Accreditation

The Pre-visit

For
SAIS Accreditation Chairs

http://www.sais.org/acc_previsit_procedure
Chair Preliminary Visit: 6-9 months before the accreditation team visit

1. **LOG INTO THE PORTAL FOR RESOURCES:** [http://portal.sais.org](http://portal.sais.org)

2. **Make your preliminary visit** to the school six-nine months prior to the team visit.

   Access the school’s response to standards and indicators in the SAIS Accreditation Portal—they should be made available at least two weeks prior to your pre-visit. A three-part response to each indicator is required: 1) affirming compliance 2) describing how the school is in compliance 3) indicating where evidence of compliance can be found is required. You will also find the list of documents that are generally show stoppers if not present. Visit [http://www.sais.org/acc_documents](http://www.sais.org/acc_documents) for the full list of documents (also available in the Portal). Typically, the pre-visit will focus most closely on compliance with all indicators related to health and safety and finance and governance.

3. SAIS suggests that you make notes as you read through all indicators about what you want to see at the pre-visit and what you will want your team to look at during the visit — also about anything which seems unclear or inconsistent.

4. At the preliminary visit:
   a. **Tour the school:** determine the best space for the team room and for stakeholder meeting space — note that the meeting space will be determined by the methodology used in conducting the meetings: either one large table or several smaller tables.
   b. **Review compliance with standards and indicators with the accreditation coordinator, head of school, business officer, academic leadership, board leadership, key faculty and staff members, volunteer organizers, development professionals.** NOTE: most of the financial documents are not required to be loaded into the portal – make sure you give the business office time to prepare them for your pre-visit.
   c. **Provide basic guidance on the format of the School Report as necessary**
   d. **Confirm the strategic growth areas the school is working on** (note that this is the basis for SAIS to assign team members who are a good fit for the school)
   e. **Determine logistics of the visit:**
      i. schedule
      ii. team room
      iii. technology needs
      iv. accommodations
   f. **Discuss expenses of visit** — the school is responsible for all travel and accommodations for the pre-visit and for the visit. **NOTE** — all schools have tight budgets! This is a professional visit and reflects on you, your school, and SAIS. As an example, if your team goes out to dinner one of the evenings, don’t expect the school to pay for alcohol — most schools have policies against this (the best rule of thumb is always to be in contact with the school and be culturally sensitive).
   g. **Discuss the exit report** — be sensitive to the school’s culture. Various methods: have a meeting with only the Head of School, or with the Steering Committee, or with the whole faculty — all methods are normal.
   h. **PUT THE SCHOOL AT EASE AS BEST YOU CAN!**

5. **COMPLETE THE PRE-VISIT REPORT** located in the SAIS Accreditation Portal.
The Accreditation Process: Suggested Pre-Visit Schedule

Most chairs like to start the pre-visit first thing in the morning, which is what this schedule suggests. The pre-visit is meant to reveal areas that may cause concerns or red flags. The pre-visit is also a very compressed time, so make sure you have read all of the school’s responses to standards and indicators well in advance. The standards and indicators will guide most of your conversations—have them with you either printed or in the portal. PRO TIP: if you have the portal open, you can make notes directly into your pre-visit report.

Evening prior to pre-visit
Arrive at hotel. Most chairs like to have dinner the evening before the pre-visit with the head of school, the accreditation coordinator, and possibly the board chair.

7:00 AM-8:00 AM
Arrive at school in time to see carpool/drop off procedures.

8:00 AM-8:30 AM
Facility tour

8:30 AM-9:30 AM
Standards review with accreditation coordinator, representative faculty:
Standard 1 (Mission) — sample topics: describe how the mission was last reviewed; describe examples of the mission driving decision making processes; describe the school’s efforts to be more inclusive.

9:30 AM-11:00 AM
Standards review with academic leadership, representative faculty and admissions professionals:
Standard 3 (Teaching and Learning) and elements of Standard 5 (Resources and Support Systems) — sample topics: describe the curriculum review cycle; how are faculty members and students engaged in reviewing and revising curriculum; describe how the organizational structures help or hinder collaboration efforts; describe the admissions process at the school and its effectiveness in finding mission appropriate students; describe the faculty evaluation process and its relationship to professional growth and strategic visions of the school; describe how the centrality of the mission maintained.

11:00 AM-11:30 AM
Standards review with advancement and communications professionals, volunteers or volunteer organizers
Standard 4 (Communications) — sample topics: describe the outreach programs at the school and gauge their effectiveness; describe how volunteers selected, screened, and trained; how does the overall communications plan support the mission of the school.

11:30 AM-12:00 PM
Break / Lunch

12:00 PM-1:30 PM
Standards review with head of school, representative board / leadership
Standard 2 (Governance and Leadership) — sample topics: describe the selection process for trustees; describe the orientation and training of trustees; are there recent examples of the board and head working well together or of the relationship being strained — and what did you do; describe how the governance structures (officers, committees, meetings, etc.) help or hinder efforts to fulfill the mission.
1:30 PM-2:30 PM  Standards review with business officer, representative staff
Standard 5 (Resources and Support Systems) and the financial elements
of Standard 2 (Governance and leadership): review financial
documentation – audit, current statements; review licenses and facility
maintenance checklists, logs of drills (fire, tornado, crisis), review fire,
safety, health documentation. Sample conversation topics: describe the
faculty hiring process including screening and background check
procedures;

2:30 PM-3:00 PM  Review visit logistics

NOTE: if any of the documents in the SAIS Accreditation Documents list that have an asterisk are not
present in the portal (or in the case of the financial documents not observable), have the school correct it
and note it in the pre-visit report if needed.

When you depart from your pre-visit, you may still have questions. Continue to communicate with SAIS
and with the school and remember that at the time of the visit, you will be assigning team members
responsibility for verifying specific standards. If you have done your job well, then your team members
will be able to focus most of their attention on the growth of the school and on the strategic areas they
have been asked to review.
# The Accreditation Process: General Visit Timeline Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-18 months before visit</td>
<td>Attend accreditation workshop; view online videos; read Guidebook; submit request for participation; assign responsibilities related to self-study, administration of process, schedule visit (Fall – between September 15 and November 15; Spring – between January 15 and April 15). Conduct stakeholder and other relevant data collection; respond to standards/indicators; begin narrative writing of self-study report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 months before visit</td>
<td>Schedule preliminary visit with chair; provide completed responses to standards and indicators to chair for review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 months before visit</td>
<td>Prepare and edit final self-study report; prepare for team visit – notify team of logistics, schedule, travel and lodging arrangements, etc.; submit accreditation fee when invoiced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks before visit</td>
<td>Send self-study report and responses to standards/indicators to chair, all team members, and to SAIS – in the SAIS Accreditation Portal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 weeks before visit</td>
<td>Finalize last minute details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Visit</td>
<td>Breathe a sigh of relief – the visit is here and it will come to an end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Visit</td>
<td>Visit report completed by Team and Chair within 10 days of the completion of the visit. School will have an opportunity to review for factuality approximately one week after report has been completed. Accreditation Review Committee will make recommendation typically within 1-3 months from the completion of the visit. Decision ratified by SAIS Board at its regular meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>Although a school must maintain its compliance with SAIS accreditation standards and protocols every year, at the two year mark, schools must document progress towards their own strategic goals and to the recommendations left them by the visiting team. SAIS will send schools a reminder at the beginning of the semester (Fall or Spring) two years later in which their accreditation took place. The two-year report is due at the end of that semester.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SAIS ACCREDITATION

SAIS accreditation remains one of the most sought after accreditation models for high quality independent schools. The process is based on the three key components – adherence to SAIS standards, a self-study that illustrates the school’s planning and how it holds itself accountable to that planning, and a visit from peers.

Think of the process as a three-legged stool: all three legs must be intact for the stool to stand. In the same way, schools must engage in all three phases of the process in order to achieve SAIS accreditation.

THREE LEGS OF SAIS ACCREDITATION

- Adhere to community and research based standards
- Conduct a thorough self-study that leads to institutional goals for strengthening mission fulfillment
- Host an external review from peer educational leaders
CONTACTS: We are here to help!

Damian Kavanagh
Vice President, Accreditation & Membership
(404) 918-8850
damian@sais.org

Joanne Andruscavage
Director of Accreditation
(678) 231-2908
joanne@sais.org