Protocol, the Standards for Accreditation for Career and Technical Institutions, the Indicators of Quality for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, the Program Assessment Template, and the Plan for Growth and Improvement;
 - iii. Conducting the Accreditation Team Visit and writing the Report of the Visiting Team; and
 - iv. The logistics of the Accreditation Team Visit.
- F. Role of the Visiting Team. The role of the Visiting Team is to make a recommendation to the Commissions regarding the degree to which the school 1) meets the Standards for Accreditation and 2) the requirements of the protocol the school selected for self-study and accreditation. The team's assessments and recommendations must be made within the context of the schools foundation documents. The team will provide their accreditation recommendation in a Team Report to be submitted to the Commissions.
- G. Disqualification. Volunteers may be disqualified from serving on a Visiting Team for displaying inappropriate behavior or language, lacking communication in preparation for the Team Visit, or at the discretion of their school or the visited school.
- H. Criteria for Accreditation Visiting Teams. Accreditation Visiting Teams shall comply with the following criteria:

- a. Competent and knowledgeable individuals, qualified by education and experience in their own right and trained by the Commissions on their responsibilities, as appropriate for their roles, regarding the Commission's standards, policies, and procedures, to conduct its on-site evaluations, apply or establish its policies, and make its accrediting candidacy, including, if applicable to the Commission's scope, their responsibilities regarding distance education;
 - b. Academic and administrative personnel;
 - c. Educators and practitioners; and
 - d. Persons without a conflict of interest [see MSA-CESS Policy: Conflict of Interest].
- I. Chairs of Accreditation Visiting Teams. The policy of the Commission is to select highly qualified educators to serve on as Chairs of Accreditation Visiting Teams to ensure the most effective accreditation evaluation of institutions seeking accreditation or re-accreditation.
- a. Selection Criteria. Chairs of Visiting Teams shall possess the following qualifications:
 - 1. An educator that has been determined by the staff of the Middle States Commission on Secondary Schools to have sufficient education and experience to be able to recognize quality in a career and technical institution;
 - 2. An active or retired educator with significant experience in career and technical institutions below degree granting level;
 - 3. Trained by the staff of the Commission as a Chair of Accreditation Visiting Teams for career and technical institutions below the degree granting level;
 - 4. Demonstrated competence in determining quality in career and technical institutions and their programs, operations, leadership and staff;
 - 5. Demonstrated writing skills;
 - 6. Able to ensure that activities prescribed for an Accreditation Visiting Team are accomplished within the identified time frame; and
 - 7. Able to produce a Report of the Visiting Team within six to eight weeks following the team's visit.
 - b. Typically, Chairs of Accreditation Visiting Teams will be assigned to Chair teams visiting institutions outside their own state and are not assigned to neighboring or competing institutions or to institutions in which they have a conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest (see MSA-CESS Policy: Conflict of Interest).

Section 4: Team Visit

The culminating accreditation activity following completion of the school's self-study is a visit by a team of educators appointed by and representing the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools. The team visit should be conducted on-site unless special circumstances allow for a full or partial virtual visit. The typical length of an MSA led onsite accreditation visit is three and one-half days but may be adjusted accordingly for team visits to schools or systems with multiple locations.

- A. Purpose of the Visit. The purpose of the Team Visit is to:
- a. Observe the operation of the school;
 - b. Gather and analyze evidence of compliance with the requirements for accreditation; and
 - c. Prepare a written Report of the Visiting Team, including the Team's observations, findings, and recommendations regarding an accreditation action.

- B. Visiting Team Access. All aspects of the school, except student and personnel records protected by applicable privacy laws, shall be made available to a visiting team appointed by the Commissions and to the staff of the Commissions, its advisory committees, the appropriate Membership and Accreditation Committee of the Commissions, and to the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools throughout the onsite visit and the entire review and accreditation action process.
- C. Travel Guidelines. MSA will follow the guidance of the US State Department for travel restrictions and the cancellation of any Team Visits. Any travel is always up to the discretion of the volunteer and the school. Team Visits should follow the most recent guidelines provided by the Commissions' staff for more detailed guidance and recommendations to ensure the safety of the Visiting Team.
- D. Cost of the Team Visit. The cost of hosting the Visiting Team is the responsibility of the school being visited. This includes travel, food, lodging and any cancellation costs. Schools should refer to the most recent guidelines provided by the Commissions' staff for details.
- E. Stakeholder Comments. When an onsite visit is scheduled by the Commissions, notices will be posted in publicly available places by both the Commissions and the institution advising the institution's community of stakeholders and other interested third-parties that the Commissions will accept comments regarding the institution's ability to meet the Middle States Standards for Accreditation and that these comments will be considered in the course of the onsite visit by the team appointed by the Commissions. See MSA Policy Third-Party Comments (Postsecondary Institutions).

Section 5: Reports of Team Visits

All schools shall have regular, onsite team visits that are followed by a written team report in which the team records their observations, findings, and recommendations to the school and the Commissions for an accreditation action.

- A. Role of the Chair. The chair of a visiting team is responsible for making necessary preparations for:
 - a. Ensuring that the members of the Visiting Team use and complete of sections of the report provided by the staff of the Commissions;
 - b. Preparing the draft report;
 - c. Providing the school with an opportunity to review the draft of the report for corrections of errors of fact and making any corrections to errors of fact; and
 - d. Providing the Commission with a final version of the report.
- B. Role of the Head of School. The head of the school is responsible for:
 - a. Reviewing the report of the visiting team for corrections of errors of fact;
 - b. Responding to the observations, findings, and recommendations in the team's report when given the opportunity to do so, and
 - c. Taking actions to address any Monitoring Issues, Stipulations, or Probationary Actions;
 - d. Sharing the contents of the final report provided by the Commissions with the school's community of stakeholders.
- C. Corrections of Errors of Fact. Prior to submitting a visiting team's report to the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, the chair of the visiting team shall provide the school an

opportunity to review the team's report for correction of errors of fact. This review shall not include requests for changes to the content of the report unless such content is clearly incorrect.

- D. Contents and Limitations. The written report of the visiting team shall include judgments regarding 1) the school's adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and 2) the school's adherence to the requirements of the protocol selected by the school for self-study and accreditation. Neither the report of a visiting team nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual member of the school's staff, but rather as a professional appraisal of the school's adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the requirements of the protocol selected by the school for self-study and accreditation.
- E. School's Response. Upon receipt of the final report of a visiting team from the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, school shall have the right to provide, within 30 days of receipt of the report, the school's response to the visiting team's observations and recommendations. The school's response shall be attached permanently to the final report of the visiting team and accompany the team's report through the Commissions' four-step review process and when the Commissions vote to take an accreditation action regarding the school.

Section 6: Review of the Report of the Visiting Team

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools uses a four-level review process to determine accreditation action decisions following Team Visits. The purpose of the four-level review process is to ensure that the Standards for Accreditation and other requirements for accreditation are applied as consistently as possible for all schools that are presented to the Commissions for an accreditation action.

- A. First Level-MSA Staff. Upon receipt of the school's Self-Study Document, the Report of the Visiting Team, and any response by the school to the Report of the Visiting Team, the Commissions' staff shall conduct the first-level review of the accreditation recommendation of the Visiting Team. Based on the evidence presented, the staff will determine if it agrees with the Visiting Team's accreditation recommendation or if it makes a different recommendation.
- B. Second Level-Advisory Committee. All of the submitted documentation and evidence from the previous levels of review are presented to the appropriate Advisory Committee. Based on the evidence presented, the Committee will determine if it agrees with the Visiting Team's accreditation recommendation and/or the staff's recommendation or if it makes a different accreditation recommendation.
- C. Third Level-Membership and Accreditation Committee. All of the submitted documentation and evidence from the previous levels of review are presented to the appropriate Membership and Accreditation Committee of the Commissions. Based on the evidence presented, the Membership and Accreditation Committee will determine if it agrees with the accreditation recommendation of the Visiting Team, the Commission's staff, and/or the Advisory Committee or if it makes a different accreditation recommendation.
- D. Fourth Level-Final Accreditation Decision by Commissions. All of the submitted documentation and evidence from the previous levels of review are presented to the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools for review and the taking of an accreditation action. Based on the evidence presented, the Commission determines if it accepts the accreditation recommendation of the

Visiting Team, the Commission's staff, the Advisory Committee, and/or the Membership and Accreditation Committee or if it takes a different accreditation action.

- E. Basis for Decision Making. Accreditation is awarded by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools based on the following criteria listed in MSA-CESS Policy: Accreditation Actions:
- a. The degree and evidence to which the school demonstrates it meets the Standards for Accreditation;
 - b. The degree and evidence to which the school demonstrates it meets the requirements of the protocol used for self-study and accreditation;
 - c. The degree to which the school is accomplishing or making progress toward accomplishing the purposes and functions outlined in its own foundation documents;
 - d. Evidence of the degree to which the school is making progress toward achieving its growth and improvement objectives and implementing its action plans for achieving its objectives.