



AN INTRODUCTION TO
EXCELLENCE BY DESIGN
A PROTOCOL FOR SELF-STUDY AND ACCREDITATION

**MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
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WHAT IS EXCELLENCE BY DESIGN?

Excellence by Design (EBD) is an accreditation protocol that uses strategic planning as a vehicle for growth and improvement in student performance and in the school's capacity to effect that growth. The protocol, developed by the Middle States Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CES), links various planning and school growth and improvement efforts. *Excellence by Design* leads the school to establish objectives for improving student performance and organizational capacity based on its vision of a preferred future for its students. Therefore, Excellence by Design is a future-oriented and visionary process. In addition, the protocol provides for a *continuous* review of programs and services and of the results of student performance. It also allows diverse constituent groups to participate in charting the future of the institution.

Excellence by Design provides the framework for formally aligning all the work of the school to ensure that all of its efforts are coordinated and focused on achieving the school's mission. It is expected that this framework will accomplish the following purposes:

- Development of a sense of community and common purpose among the school's students and staff, and its community of stakeholders.
- A Plan for Growth and Improvement in student performance and the school's capacity to produce the levels of student performance expected by the school and its community of stakeholders.
- Greater cooperation between all of the school's stakeholders in identifying and implementing practices that have been demonstrated to lead to excellence in student performance and the organization's capacity to produce the desired levels of student performance.

Most importantly, this framework intends to develop in the school's community of stakeholders an understanding that the school is part of a larger community of learners and that this community has agreed upon, supports, and accepts responsibility for assisting the school in achieving its Mission, Profile of Graduates, and Plan for Growth and Improvement in student performance and organizational capacity. This learning community understands that, by working together to articulate and align its efforts, it can achieve higher levels of excellence in student performance.

Education leaders must keep the attention of the entire school community focused on answering the five questions below. In the *Excellence by Design* process, the Planning Team will be guided to develop answers to the following questions:

- #1: By the time they have experienced our full educational program and services, what should our students know, and how should they be able to use what they know? What content, skills, and work habits should be the priorities for learning? What attitudes, qualities or characteristics should our students demonstrate?
- #2: How well should students perform the desired outcomes, and what does excellent performance look like?
- #3: How will we measure and evaluate our students' performance in multiple ways?
- #4: How well do our students currently perform? What is the actual quality of their work?
- #5: What must we do to improve student performance?

In setting a course for continuous improvement in student and organizational performance, schools and their communities must study not only what the existing data tell them about their students' present performance,

but they must also set clear targets for what they want student performance to be in the future. Maintaining a focus on these five questions is essential to a successful continuous improvement process and is a “habit of mind” that must be cultivated and nurtured by the school’s leaders and those leading the growth and improvement efforts.

The Excellence by Design protocol is designed to be compatible with local, state, and federal school improvement and strategic planning requirements, including those of the No Child Left Behind Act for public schools. There is a high level of compatibility with any improvement requirement that focuses primarily on increasing the level and quality of student performance. By using this protocol, schools will be able to fulfill the improvement and planning requirements of their various governing agencies and, simultaneously, obtain accreditation. In addition, many schools have found that the improvement processes inherent in Excellence by Design help them to sharpen the focus of their improvement efforts. The external evaluation of such efforts provided by a team of evaluators from the Middle States Association is another distinct value added by the protocol that is not provided by most improvement models.

The Excellence by Design protocol is generally recommended for schools that have previously been accredited and are seeking re-accreditation.

PHASES OF THE *EXCELLENCE BY DESIGN* SELF-STUDY

PHASE	ACTIVITY
PHASE I	Overview of the Self-Study and Accreditation Process
PHASE II	Laying the Foundation
PHASE III	Developing A Profile Of The School
PHASE IV	Identifying Priorities: Profile of Organizational Capacity
PHASE V	Developing a Plan
PHASE VI	Achieving and Maintaining Accreditation
PHASE VII	Implementing the Plan and Preparing for Reaccreditation

These phases are further defined in the self-study guide.

THE SELF STUDY AND ACCREDITATION PROCESS

THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE SELF-STUDY [Phase I]

The framework and criteria for this self-examination and self-assessment are provided by:

- The 12 Middle States Standards for Accreditation, which are qualitative statements that reflect research-based best practices for schools. The Middle States Standards are recognized and accepted by educators and educational communities throughout the world as descriptors of what a quality school looks like and achieves.
- Indicators of Quality for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment reflecting the quality of these functions in components of the school’s educational program—the disciplines or subject areas.
- Criteria for effective planning for growing and improving student performance and the organization’s capacity to produce the performance it desires.

The self-study guide and template set forth the requirements and processes for conducting the self-study that leads to accreditation. The process is structured and organized in a logical and purposeful manner.

Timeline for Conducting the Self-Study

The amount of time required to complete a high-quality self-study depends very highly on the amount of time and energy the school wishes to devote to this project and the other demands on the school at the same time. Most schools can complete the self-study within a 12-18 month period.

Appointing Internal Coordinators

A required component of the Excellence by Design protocol is the appointment of a team of Internal Coordinators. The primary functions of the Internal Coordinators are to:

- Lead the Planning Team.
- Coordinate the school's planning process and development of a plan for growth in student performance.
- Oversee planning and preparation for the Team Visit.
- Prepare the Mid-Term Report.
- Provide the energy, enthusiasm, and expertise to move the process forward.

The Middle States Association encourages schools to appoint more than one Internal Coordinator whenever possible. Internal Coordinators are responsible for coordinating and overseeing many activities related to the self-study and planning processes and implementation of the plan to improve student performance. Most schools find that these responsibilities can be met more effectively and efficiently when shared by multiple Internal Coordinators. In addition, multiple Coordinators ensure that, if one of the Coordinators leaves his/her position, the remaining Internal Coordinator(s) can carry on, and the planning process can move forward smoothly.

Therefore, it is critical that the Internal Coordinators see their primary roles as "coordinating" and "delegating" the responsibilities and activities required by the protocol.

Coordinating Implementation of the Plan for Growth and Improvement

The school must consider how implementation of the Plan for Growth and Improvement in student and organizational performance will be coordinated after the Visiting Team's visit. As stated above, a major expectation of the Excellence by Design protocol is that stakeholder-based planning for continuous growth and improvement in performance becomes part of the culture of the school. It is expected that planning for growth and improvement will become as much a part of the daily work of the school as are teaching, learning, and administering.

Composition of the Planning Team

The Excellence by Design protocol requires that the Planning Team includes a varied spectrum of the school's stakeholders. Middle States does not prescribe what groups constitute the school's stakeholders. This is a local decision.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION [Phase II]

In Phase II the Planning Team and school community review, revise, or reaffirm the school's foundation documents. These foundation documents include a Mission Statement, Beliefs or Core Values, and a Profile of Graduates.

SCHOOL PROFILE [Phase III]

Phase III involves gathering data on the school community, the local community, and student performance data. Studying this data about the school's students' present performance highlights gaps and begins to help clarify targets for student performance goals.

PROFILE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY & IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES [Phase IV]

In Phase IV the Planning Team and subcommittees focus on self-assessment of adherence to each of the 12 MSA Standards for Accreditation. Each section includes the collection of data, the self-assessment of relevant MSA Standards for Accreditation, and a determination of areas for improvement. Phase IV also includes a review of any curricular areas related to the school's chosen student performance objective. For example if the school determines that improvement in math scores is a top priority, the math curriculum will be self-assessed in this section.

The MSA Standards and How They Are Assessed

The Standards for Accreditation are qualitative statements that reflect research-based best practices for schools. There are twelve Standards for Accreditation that schools, school systems, and similar education institutions must meet in order to become accredited. The Middle States Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools most recently revised the Standards for Accreditation in 2014.

The Planning Team may choose to direct and oversee the self-assessment, or it may appoint a separate committee to do so.

It is important that the results of the self-assessment are credible and meaningful. Therefore, it is important that as many members of the school's community as possible are provided the opportunity to participate and to share their perceptions regarding how well the school meets each Standard and its Indicators of Quality

One way of administering the surveys is through SurveyMonkey.com. Schools and school systems that purchase Survey Monkey's online survey service may use that service to make the survey of the Middle States Standards available to their stakeholders online either directly at the SurveyMonkey.com website or on the website of the school and/or school system.

Middle States provides three versions of the survey:

- Staff Survey
- Parent Survey
- Student Survey

The Results of the Self-Assessment Survey

When the surveys have been administered and the results have been obtained, it is important to conduct a study and analysis of the results to make them more meaningful and usable. The study and analysis of the results may be conducted by:

- Individual committees appointed for each Standard for Accreditation or Descriptive Summary; or
- In the case of a very small school, by one committee appointed for this purpose or by the Planning Team.

DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT [Phase V]

The school uses the data collected during its review of adherence with the MSA Standards, its foundation documents, and student performance results to determine its priorities for growth in student performance and organizational capacity. The Planning Team develops 3-5 measurable objectives, at least two of which must be focused on improving student performance. The objectives are reviewed by MSA staff through the technical review process and the approved objectives are included as a part of the self-study. The school develops action plans for each objective that are reviewed by the Visiting Team during their visit.

ACCREDITATION VISIT AND DECISION [Phases VI & VII]

When the self-study is complete the school hosts a Visiting Team, typically for 3.5 days, who will validate what the school has presented in their self-study. The Team will make an accreditation recommendation to the Commission(s) of the Middle States Association and a final decision will be made by the Commission(s) at their biannual meetings. The accreditation term for schools using Excellence by Design is 7 years, with a mid-term review report due in the third year of accreditation.

If you are interested in using the Excellence by Design protocol to conduct your school's self-study, please contact your Accreditation Officer to discuss the benefits of this option. For more information on this protocol, we encourage you to attend a free self-study workshop (workshop schedules are posted on the MSA website) and also to visit the MSA website to access additional self-study materials. ***Please note it is strongly suggested you consult with your Accreditation Officer prior to initiating your self-study.