

SAIS Accreditation

Role of the Visiting Team Chair



Accreditation is based on a peer-review process that encourages educators to view their efforts as a civic duty within the independent school community, ensuring the sustained quality of independent education. In the SAIS process, the visiting team chair assumes the primary leadership role.

The chair's role includes:

- Coordinating logistics with the candidate school.
- Conducting a preliminary visit.
- Facilitating the visit.
- Preparing the team for the visit.
- Managing of the team.
- Writing the visit report.
- Recommending to the SAIS Accreditation Committee whether or not the candidate school should be accredited.

This role also involves coordinating the evaluation of the school's process from the time of the preliminary visit through the writing of the visit report. Although the chair is expected to engage the visiting team members in meaningful discussion and activities, the ultimate responsibility for the accreditation visit and visit report belongs to the chair. Accreditation is a leadership event and the chair is expected to help groom the next generation of leaders in SAIS.

Chair Prerequisites

In order to chair SAIS, one must attend a chair training session offered by SAIS, which includes a thorough discussion of the accreditation materials and process.

A chair must also:

- Be a head or administrator from an SAIS member school.
- Attend the SAIS chair training workshop once every five years.
- Serve as a visiting team member on an SAIS accreditation visit on at least one occasion prior to serving as a chair.
- Agree not to accept chair assignments at schools where a conflict of interest exists. Examples of conflicts of interest might include previous work experience as head or a senior administrator at the school to be chaired; a sense of personal obligation to the head of school related to career advancement; any current or expected consulting or financial relationship with the school to be chaired; and any special interest in having the school become accredited or disaccredited. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis if there are extenuating circumstances.

The Accreditation Process

Conducting preliminary site visit: The preliminary site visit should take place at least six months and not more than about 9 months prior to the team visit. The preliminary visit typically lasts one day and is conducted on the school premises by the assigned chair. During this preliminary visit, the chair will:

- Check the school's readiness for the team visit.
- Create and/or review the visit schedule with the head and/or accreditation coordinator; check the progress of the school's self-study and provide advice as needed.
- Check the school's compliance with standards – the school should respond in writing to each indicator (a sentence or two will suffice for most, with reference to other materials as needed). If the chair does not see evidence of compliance with indicators and standards, he/she needs to work with the school to identify areas of improvement prior to the team visit. If the chair feels that the school is not in compliance with all standards/indicators, and will likely not be able to be in compliance by the visit date, the team visit may be cancelled or postponed. SAIS should be informed if a change to the visit schedule is proposed.
- Confirm the areas the school is focused on as they work through their self-study.
- After the Preliminary visit has taken place, the chair should fill out the Chair Preliminary Visit form on the SAIS web site. Completion of this form confirms that SAIS should begin assembling the visiting team.

In preparing the team for the visit, the chair will:

- Ensure that the team members are familiar with the accreditation process and request that they familiarize themselves with the standards/indicators, Guidebook, and visit report template; distribute contact information (cell phone number, etc.) to team members in case of a last-minute emergency.
- Assign each team member specific duties or areas of special attention based on their strengths or areas of experience.
- Provide a copy of the visit schedule to the SAIS office and to the visiting team.
- Inquire into any special needs or dietary restrictions of the team members.
- Work with school's accreditation coordinator to make sure the visiting team receives all necessary information in advance of the visit (self-study report, lodging information if applicable, directions to the school/hotel, where to park at school, what room to meet in, what meals are provided/on own, etc.
- Remind team members that all matters involving the accreditation process of a school are CONFIDENTIAL and should not to be discussed with persons other than the SAIS staff, board, accreditation committee, and visiting team members.

Providing leadership to team during visit by:

- Conducting a comprehensive two-hour orientation meeting for the visiting team at the beginning of the visit.
- Coordinating the reimbursement of team member expenses by school (travel, lodging, meals).
- Working collaboratively with the team throughout the visit to:
 - judge the adequacy of the self-study
 - confirm the school's compliance with standards and indicators
 - determine the recommendation for or against accreditation
 - identify commendations and recommendations to be discussed in the report

Writing and submitting visit report: The chair will guide the team in the process of writing the visit report, being mindful that the school will benefit from clear, concise statements of commentary, commendation, and recommendation regarding what was presented in the self-study as compared to what was evidenced on campus. The SAIS timeline for submitting the visit report using the template and tools provided by SAIS is as follows:

- The chair will share the draft report with the visiting team members. Team members review the draft and reply to the chair with changes or suggestions. Not replying within a reasonable time means acceptance of the draft version.
- The chair finalizes the report within 21 days of the conclusion of the visit.
- If for any reason the chair will not meet the 21-day submission guideline, the SAIS office should be notified as soon as possible. If the school has requested additional areas of study by the visiting team beyond those required, additional time may be allowed.
- SAIS will send the report to the Head of School and to the school's Accreditation Coordinator for review and comment before sending it to the SAIS Accreditation Committee. The Accreditation Committee votes on the recommendation of the visiting team and makes the final decision regarding a school's accreditation status. SAIS will notify the Head of School, Accreditation Coordinator, and Board Chair of the disposition of the school's accreditation status.

Questions?

Please contact

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For team updates and information regarding logistics, please contact

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