

From: Elizabeth Oberreiter <eoberreiter@acs-wasc.org>
Sent: Thursday, November 7, 2024 10:00 PM
To: Lovett, Tom <Tom.Lovett@vermont.gov>
Cc: Clayton J. Petry <claytonjpetry@ncpsa.org>
Subject: ACS WASC Process

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Hello Tom,

Here is a summary of the WASC Process from the application to the Self-Study, as a member what to expect, summary of how to prepare and the importance of serving :

The **Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC)** is responsible for accrediting educational institutions, ensuring they meet rigorous standards of educational quality and improvement. Here's a comprehensive overview of the ACS WASC accreditation process, including its stages, the role of the ACS WASC Commission, short description of the Commissioners.

ACS WASC Accreditation Process

1. Application and Eligibility Requirements

- Schools initiate the accreditation process by submitting an application, which includes foundational information about the institution, its educational programs, student demographics, and compliance with eligibility criteria.
- ACS WASC reviews the application to verify that the institution meets initial requirements, such as having a legal operation, a defined governance structure, and a commitment to improvement.

2. Initial Visit Preparation and Review

- Upon application approval, the school completes a preliminary self-study or initial report outlining its mission, programs, resources, and areas for growth.
- ACS WASC arranges an initial visit by a team of representatives who assess the school's readiness for full accreditation. This team meets with school stakeholders to evaluate foundational systems and provide preliminary feedback.

3. Initial Visit by the WASC Committee

- The WASC representatives conduct a one- to two-day visit, verifying the school's readiness for the self-study phase and offering guidance on meeting WASC standards.
- The visit helps the institution understand the accreditation standards and prepare for the comprehensive review.

4. Decision on Initial Accreditation Status

- Following the initial visit, WASC decides on granting **Candidate Status** or **Initial Accreditation**:
 - **Candidate Status** is for schools showing potential but needing more preparation.
 - **Initial Accreditation** is for schools that demonstrate effective practices and meet WASC standards.
- Schools receiving Candidate Status continue to develop in preparation for the comprehensive accreditation review.

5. Full Self-Study Process

- Schools awarded Candidate or Initial Accreditation Status begin a detailed self-study, examining all aspects of the school with input from staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders.
- The self-study process, which often spans 12–18 months, involves a deep assessment of strengths and areas for improvement aligned with WASC's criteria for accreditation.

6. Preparation for the Full Visit by the Accreditation Visiting Committee

- After completing the self-study, the school submits its findings and an action plan to WASC.

- The school prepares for a comprehensive multi-day visit by a Visiting Committee, which evaluates the school’s performance and action plan.

7. Full Visit by the Visiting Committee

- During the multi-day visit, the Visiting Committee reviews documentation, observes classes, and interviews stakeholders to assess alignment with WASC standards.
- The committee’s report provides feedback on strengths, areas needing development, and recommendations to guide further improvement.

8. Accreditation Report and Decision

- ACS WASC reviews the Visiting Committee report, self-study findings, and action plan to determine an accreditation term.
- Accreditation terms may vary from a full six-year accreditation to shorter terms for schools requiring follow-up.

9. Ongoing Monitoring and Mid-Cycle Review

- Accredited schools with a six-year term some participate in a mid-cycle review in the third year to ensure they remain on track with their action plans.
- Schools with shorter terms undergo more frequent follow-up to demonstrate continuous improvement.

10. Renewal of Accreditation

- Schools complete a new self-study and visit process to renew accreditation at the end of each term, promoting ongoing quality and effectiveness in alignment with WASC standards.

ACS WASC Commission Meetings and Structure

The ACS WASC Commission meets **three times a year** to discuss and decide on accreditation matters. The meetings scheduled for **2025** are:

- **Winter Meeting:** January 27–28, 2025
- **Spring Meeting:** April 28–29, 2025
- **Summer Meeting:** June 23–24, 2025

These meetings are essential for reviewing accreditation reports, setting policies, and ensuring the continued integrity and quality of accredited institutions.

ACS WASC Commissioners

The ACS WASC Commission includes up to 35 members, each representing various educational organizations. Commissioners are nominated by member organizations or the Commission itself and serve three-year terms, with reappointment as an option. The Commissioners bring diverse educational expertise, collectively guiding the accreditation process.

+++++

WASC VC members (What to expect)

The preparation process for WASC Visiting Committee members involves a thorough review and familiarization with the school's documents, alignment with WASC's accreditation criteria, and planning for an effective on-site evaluation. Here's an overview of how WASC committee members prepare for a school visit:

1. Review of Self-Study Report

- Committee members receive the school's self-study report in advance. This document contains detailed information about the school's mission, goals, instructional programs, student outcomes, resources, governance, and identified areas for improvement.
- Members closely examine each section, noting strengths, weaknesses, and questions they may want to address during the visit.

2. Understanding the School Context

- Committee members familiarize themselves with the school's unique characteristics, including its size, student demographics, special programs, and community context.
- They consider the school's stated goals and challenges within the broader framework of its community, which helps tailor the evaluation to the school's specific context.

3. Identifying Key Focus Areas

- Based on the self-study report, committee members identify areas that require deeper investigation during the visit, such as specific instructional practices, support services, or resource allocations.
- The team may prioritize focus areas that relate to the school's mission, educational outcomes, and areas the school has highlighted as needing improvement.

4. Aligning with WASC Accreditation Criteria

- Members review WASC's accreditation criteria, which encompass aspects like school governance, curriculum, instructional practices, assessment, school climate, and continuous improvement processes.
- They ensure that their preparation aligns with these standards to provide consistent and objective evaluations.

5. Planning the Visit Schedule and Tasks

- The committee collaborates with the school to outline a visit schedule that includes interviews with administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents.
- Members assign specific responsibilities within the team, such as who will lead certain focus groups, observe specific classrooms, or review student performance data.

6. Developing Preliminary Questions and Observational Goals

- Each committee member develops a list of preliminary questions based on their review of the self-study and WASC criteria.
- Observational goals are also set, such as identifying how the school addresses diverse learning needs, uses data for decision-making, and supports student social and emotional development.

7. Collaborating with the Committee Chair

- The committee chair guides team preparation by setting expectations, clarifying roles, and coordinating logistics.
- The chair may lead pre-visit meetings to discuss the self-study findings and ensure a unified approach to the visit.

8. Preparing for Evidence Collection

- Committee members decide on methods for collecting evidence to validate the self-study report, such as interview questions, observation notes, and document review checklists.
- They plan to document findings effectively to create a comprehensive and accurate report.

By reviewing school documentation, aligning with accreditation criteria, and setting clear goals, committee members ensure a focused and constructive visit that provides valuable feedback and supports the school's improvement efforts.

WASC provides specific training for Visiting Committee members to ensure they understand the accreditation process, WASC criteria, and their roles in evaluating schools effectively. Here's an outline of the training components:

1. Initial Orientation and Training Sessions

- New members receive an orientation that introduces them to ACS WASC's mission, accreditation process, and standards. This training covers WASC's expectations, the accreditation cycle, and the importance of consistent, objective evaluation.
- Committee members learn about WASC's focus on continuous school improvement and how to use the accreditation criteria to guide their evaluations.

2. Detailed Review of Accreditation Criteria

- Training sessions include an in-depth overview of WASC's accreditation criteria, such as school governance, instructional quality, student support, and school climate.
- Committee members learn to apply these criteria to various school settings, allowing them to make fair and accurate assessments across different types of schools.

3. Evaluation Techniques and Evidence Collection

- Training emphasizes effective evaluation techniques, such as classroom observations, stakeholder interviews, and document analysis.

- Members receive guidance on collecting evidence to validate the school’s self-study findings. This includes how to conduct interviews, observe classroom activities, and review documentation to corroborate the school's reports.

4. Report Writing and Documentation

- Members receive training on structuring their observations and findings into clear, objective, and constructive feedback.
- They learn the standards for writing WASC reports, including how to document strengths, recommendations, and action plans, ensuring reports are consistent and helpful for schools.

5. Collaborative Teamwork and Communication

- WASC provides training on teamwork and effective communication, as the Visiting Committee’s work is collaborative.
- Members learn how to work within a team structure, communicate findings with fellow members, and interact professionally with school staff during the visit.

6. Updates on Accreditation Policies and Best Practices

- WASC regularly updates its criteria and processes to reflect best practices in education. Committee members receive ongoing training on any new policies, criteria changes, or emerging educational trends that could impact their evaluations.

These training sessions are essential for maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the WASC accreditation process, ensuring committee members are prepared to conduct thorough, fair, and constructive evaluations that contribute to the school’s improvement journey.

+++++

What can a member gain from participating in a WASC school visit?

Serving as a WASC Visiting Committee member offers a variety of professional and personal benefits, which include gaining insights into different educational environments,

building professional connections, and enhancing one's skills in evaluation and school improvement. Here are the key benefits:

1. Professional Development and Skill Enhancement

- **Evaluation and Analytical Skills:** Serving on a WASC visit strengthens skills in analyzing school performance, assessing curriculum and instruction, and evaluating school operations against established standards.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Committee members learn to use data effectively to validate findings, which can enhance their ability to make evidence-based decisions in their own schools or organizations.
- **Leadership and Teamwork Skills:** Participating in a committee with other educators promotes collaborative skills, leadership, and professional communication, especially through shared decision-making and report writing.

2. Exposure to Best Practices and New Perspectives

- **Innovative Programs and Approaches:** Visiting Committee members see a range of instructional strategies, school cultures, and programs that they can bring back to their own schools or educational contexts.
- **Broad Perspective on Educational Challenges:** Exposure to schools in various contexts, such as urban, rural, charter, or international, provides insights into different ways schools tackle challenges like resource allocation, student engagement, and curriculum development.

3. Networking and Professional Connections

- **Building Relationships with Educators:** Committee members connect with educators from a wide range of backgrounds, fostering professional relationships that may support collaboration, resource sharing, or mentorship.
- **Expanding Knowledge Base:** Interaction with experienced educators and WASC officials broadens one's professional network, which can be beneficial for career development and accessing resources.

4. Understanding Accreditation and Continuous Improvement

- **In-Depth Knowledge of Accreditation Standards:** Committee members gain a deeper understanding of WASC's accreditation standards, which they can apply within their own institutions to support ongoing improvement.

- **Commitment to Quality Education:** Serving in this role allows educators to contribute to the improvement of educational quality and support the mission of WASC, which values continuous improvement and accountability.

5. Contributing to the Educational Community

- **Impacting Student Success and School Development:** By offering valuable feedback to schools, committee members support the development of quality educational experiences for students, enhancing learning outcomes.
- **Supporting the Profession:** Participating in accreditation visits is a way of giving back to the education community, helping schools grow and maintain standards that positively impact students and staff.

6. Personal Growth and Satisfaction

- **Satisfaction from Meaningful Service:** Many committee members find personal fulfillment in contributing to the broader mission of educational improvement, knowing they play a role in helping schools enhance their programs.
- **Exposure to Diverse Cultures and Communities:** For those visiting schools in different regions or international locations, the experience can be personally enriching, providing new cultural perspectives and appreciation for diversity in education.

+++++

I hope this helps.

Liz

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Oberreiter

Vice President, Domestic Schools and Programs

ACS, Western Association of Schools and Colleges

533 Airport Boulevard, Suite 200

Burlingame, CA 94010

(626) 290-2126

eoberreiter@acswasc.org

[Click Here: WASC Accreditation: The Gold Standard](#)

Excellence in Worldwide Accreditation through Personalized Support