



## POLICY 5.3

### SELF-STUDY AND ACCREDITATION PROCESS

---

---

The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools grant accreditation to institutions based on information gathered during the Application for Candidacy phase, from the institution's self-study, and from information gathered and observations made during an onsite accreditation visit conducted by a team of peer evaluators appointed by the Commissions. Some of the requirements of the self-study and accreditation process are dictated by the protocol used.

#### 5.3.1. The Self-Study and Accreditation Process.

5.3.1.1. Accreditation is awarded by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools based on the following criteria listed in MSA-CESS Policy 1.3, Accreditation Actions:

- a. The degree to which the institution demonstrates it meets the Standards for Accreditation;
- b. The degree to which the institution demonstrates it meets the requirements of the protocol used for self-study and accreditation;
- c. The degree to which the institution is accomplishing or making progress toward accomplishing the purposes and functions outlined in its own statement of philosophy/mission.
- d. Evidence of the degree to which the institution meets the Standards for Accreditation;
- e. Evidence of the degree to which the institution meets the requirements of the accreditation protocol used for self-study and accreditation; and
- f. Evidence of the degree to which the institution is making progress toward achieving its growth and improvement objectives and implementing its action plans for achieving its objectives.

5.3.1.2. Institutions 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 Commission for Candidacy to expire.

5.3.1.3. Institutions previously accredited by the Commission(s) must conduct a self-study, host and onsite accreditation visit, and be granted reaccreditation prior to the date set by the Commission for the institution's accreditation to expire.

5.3.1.4. MSA-CESS Policies 1.2, Expectations for Accredited Institutions, and 5.4, Accreditation Maintenance Requirements, set forth the requirements for accredited institutions to maintain their accreditation during the term of accreditation set by the Commission(s) and the consequences for failure to meet those requirements.

5.3.1.5. Self-Study and Accreditation Protocols.

- a. Use of Approved Self-Study and Accreditation Protocols. Institutions 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 Approved Self-Study and Accreditation Protocols Not Permitted. Institution's may not make changes to the approved protocols without prior permission of the Commissions' staff.

5.3.1.6. Adequacy of the Institution's Self-Study Document. The institution'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 Commission(s) makes its accreditation recommendations to the Commission(s). Therefore, if the Chair of the Visiting Team and the President of the Commissions concur that the institution'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 institution is deemed ready to proceed. Any additional costs incurred by such cancellation or rescheduling shall be assumed by the institution.

5.3.1.7. Distribution of the Institution's Self-Study Document. The institution 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.

5.3.1.8. Retention of the Institution’s Self-Study Document. The institution may request that members of the Visiting Team, with the exception of the Chair of the Visiting Team, return their copies of the self-study document at the end of the team's visit.

5.3.2. Mid-Term Review. Institutions accredited by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools must complete a mid-term review process defined as follows:

5.3.2.1. Institutions Granted Accreditation for Five Years with Possible Additional Five-Year Renewal.

- a. In the fourth year of the term of accreditation, submit a Five-Year Renewal Report; and
- b. Host a Five-Year Renewal Visit; and
- c. Be recommended by the Five-Year Visitor, the Commissions' staff, the appropriate Advisory Committee, and the appropriate Membership and Accreditation Committee(s) for accreditation for the remainder of their ten-year term.

5.3.2.2. Institutions Granted Accreditation for Seven Years.

- a. At the beginning of the third year of the term of accreditation, submit a Mid-Term Review Report;
- b. *For institutions in their first term of accreditation by the Commissions on Elementary and/or Secondary Schools:* host an on-site visit by a Reviewer appointed by the Commission(s) to verify the contents of the Mid-Term Review Report and ensure the institution continues to meet the Standards for Accreditation;
- c. *For institutions in their second or subsequent terms of accreditation by the Commission on Elementary and/or Secondary Schools:*
  - 1) If the Commissions' staff determines that the institution’s Mid-Term Report is acceptable and presents no issues requiring verification through an onsite visit, no visit is required, and the institution's accreditation continues for the remainder of the seven-year term;
  - 2) If the Commission's staff determines that the report presents issues that require follow-up through an onsite visit, a visit is scheduled;
  - 3) An institution may request a Mid-Term Visit even if a visit is not required.

5.3.2.3. Institutions Granted Accreditation through the Self-Study and Accreditation Protocol of a Cooperating Agency. Institutions granted a term of accreditation by the Commissions based on the institution's having completed successfully the self-study and accreditation requirements of an agency with which the Commissions have a cooperating agreement must meet the Mid-Term Review requirements of the cooperating agency.

### 5.3.3. Visiting Teams

5.3.3.1. Authority of Chair and Visiting Team Members. Members of a visiting team appointed by the Commission(s) serve as agents of the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools for accreditation purposes during their service to the institution being visited.

#### 5.3.3.2. Composition of Visiting Teams.

- a. The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools' accreditation process includes an onsite visit by a team of peer educators from other MSA-CESS accredited/candidate institutions.
- b. Therefore, team members shall, in most cases, be practicing and/or recently retired experienced educators.
- c. In developing visiting teams, consideration will be given to the institution's unique characteristics and local needs.
- d. 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.

5.3.3.3. Qualifications of Members of Visiting Teams. The members of a visiting team must possess the following minimum qualifications:

- a. A Bachelor's Degree from a recognized college/university;
- b. Three years' successful teaching in school/schools accredited by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools or other recognized accrediting agency.

#### 5.3.3.4. Training of Visiting Team Members.

a. Chairs of Visiting Teams. Prior to serving as a Chair of Visiting Teams, those nominated to be trained will complete successfully a one-day chair training session conducted by the staff of the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.

b. Members of Visiting Teams. Members of Visiting Teams will undergo training and orientation conducted by the Chair of the Team prior to the start of a visit using the training and orientation procedures provided by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.

5.3.3.5. Role of a Visiting Team. The role of a visiting team is to make a recommendation to the appropriate Commission(s) regarding the degree to which the institution 1) meets the Middle States Standards for Accreditation and 2) the requirements of the protocol the institution selected for self-study and accreditation. The team's assessments and recommendations must be made within the context of the institutions philosophy/mission.

5.3.3.6. Disqualification of Team Members. A person nominated by the Commission(s) to be the chair or a member of a visiting team, may be disqualified, for cause, by the institution being visited.

5.3.3.7. Observers on Visiting Teams. Under special circumstances and with the approval of the President of the Commissions and the institution to be visited, observers may be permitted to accompany a visiting team. An observer is defined as an individual who is not chosen by the Commissions' staff to serve as a member of a visiting team but who participates in all activities of the team except for deliberations of the visiting team and the decisions of the team.

a. An individual may request to be an observer by making the request writing to the President/Executive Director of the Commission. An observer is assigned to a visiting team only after receiving the approval of the President/Executive Director of the institution to be visited.

b. An example of an observer might be a member of the staff of the U.S. Department of Education assigned to observe the conduct of the Commissions' accreditation activities.

5.3.4. Reports of Team Visits. All institutions shall have regular, onsite team visits that are followed by a written team report in which the team reports to the institution and the Commission(s) its observations and recommendations regarding the accreditation action the Commission(s) should take.

5.3.4.1. Responsibility of the Chair of a Visiting Team. The chair of a visiting team is responsible for making necessary preparations for the team's visit and for preparing and providing to the institution visited and the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools the report of the team's visit.

5.3.4.2. 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 institution 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.

5.3.4.3. Responsibility of the Head of the Institution. The head of the institution is responsible for 1) reviewing the report of the visiting team for correction of errors of fact, 2) responding to the observations and recommendations in the team's report when given the opportunity to do so, and 3) distributing the final report provided by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools in compliance with Policy 1.2.4.--Expectations for Accredited Institutions.

5.3.4.4. Contents of the Report of the Visiting Team. The written report of the visiting team shall include judgments regarding 1) the institution's adherence to the appropriate Standards for Accreditation and 2) the institution's adherence to the requirements of the protocol selected by the institution for self-study and accreditation.

5.3.4.5. Limits of the Report of a Visiting Team. Neither the report of a visiting team nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual member of the institution's staff, but rather as a professional appraisal of the institution's adherence to Standards for Accreditation and the requirements of the protocol selected by the institution for self-study and accreditation.

5.3.4.6. The Institution's Response to the Report of a Visiting Team. Upon receipt of the final report of a visiting team from the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, institutions shall have the right to provide, within 30 days of receipt of the report, the institution's response to the visiting team's observations

and recommendations. The institution'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 Commission(s) votes to take an accreditation action regarding the institution.

5.3.5. Open Access. All aspects of the institution, 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(s) of the Commission, and to the Commissions on Elementary Schools and/or the Commission on Secondary Schools throughout the onsite visit and the entire review and accreditation action processes by the Commission's staff, its advisory committees, the Membership and Accreditation Committee(s) of the Commissions, and the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.

5.3.6. Stakeholder Comments. When an onsite visit is scheduled by the Commissions for initial accreditation (candidates for accreditation) or reaccreditation, 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 Commission. The notices must include:

- a. That only comments that relate directly to the institution's ability to meet the Standards for Accreditation will be considered;
- b. The web address at which the Middle States Standards for Accreditation can be viewed;
- c. The requirement that comments must be in writing and include the stakeholder's name and affiliation with the institution;
- d. The requirement that comments must be received not later than 30 days prior to the first day of the onsite visit; and
- e. The Commission on Secondary School's address (mailing and e-mail) to which comments may can be sent.

5.3.6.1. Public notice shall be made by at least two means that are accessible to the institution's stakeholders. Examples include the institution's website and notice in a local newspaper.

5.3.6.2. The purpose of this policy is to provide stakeholders who are not part of the institution's self-study process the opportunity to provide input regarding the institution's ability to meet the Middle States Standards for Accreditation.

5.3.6.3. Because comments by stakeholders provide the Commission(s) with information or evidence regarding an institution's ability to meet Standards for Accreditation, the President shall provide any comments received to the head of the institution prior to the onsite visit by the visiting team. The institution will be invited to respond to the comments and/or provide evidence to respond to the comments received. The institution may respond in a separate report or as an element of the self-study document submitted to the visiting team and the Commission(s).

5.3.6.4. All comments received by the President that meet the requirements of this policy and any response to the comments by the institution shall be provided to the Chair of the Visiting Team. The Chair of the Visiting Team shall consider the comments and any response by the institution along with other evidence observed during the visit when determining whether the institution meets the Standard(s) for Accreditation that are the subject of the comments. However, it shall not be the responsibility of the Visiting Team to resolve any personal or individual issues presented in the comments.

5.3.6.5. The Visiting Team shall not recommend or require any action of the institution based on comments by stakeholders unless the comments have been confirmed by other evidence observed by the Team.

Action	Date	Notes
Initial Adoption by MSA-CSS	April 15, 2011	
Initial Adoption by MSA-CES	October 28, 2011	
Revisions		



<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>