



# **GUIDE FOR TEAM MEMBERS**

of

# **ON-SITE VISITS**

*v.6.18*

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**This Guide is to be used by SAES Visiting Team Members who serve On-Site Accreditation Visit Teams. Team Orientation meetings are scheduled prior to each visit.**

## WHY ACCREDITATION?

Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools [SAES] accreditation employs a process of evaluation that combines self-scrutiny with an external review by a team of peers. Both the internal and external reviews bring helpful and accurate observations, comments, and suggestions for the purposes of validation and improvement.

- SAES is a member in good standing of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) Commission on Accreditation. It has voluntarily agreed to abide by the Commission's Criteria for Effective Independent School Accreditation Practices and to submit to a thorough review and evaluation of its accreditation procedures. SAES is recognized by state agencies in Texas (TEPSAC), Oklahoma (OPSAC), and New Mexico, and by eleven Episcopal dioceses within the six states served by SAES.
- SAES schools are evaluated for accreditation with an on-site visit on a 10-year cycle.
- A 5-Year interim report is part of the 10-year accreditation cycle.
- Decisions on accreditation are made by recommendation of the SAES Standards Committee with final approval by the SAES Board of Directors.

	<p><b>Accreditation</b> provides an opportunity for the school and Visiting Team to examine in depth the school's mission and philosophy, governance and administrative structure, academic and co-curricular programs, and physical plant to ensure consistency, sustainability, safety, and relevance of existing programs and practices.</p>
	<p><b>Accreditation</b> provides an opportunity for the school and visiting team to look to the future to identify areas of need to further accomplish the school's mission.</p>
	<p><b>On-Site visits</b> provide only a snapshot of the school at a particular point in time, though a school has an ongoing relationship with its accreditor. Therefore it is critical that full and honest disclosure is practiced by the school in the preparation of the Self-Study and in conversations so the Visiting Team can make valid observations.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

A successful on site visit is the primary responsibility of the Team Leader. This demands a number of strategies in a variety of situations: diplomacy, objectivity, professionalism, patience, sense of humor, consensus-building, and closure. In addition, the Team Leader is the primary conduit between the school and the association. It is the Team Leader, as well as the Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools [SAES] Team Representative (usually the Associate Director of Accreditation Services of SAES [ADAS], but may be the Executive Director of SAES or the Director of Accreditation Services of SAES [DAS]) who establishes a relationship with the school's Head of School [HOS] before, during, and after the on-site visit, and serves as the liaison between the school and-SAES. In essence, it is the Team Leader who determines if the school has:

- completed all elements of the Self-Study, including compliance with all Standards by answering questions posed, exhibiting analytic and reflective thinking at the end of each section of the Self-Study, and providing all appendices and documents required by the Self-Study;
- disclosed fairly and accurately a congruence between its mission and its program;
- hosted a constructive, well-organized on-site visit by the SAES Visiting Team;
- engaged actively with the HOS as the final report of the On-Site Visiting Team is edited for factual accuracy.

The Team Leader communicates all of the above to both the school and the Team Members [TMs]. Further, the Team Leader guides the TMs in their assessment of what the school has been doing, what the school does well, what the school might consider doing, and what the school must address in order to meet SAES Standards for improvement.

The expectations of each TM are listed in the next section. However, before the On-Site Visit , the Team Leader assumes a number of responsibilities. Specifically, the Team Leader is responsible for:

- communicating with the HOS and making a Pre-Visit to the school to be assured that the school is prepared for the on-site visit;
- communicating with each TM to be certain that s/he has made travel arrangements in a timely fashion and sent the Travel Information Form to the school;
- instructing each TM on his/her responsibilities for reading and annotating the complete Self Study Report while giving close attention to the section that the TM has been assigned.

Once all TM's have arrived for the on-site visit, the Team Leader will lead all team meetings, as well as coordinate any needs that the team members have or requests that the school has with the SAES Representative who will serve as the go-between with SAES. The Team Leader is also responsible for overseeing the conduct of all TM's. During the On-Site Visit [OSV], if a TM does not follow protocol for TM's and/or if a TM attempts to go beyond the expectations of a TM by interfering with instruction, it is the responsibility of the Team Leader to attempt to correct the behavior and then ultimately arrange for that Team Member to be dismissed from the team, if necessary. In that

situation, a Team Member or the Team Member's school may be expected to cover the expenses of this TM's travel and accommodations.

A thorough, sensitive, effective evaluation is a complex endeavor. If at any point before or during the visit the Team Leader is uncertain of a protocol to be followed, the SAES Representative on the On Site Visit is to be consulted. If questions still remain, then the Director of Accreditation Services should be consulted.

An effective Team Leader is a teacher of the team, a coordinator of communication with the school, and the spokesperson at the Standards Committee meeting to determine a recommendation on accreditation to the Board of Directors. Teaching the accreditation process includes sharing his/her understanding of and experience with objective observations, valid findings, and accurate reports. This assistance is often needed throughout the visit, especially if there are TM's who are experiencing their first On-Site Visit. Continually checking-in with each TM throughout the visit is often the best way to keep a finger on the comfort and productivity of each TM.

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity on behalf of both SAES and the host school.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF ON-SITE VISIT TEAM MEMBERS**

NB: If the Associate Director of Accreditation Services [ADAS] is unavailable to participate in the On-Site Visit, she may be replaced on a team by the Executive Director of SAES or the Director of Accreditation Services [DAS].

Conflict of Interest: In accordance with best practices and SAES policies, all accreditation team leaders and team members must not accept an assignment where a conflict of interest exists. Common conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to the following: you are current or former employee of the school; you have a relative who is a current or former student, employee, or Board member of the school; your school is a direct competitor of the school; you have been in communication with the Head regarding your own career path; you have a current or planned consulting or financial relationship with the school; you have a special/personal interest in the school's accreditation. Please do not assume that SAES is aware of any such conflicts of interest. If you feel that you have a conflict, please discuss it with the SAES Director of Accreditation Services before you accept any invitation to join a visiting team or appear for a visit.

### **Prior to the On-Site Visit**

1. Become familiar with the SAES Standards of Accreditation and Criteria for Membership. These are found on the SAES website, [www.swaes.org](http://www.swaes.org). You will be asked to evaluate adherence to these Standards in light of its own mission.
2. Acquaint yourself fully with the school that you are visiting by looking at its website and reading the Self-Study report that you will be sent about one month prior to the visit.
3. If you have questions about anything in the Self-Study or any of the documents sent to you by SAES, please contact the Team Leader or the Associate Director of Accreditation for On-Site Visits – not the school. (The Team Leader will make a Pre-Visit to the school, usually within three months prior to the On-Site Visit to discuss major issues and final plans for the On-Site Visit Team visit.)
4. Make travel arrangements to and from the school, keeping costs down as much as possible. The school will make hotel arrangements (individual rooms) for you and each Team Member. *Lodging and meals are provided by the host school, and your travel expenses related to the Pre-Visit and the On-Site Visit trips will be reimbursed. If you extend your visit for personal reasons, you are responsible for the cost of additional lodging, food, and local transportation during that time.*
5. And, of course, what to pack! When on campus, business or professional attire is appropriate. Some areas of SAES's region are more formal than others, so if you have a question, ask. During evening meetings, casual and comfortable are key!

**During the On-Site Visit**

1. The On-Site Visit Team explores all areas of the school's program and operations.
2. The On-Site Visit Team visits all faculty members, observes school life, and attends meetings.
3. The On-Site Visit Team assesses the school's compliance with the SAES Standards.
4. The On-Site Visit Team reports on all aspects of the school's program and operations.

***Don't assume anything. If you have questions, ASK!***

**Visit Protocol**

1. Express gratitude, offer encouragement, but remain objective and neutral.
2. You are not consulting. Be cautious about offering advice.
3. No cell phone use in observations, meetings, etc.
4. Each faculty member should be observed, ideally, by two team members, if time and team size permit.
5. During class observations,
  - Do not take notes and do not participate or interrupt.
  - Drop in for a minimum of 10-15 minutes.
6. Do not jump to conclusions after such a brief visit. If you have a concern, talk with other team members to see what they saw. Follow up with faculty members to see what's going on in their classroom the other 175 days of the year.
7. The On-Site Visit is a process of school reflection and improvement, not a personnel review. Careful about comments about staff. If you have a concern, be certain to discuss it with the ADAS.
8. Confidentiality is critical..
9. Do not solicit staff for positions at your school. Likewise, self-promotion for job consideration is not appropriate.

During the On-Site Visit [OSV], if a TM does not follow protocol for TM's and/or if a TM attempts to go beyond the expectations of a TM by interfering with instruction, it is the responsibility of the Team Leader to arrange for that team member to be dismissed from the team.

In that situation, that Team Member or that Team Member's school may be expected to cover the expenses of this TM's travel and accommodations.

NB: Information on formatting your writing of the report is under Visiting Team Report Guidelines that can be found on pages 15 through 19. Also included on these pages is information about grammatical corrections and word choices. Please review all these pages BEFORE writing any portion of your report.

### **After the On-Site Visit**

Your work is done and you will not hear anything more than “thank you,” but...

- The ADAS proofreads all sections of the report and sends it to the HOS for correction of factual errors and to the Team Leader for review.
- The SAES Director of Accreditation Services sends the report to members of the SAES Standards Committee—working and retired Heads of School— who will make a recommendation regarding the school's accreditation to the SAES Executive Board—working and retired Heads of School.

The SAES Board of Directors makes its final decision that is communicated to the school by SAES. The Report of the On-Site Visit Team is sent to the school at this time. This could take three months or more.



## GUIDELINE & SUGGESTIONS FOR ON-SITE VISIT EXIT MEETINGS

### Purpose

The *exit meeting* at the conclusion of a 3½-day On-Site Visit has a multi-faceted purpose. The Team Leader will present an *oral report* to school constituents, and in doing so, it

1. Brings closure to the visit.
2. Acknowledges the preparation and hard work that has been done by members of the school community.
3. Offers a glimpse of the visiting team's observations.
4. Extends the visiting team's thanks for the school's hospitality.
5. Explains next steps (when to expect the report, what to expect in the report, etc.).
6. Provides an opportunity for the Head to gather his/her constituents immediately following the completion of the visiting team's work at the school and allows the school community to come together to celebrate their hard work.

SAES Representative joins the Team Leader for this meeting. Team members are not required to attend exit meetings; however, if travel plans dictate a later departure, they are welcome to remain. Check with the Team Leader for any further information.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEAM MEMBERS DURING THE ON-SITE VISIT

*The task of an evaluator is two-fold; to see if the Self-Study is in fact an accurate description of what is occurring at the school and to see if the program is consistent with the school's mission and philosophy. In order to do this effectively, a team member puts his/her own mission and philosophy aside and judges only from the perspective of the school. This is not an easy task. Before a team member arrives at the school, s/he should have read thoroughly and carefully the Self-Study and should have already compiled some questions to be pursued. The process of evaluating a school is a sophisticated one. A team member proceeds from the hard, objective data at hand to some meaningful subjective judgments and conclusions.*

As a team member, you have unique work to do on your own and as a member of a team. Though you will be visiting alone various areas of the school and forming your own opinions, you will also be sharing your opinions with the team and using their feedback to refine your thinking. This blend of individual and collaborative work is a rich opportunity to grow professionally and personally.

The primary goals of an On-Site Visit are two-fold. The first goal of the team is to establish if what the school reports in its *Self-Study* is actually in practice at the school. The second goal is to determine if the school is in compliance with the Standards established by SAES for schools who are seeking accreditation. This requires careful examination and thoughtful reflection.

Keeping in mind an understanding of the whole of the school you are evaluating is essential. Even though you have been assigned to write about particular aspects of the school, you must relate each part to the larger context of the mission to determine the school's alignment with the mission and the Standards of SAES. In the end, your responsibility is to help evaluate the total school as well as the specific sectors.

Your objective is to arrive at in-depth conclusions and judgments. It is important not to be distracted by surface matters. When you have the opportunity, ask questions that elicit specific examples, but be sure that the questions are neutral in construction; e.g., "Can you cite a time when..." or "Can you recall an example of..." or "Can you help me to understand how..." Ask opening, not leading, questions. When a person from the school makes a flat statement, ask him or her to provide an illustration or to cite the facts on which he or she has based this judgment; e.g., "That's interesting, can you give me an example of..." Or "Can you help me to understand this by giving me an illustration of..." Don't cast doubt; just encourage the person to present the corroborating evidence. Then it will be your job to determine if the specifics support the general statement.

These are some suggestions to guide you in your work:

1. Avoid being dogmatic. Don't impose your educational thinking on the school. Try to determine what the school envisions as its goals, then estimate how fully it is realizing those goals.
2. When you feel you have sufficient information for your purposes, politely but firmly tell your respondent that. Keep the initiative in your hands; avoid being briefed into exhaustion.
3. Be purposeful in seeking information. You will not have time to observe everything in the school. Keep in mind the questions you had when you were reading the *Self Study*. Try to determine what the

major issues are, and then seek the information you will require to arrive at meaningful judgments on those issues.

4. Avoid early closure. Keep your mind, eyes, and ears open. Only as the pieces begin to fall into patterns should you make some initial and tentative conclusions. Always keep in mind specifics, as you are drawing those conclusions.
5. Be alert to those cues and clues that can open wider perspectives for you on the school and your assigned area. You are looking for areas of major strengths and areas needing strengthening. As you begin to form some tentative conclusions, look for the information that will shed more light on these.
6. Listen carefully to what people tell you. While you are gathering information, attempt to determine why the person is responding as he or she is, as well as noting what the response happens to be. If you remain uncertain about an issue or information, note it and be certain to share it with the group at the next group meeting.
7. Don't take any crucial statement at face value. Check it out by getting independent readings on it. The more perspectives you obtain on any matter, the more fully you will understand it.
8. Avoid evaluations that involve personalities or blame. Keep your focus on the situation as it exists objectively.
9. Try to be realistic in both your evaluations and your suggestions. Some of the constraints under which a school is operating may not be able to be changed. If this is so, keep your evaluation and your suggestions within the context of those given conditions, and only share them with team members and as part of your section of the report.
10. Discuss the school and all its aspects freely with your colleagues on the Team. Their findings will reinforce yours or they might change your view. In keeping with the Confidentiality Agreement that you will sign, do not discuss your observations or reactions with members of the school staff.
11. Remember that your final report reflects the depth and the worth of your evaluation. If all you can do is write a few generalities or some professional platitudes, no one will be well served. Be thoughtful, objective, and specific.
12. The final report in all its particulars is a team report. This means that you are to bring back to the total team your own conclusions and impressions regarding your areas of assignment, but the final evaluation decisions on all areas are to be made by the full team. Any conclusions or observations that you want to put into the report will be corroborated by another team member, so always check out what you are seeing or hearing with other members of the team.
13. There are numerous opportunities for the team to meet in private settings. If you have a need to discuss what you have seen or what you are thinking, this should be discussed only in those private places. This avoids people overhearing conversations that might be misunderstood.

14. Remember that the evaluation process is complex and labor intensive. As an educator, you know what constitutes effectiveness and what does not. Ask your questions and seek your answers to those ends. But always keep in mind that your evaluation is only one part of a larger On-Site Visit Report.

NB: The Report of the On-Site Visit Team has already been formatted in *Google Docs*. Included on these pages is information about grammatical corrections and word choices. Please review all these pages BEFORE writing any portion of your report.

## THE ON-SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

### Sunday

- Team arrives by **2:00 p.m.** for an orientation meeting
- Team **tours** the school and campus
- Team attends **reception** with faculty, staff, Trustees, and church representatives
- Team has **dinner** with Team only (nearby restaurant)
- Team **meets** to review assignments, SAES Standards, and Monday schedule (hotel)

### Monday

- Team **observes** student arrival and dismissal
- Team **visits** classrooms and co-curricular activities
- Team **observes** fire drill
- Team **meets** with parents, students, trustees, church representatives, and alumni/ae (if appropriate)
- Team **meets** with administrative personnel and faculty
- Team **writes** drafts of individual sections of the report as assigned by the Team Leader
- Team has **dinner** alone (nearby restaurant)
- Team **meets** in the evening to share observations, answer questions, and review Tuesday schedule (hotel)

### Tuesday

- Team **visits** classrooms and co-curricular activities
- Team **meets** with faculty, administrative personnel, and church representatives, as needed
- Team **submits** travel receipts and expense form for reimbursement
- Team **continues** writing and reviewing the report
- Team has **dinner** alone (delivered to workroom )
- Team **meets** in the evening to share observations, answer questions, read and edit each others' drafts, and review Wednesday schedule (hotel)

### Wednesday

- Team **fine tunes** its report if not completed on Tuesday evening
- Team **completes** visit evaluations
- Team typically **departs** no earlier than noon
- Team Leader and ASDS conduct an **exit meeting** with the Head of School, Board Chair, and Rector (if applicable)
- Team Leader and ADAS conduct an **exit meeting** with the school community (faculty, Board, church leadership (if applicable).



### SAES ON-SITE VISIT SAMPLE SCHEDULE

[School Name]

[Date of Visit]

<b>Sunday</b>	prior to 2:00 p.m.	Team arrives at hotel and checks-in
	2:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Team Orientation meeting at hotel
	4:15 p.m.	Travel to school meet HOS and tour
	5:00 – 6:00 p.m.	Reception with board, faculty, staff, trustees, church leadership, parent representatives
	6:30 p.m.	Dinner for team only
	8:30 -9:30 p.m.	Team meeting at hotel
		<p><u>Evening work:</u>            General discussion of observations impressions, questions            Share impressions of what the school is about            Review schedule, assign constituent meetings</p>

*Goals: Complete travel, settle into hotel, participate in Training, prepare for Monday work*

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<b>Monday</b>	7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Team arrives at school; observes student arrival and dismissal, class observations, meetings, fire drill, and works on report.
	8:00 a.m.	TL, SAES Staff Rep meet with HOS
	11:45 – 12:00	(Pre-lunch gathering of team-checking in)
	5:30 – 6:30 p.m.	Dinner for team only
	7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Team works at hotel
		<p><u>Evening work</u>            Review compliance with Standards (based on Self-Study and initial observations)</p>

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Begin discussion of overarching commendations & recommendations  
Initial list of section commendations & recommendations

*Goals: Visit relevant areas of focus, contribute index card observations, begin writing narrative on each assigned section, confirm Standards Compliance in areas of focus.*

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<b>Tuesday</b>	7:30 a.m.	Team arrives at school; continues observations and works on report at school
	11:45 – 12	(Pre-lunch gathering of team-checking in)
	5:30 – 6:30	Dinner for team only, in hotel work room preferred
	7:00 – 9:00	Team works at hotel <u>Evening work:</u> Continue list of Comm. and Rec's Reading and editing drafts of all section reports Add Standards reference to section commendations and recommendations Finalize overarching commendations & recommendations

*Goals: Make final observations, review Documents in Adherence to Standards, SAES Compliance to Standards, and Supplementary Materials as necessary, complete and print draft copy of each assigned report, save reports on flash drives. Turn in reimbursement requests.*

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### Wednesday

	8:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.	Team checks out of hotel and arrives at school; conducts final observations, works on report (if necessary); team members depart school when work is finished, no earlier than noon
	10:30 – 11:30 a.m.	TL and ADAS with HOS, Board President, and Rector
	Noon or later	Team members depart if finished with work
	afternoon, time TBD	TL and ADAS conduct Exit Meeting with Oral Report

## GATHERING INFORMATION

1. The **Self-Study** will become your “go-to” book for information.
2. The **Documents in Adherence to Standards** “box” is a valuable source of information available to the team during the visit, as it contains curriculum, handbooks, policies, reports, data, and other forms of Supplementary Materials. At the end of each Standard section of the Self-Study, a “box” containing the names/numbers of the documents that apply to that section are listed for easy reference. Be sure to review those documents before writing your section and sign the Documents in Adherence to Standards list in the front of the documents box..
3. **Conversations** with school people throughout the visit will help you clarify information in the report and observations you make. If you are unsure as to what to ask, talk with the Team Leader or the Associate Director of Accreditation Services.
4. **Observations** of classes and other activities will help you ascertain if the school is living out its mission. **When you are in a classroom and/or observing an activity, do not take notes.** You can do that immediately upon leaving the room.
5. Always have your **eyes and ears open** when you are moving between observations. Pay attention to what people are doing when they are not in class and what the hallways and surrounding areas look like. Be particularly aware of any activity or area that appears NOT to be safe, then share that information with the person working on Facilities and Safety.
6. And, of course, your **teammates** are there to share their knowledge. If you have questions about anything you have observed or you are uncertain as to whether or not to include certain information, do not hesitate to discuss it with any member of the team. Remember, **all information gathered and/or and share with the team is confidential.**

*Remember, the Team does not accredit; the SAES Board of Directors does. The Team gathers information and writes the report that informs the SAES Standards Committee recommendation to the SAES Board.*



## ON-SITE VISIT TEAM REPORT GUIDELINES

The Visiting Team’s report reflects the structure of the school’s Self-Study, but will be divided into the following major sections:

**Mission and Philosophy, Episcopal Identity, School Climate and Culture; Governance; Organization and Administration; Teaching and Learning; Fiscal Responsibility; Facilities and Safety**

Each report you write should be added to the *GoogleDocs* template that has been created by SAES. The ADAS who is facilitating the team’s work will provide details on how to do this. Please do not save any reports on your computer or those borrowed from the School. Please do not email reports. Please do not “lock” your documents (pdf’s or DocX) as they cannot be edited. Please do not use any fancy formatting. The report in *Google Docs* has already been formatted.

Please remember that while SAES does not stipulate that a report MUST have commendations, suggestions, and/or recommendations, it is most helpful to a school to have at least recommendations and commendations. The School has worked hard to prepare for this visit, and surely the Team can find something constructive to say. SAES expects a school to fulfill the recommendation but not the suggestions.

*The general report format is:*

- Title (same as in the School’s self-study)
- General Statement (a narrative of 1-3 paragraphs)

This statement gives an overview of the section being evaluated. There must be enough detail to be clear to someone unfamiliar to the School. To describe a department, it might include the courses taught, the graduation requirements, the number of teachers assigned (full and part-time), the length of time the class is taught each day/week, and any other pertinent information. For self-contained classrooms/programs, give a similar description. Descriptions of other programs, divisions, and administrative/constituent areas should give stats and other information.

- **Commendations** – Cite strengths beyond the expected. Make sure each commendation phrase grammatically completes the opening phrase, “*The SAES Visiting Team commends the School for:*” Use parallel construction among all commendations. Commendations must reference the associated SAES Standard (put in parentheses following the comment). Commendations should be listed in “descending” order with highest priority first, if possible. Please do not change margins, indent or tab over text; nothing fancy. Except for the Head of School, individuals must not be commended.

- **Suggestions** – Issues that represent areas of relative strength or weakness, or areas in need of improvement that do not rise to the level of a commendation or recommendation. These are issues that should be noted, but the school is not held to them as in a recommendation. Make sure each suggestion phrase grammatically completes the opening phrase, “*The SAES Visiting Team suggests:*” Use parallel construction among all suggestions. Suggestions do not need to reference a Standard. Suggestions should be listed in “descending” order with highest priority first, if possible. Please do not change margins, indent or tab over text; nothing fancy.
- **Recommendations** – Cite areas that need attention. SAES expects the school to address a recommendation but not necessarily a suggestion. Make sure each recommendation phrase grammatically completes the opening phrase, “*The SAES Visiting Team recommends that the School:*” Use parallel construction among all recommendations. Recommendations must state the Team’s concern but not be remedial or prescriptive. The school itself must find solutions to its problems. The Team should specify its concerns to the extent needed for the School to take remedial action. Recommendations must reference the associated SAES Standard (put in parentheses following the comment). Recommendations should be listed in “descending” order with highest priority first, if possible. Please do not change margins, indent or tab over text; nothing fancy.
  - Identifies the Team’s concern about a staffing problem: *The SAES Visiting Team recommends that the School review the current schedule and workloads of its music faculty to ensure the objectives of the music program are being met.*
  - Too prescriptive: *The SAES Visiting Team recommends that the School hire an additional music teacher to alleviate the heavy workload of its music faculty.*
  - Examples of appropriate phrases for recommendations:

Examine the implications of	Intensify efforts
Address the need for	Attend to issues of
Continue efforts	Continue to develop
Continue to support	Study ways to provide
Clarify	Review policy of
Study the process of	Examine fully the process of
Identify ways to	Develop
Examine the possibility of	Study the need for
Recognize the value of	Further examine
Direct efforts to ensure	Initiate a plan for
Take steps to (Take immediate steps to)	Explore
Give immediate consideration to	Re-evaluate
Move in the direction of	Study the feasibility of
Make provisions for	Pursue (actively pursue/seek)

Take steps to	Develop a procedure to
Attempt to establish	Undertake a study of
Study ways to	Continue commitment to

- o More useful action verbs to avoid using verbs such as consider, continue, or other equivocal verbs in a recommendation that does not call for a specific action with a measurable outcome: address, analyze, appraise, assess, attend, avail, balance, categorize, clarify, classify, combine, compare, compile, compose, conclude, conduct, construct, contrast, correct, create, decide, deduce, defend, demonstrate, design, detect, determine, develop, devise, discriminate, dissect, draw, eliminate, employ, encourage, establish, estimate, evaluate, examine, extend, expand, explain, focus, formalize, generate, hypothesize, identify, illustrate, implement, improve, infer, initiate, insure/ensure, institute, integrate, interpret, investigate, invent, judge, justify, maintain, manipulate, measure, modify, order, organize, originate, operate, paraphrase, plan, predict, prioritize, proceed, produce, propose, provide, recognize, relate, review, revise, resolve, seek, separate, solve, structure, summarize, survey, synthesize, transform, use, withdraw

### Sample Report

#### Governance

The † † † Episcopal School is governed by a twenty-five member Board of Trustees. Eighteen members are recommended to the Board for election by the Trusteeship Committee. The remaining seven members are elected or appointed in accordance with the School's by-laws. Six of the seven serve as ex-officio members: the Head of School, the President of the Alumnae Association, Business Manager, Rector, one Vestry member, and the President of the Parents' Association. The by-laws require that 51% of the Board be members of the parish. Currently, the Board membership includes: 5 alumni/ae, 2 alumni/parents, 2 alumni/parents of alumnae, 6 parents, 1 parent of alumna, 2 community/business leaders, and 1 Head of a non-competitor school. Three Board positions are currently vacant. According to diocesan law, the Rector serves as the Chair of the Board; an appointed Board member serves as the Executive Chair (President). The full Board meets five times a year (September, November, January, March and May); the March Board meeting includes a meeting with the faculty.

Operating within the framework of the Episcopal Church, † † † Episcopal Day School is a ministry of the Parish of † † †. The Rector and Vestry of the Church have delegated the management of the affairs and policies of the † † † Episcopal Day School, in turn, to the Board of Trustees.

The Board has six standing committees (Executive, Trusteeship, Finance, Head Evaluation and Support, Development, and Audit) and two *ad hoc* committees (Campaign Steering, Strategic Planning). There are clear directives for all Board committees and clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for the Board as a whole and for individual Trustees. There is an orientation

program for new Trustees prior to the first Board meeting. Recent revision of Board terms has established a three-year term for Trustees, renewable for two terms. Under the leadership of the Trusteeship Committee, there is an annual evaluation process for the Board as a whole, for individual Trustees and for the Head of School.

In the spring of 2020 the Board approved strategic initiatives for the School in the areas of faculty/staff compensation, technology, athletics/fitness, diversity, and capital funding. These initiatives were the result of the committee and subcommittee work of over thirty direct participants, including trustees, faculty, staff, parents and alumni/ae who held planning meetings from September 2018 to April 2020. Many of the critical factors identified and goals set in these strategic initiatives have been met or are in the process of being met. The Board is beginning to consider planning for new strategic initiatives.

***The SAES Visiting Team commends the School for***

1. Recognizing the value of on-going strategic planning. (C.3.g)
2. Articulating clear guidelines for individual Trustees and the Board as a whole that allow the Board to focus appropriately on strategic issues. (C.3.a)
3. Revising the Board Committee structure and establishing Trustee terms and limits. (C.3.e, C.2.a)

***The SAES Visiting Team suggests that the School:***

1. Engage a facilitator to lead the Board through its next strategic planning process.
2. Consider changing the 51% parish member requirement of Board, exploring either a lesser percent and/or recruiting Board members from other Episcopal parishes.

***The SAES Visiting Team recommends that the School:***

1. Ensure the full Board's commitment to continued strategic planning. (C.3.g)
2. Address the need to increase the School's endowment. (C.3.g)
3. Continue to support a zero based budget. (C.3.b)
4. As recommended in the School's Self-Study, create conflict of interest and whistleblower policies. (C.3.i, C.3.j)
5. Implement the already recognized need to improve the timeliness of distribution of information needed to prepare for Board and committee meetings. (C.3.a)

N.B. The SAES Staff Representative will have more samples that may be viewed during the On site Visit.

Formatting tips (making it easier to merge all pieces of the reports):

- ALL FORMATTING IS COMPLETE IN the *GOOGLEDOC* to which you will have access during the On-Site Visit.. DO NOT CHANGE ANY FORMATTING. If you have a questions concerning formatting, please consult the Team Leader or the ADAS.

Reports must be consistent in:

- The use of capital letters. *Visiting Team*, *Team*, and *School* should be capitalized.
- The references to departments, staff positions, administrative titles, committees, etc.
- The school's name.

Things to avoid:

- Referencing individual teachers or other school personnel by name, position or small group.
- Using the name of a commercially produced material/product.
- Endorsing a program not mandated by the government.
- Editorializing and using lengthy descriptions, recommendations, observations and suggestions, and commendations.
- Making an observation/suggestion when it should be a commendation or recommendation and vice versa. (If there is Team consensus and/or strong, consistent feeling, then make it a commendation or recommendation.)
- Using too many recommendations, suggestions, and commendations. Look at possible combinations if this is the case. On the other end, try to give at least one recommendation and one commendation.

More notes about the overall report:

- All reports will be shared and approved by the entire Team.
- The final report, a composite of the reports of Team Members and representing the point of view of the whole Team, should follow the general outline of the SAES criteria and the School's Self-Study. It will have a cover page that includes the school's name, the accrediting association(s), the date of the visitation, and the names of the Team Members and the schools they represent.
- It should include a copy of the School's philosophy and mission, and a table of contents.
- There should be an introductory overview at the beginning of the report and a concluding section at the end. The introduction should include something about the something about the history, structure, and location of the school. The conclusion should end with a thank you to the School.
- The Team and its report should make no reference to the likelihood of accreditation.

**Grammar 101** – common questions

***Capitalization:***

With...

1. Proper nouns:

For example:

Stevens Hall, English

Trinity School (once identified, may

No capitalization:

math

	be referred to as the School)	
2. Titles	Head of School Rector Board of Trustees	school w/o name teacher, treasurer on site visiting team
3. Names of specific courses	Algebra 2	history (general course)
4. Specialty classes	Mandarin Chinese	Kindergarten, art, music (general courses)
5. Divisions	Lower School	

**Hyphens:**

- All compound numbers                      thirty-two
- All spelled out fractions                      one-third
- Words hyphenated in the dictionary              part-time, full-time

**Who vs. That or Which**

- Who* refers to a person                      Sally is the one who rescued the cat.  
She is on the team that won first place.
- That* introduces an essential clause              I do not trust products that claim “all natural ingredients”.
- Which* introduces a non-essential clause              The product claiming “all natural ingredients,” which appeared in the Sunday paper, is on sale.

**Singular or Plural**

- Staff                      The staff is                      Staff members are
- Faculty                      The faculty is                      Faculty members are

**Ordinal Numbers**

Use Grade 3 (not a grammar rule; just choosing one for consistency).

**And finally,**

Our students attend *Episcopal* (adjective) schools. Members of the church are *Episcopalians* (noun)!

**“HOW TO WRITE GOOD”**

- Avoid alliteration. Always.

2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. Avoid clichés like the plague. They're old hat.
4. Comparisons are as bad as clichés.
5. Be more or less specific.
6. Writers should never generalize.
7. Be consistent.
8. Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it is highly superfluous.
9. Who needs rhetorical questions?
10. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.

**SECTIONS OF OSV TEAM REPORT - *SELF-STUDY 1***

[SAES Staff Representative on the OSV Team will provide a template for the report.]

*Report sections should appear in the following order.*

SAES Annual Report – [insert digital version obtained from school]

Introduction

Overarching Commendations and Recommendations

Report on Standards

A. Mission and Philosophy [Note: The Team Leader and the SAES Staff Representative will decide if this section will be combined with Section B.]

B. Episcopal Identity, School Climate and Culture

B. Governance

C. Organization and Administration

D. Teaching and Learning

[insert sections as reflected in the structure of the school's Self-Study and the report writing assignments]

E. Fiscal Responsibility

F. Facilities and Safety

Conclusion

Statement of Confidentiality – [insert standard statement]

*SAES Documents in Adherence to Standards* – [insert Documents Compliance Checklist]

*SAES Standards* – [insert Standards version used by the school in its Self-Study]



**SECTIONS OF OSV TEAM REPORT - SELF-STUDY 2**

[SAES Staff Representative on the OSV Team will provide a template for the report on *GoogleDocs*.]  
*Report sections should appear in the following order.*

Table of Contents

SAES Annual Report – [insert digital version obtained from the SAES Office]

Introduction

Overarching Commendations and Recommendations

Compliance to Standards

A. Mission [Note: The Team Leader and the SAES Staff Representative will decide if this section will be combined with Section B.]

B. Episcopal Identity, School Climate and Culture

C. Governance

D. Organization and Administration

E. Teaching and Learning

[insert sections as reflected in the structure of the school’s Self-Study and the report writing assignments]

F. Fiscal Responsibility

G. Facilities and Safety

*Episcopal Identity, School Climate & Culture* (if completed as a “stand alone” section.)

School Plan [insert sections as reflected in the structure of the school’s Self-Study and the report writing assignments]

Conclusion

Statement of Confidentiality – [insert standard statement]

*SAES Documents in Adherence to Standards Checklist*– [insert *Documents Compliance Checklist*]

*SAES Standards Checklist* – [insert *Standards Checklist* version used by the school in its Self-Study]

## A GUIDE FOR WRITING NARRATIVE SECTIONS OF THE ON-SITE VISIT REPORT

Introduction (written by Team Leader) – refer to *Head of School Introductory Report*

- Brief description of school – location, grades, size, founding/history, location, etc.
- Brief summary of major changes since last OSV
- Brief summary of major challenges facing the school as identified by the school
- Anything else that will provide a report reader to major/relevant aspects of the school

Overarching Commendations and Recommendations (written by Team Leader w/ input from team members)

- Overarching themes and trends that rise from observations and discussions
- Can serve as a basis for strategic goals
- Should state commendation or recommendation, followed by a rationale
- Schools must address overarching recommendations in the Head's school status report sections of interim reports.
- *Example of overarching commendation: Church and School Relations* - Dating back to the founding of XXX School in 1972 when XXX Episcopal Church made a commitment to supporting a school as its primary outreach, there has been a close relationship between the Church and the School. Today, this relationship is nurtured by the consistent and supportive interaction between the Rector and the Head of School. With the Church's membership growing and the School's enrollment increasing, the leaders of each have shaped a model of collaboration. The Rector's visibility in carpool line and in chapel services, and the parishioners' participation in school events mirrors this model. Though there is significant potential for tension because the School uses a large portion of church space in its daily operations, this does not appear to be a problem. There is great respect for both organizations by both constituencies.
- *Example of overarching commendation: Diversity* - It is impossible to walk onto the campus and not to notice the diversity that exists at the School. Both the faculty and the students are diverse racially, ethnically, religiously. This diversity makes up approximately 45% of the student body, and faculty are committed to building attitudes of respect for others. There is literature included in the program from different cultural perspectives that allows for discussions on different traditions and histories. That is reinforced by the Spanish teacher who emphasizes the value of all heritages. Evidence of how well diversity is incorporated into school life is clear in the success of a very young Chinese student who, though not fluent in English, has been fully accepted by his peers and teachers. All of this emanates from an appreciation of the diversity that surrounds the School.
- *Example of overarching recommendation: Governance* - Currently, the Board of Trustees is a committed group of church members and parents who have not reached their full potential in terms of effectiveness. Practices of the Board do not match bylaws. Only ten of the allowed twelve board members sit on the Board at this time. And the committees named in the bylaws are not necessarily the ones that are required for effective governance (e.g. Head of School Support and Evaluation Committee, Finance, Development, Committee on Trustees, Strategic Planning, and Buildings and Grounds Ad Hoc). There is much that needs to be changed for best practices to be evident—veteran and new trustee orientation; strategic planning with a matrix that includes for each goal the person in charge, timeline for completion, resources, and costs; a

long range financial plan; and policies that are put into practice with consistency. This and other specific suggestions will bring the school's governance up to a standard that will benefit the operations of the School and be consistent with shaping an institution for sustainability in the future.

- *Example of overarching recommendation: **Enrollment Management, Recruitment, and Retention*** - Both the economy and the lack of consistent leadership prior to September 2013 has taken a toll on the school's enrollment. There is a desire on the part of all constituencies—Board, Vestry, Faculty, and Parents—to increase student numbers, for not only financial but also educational reasons. To make this happen in a strategic way, these areas of planning are needed: enrollment management, marketing, recruiting, transition, and retention. An Enrollment Management Plan should include tracking families from first contact through matriculation, comparing yield year-to-year as well as attrition, and using that information to inform the budget. A Marketing/Recruiting Plan should include a variety of strategies to reach out to the community and to mine new populations as potential families. A Transition/Retention Plan should focus on ways to encourage current students to continue at the School by defining and developing transition activities at different grade levels, assuring that as students move up in grades that they are also moving up in subject matter complexity and skills development. With these plans in place, increasing enrollment becomes a strategic goal rather than an item on a wish list.

#### A. Mission and Philosophy, Episcopal Identity, School Climate and Culture

- Congruence with programs and practices
- Needs of students, freedom of inquiry and respectful exchange of diverse viewpoint
- Correlation with mission
- Governance and administrative areas relating to Episcopal Identity
- School-Church relations
- Shared use and other cooperative agreements between school and church
- Worship and religious studies
- Diversity/inclusive environment, understanding of and acceptance of differences, equity and social justice
- Exemplary education
- Description of school climate and culture
- School's use of community resources
- The school IN the community, local and global - community service and outreach

#### B. Governance

- By-laws, including but not limited to Board structure, incorporation, and conflict of interest
- Trustee recruitment, orientation, and Board development
- Trustee and whole Board evaluation
- Head of School support and evaluation
- Congruence of by-laws, policies, and practices with school's mission, viability, and goals
- Fiduciary, strategic, and generative tasks
- Vision and strategic planning

### C. Organization and Administration

- Congruence of daily operations & policies (stated vs. practice)
- Administration responsibilities
- Administration qualifications and experience
- Recruitment and retention, including but not limited to compensation packages
- Admissions, including but not limited to current, trends, financial aid, non-discrimination policy, published policies regarding student assessment
- Institutional Advancement/Development, including but not limited to fundraising, marketing, communications
- Admissions, including but not limited to current, trends, financial aid, non-discrimination policy, published policies regarding student assessment
- Student admission and academic data/records, graduate records, and personnel records
- Student/graduate “profile” – character traits instilled/developed
- Parent’s association description, goals, leadership, etc.
- Alumni/ae
- Communication and interactions with parents, alumni/ae, and community
- Student and interactions with parents, alumni/ae, and community
- Community awareness, local and global

### D. Teaching and Learning

- Structure
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Division Overviews
- Content Areas/Special Programs
- Data analysis and application
- 21<sup>st</sup> century capacities, including blended and online learning
- Residential/Boarding & Homestay Programs – (see section)
- Supervision and evaluation – orientation, mentoring, ongoing assessment
- Involvement in ongoing program development
- Professional development
- Safeguarding God’s Children and other relevant training
- Hiring policies, including requirements, staffing priorities and transition plans (if needed)
- Awareness and implementation of school’s policies of health and safety and supervision of students
- Compliance
- Number of school days with students present; number of faculty/staff professional days
- Summer/Weekend Programs - Since the SAES Visiting Team is unable to observe any summer or weekend, either internal or external, programs, the Visiting Team Report will not comment on the quality of such programs; however, the report will address the impact of these programs on school operations (income from revenue stream, additional insurance coverages, wear-and-tear on facilities, etc.)

### E. Fiscal Responsibility

- Status of Incorporation (parish/diocesan/independent school)
- Budget process

- Tuition
- Financial assistance
- Cash reserves
- Surplus or deficit
- Long-term debt
- Business/Finance personnel
- Endowment
- Insurance coverage and risk management plan
- Accounting Practices and Audit/Review including management letter
- General financial policies, including long-range or strategic financial plan
- Technology plan funding
- Strategic financial plan and/or long-range financial plan
- Compensation package
- Adequacy of funds to meet program needs

#### F. Facility and Safety

- Compliance with city, county, state, (and federal) codes
- Comment on fire drill
- Adequacy of physical plant
- Food services
- Security and safety
- Supervision
- School vehicle compliance (if applicable)
- Crisis response plan
- Daily housekeeping and maintenance
- Master facilities plan
- *School Safety Checklist* – A comprehensive list of safety and security requirements and standards of care. Completed by the person responsible for all things regarding safety and security and signed by Head of School. Filed in *Documents in Adherence to Standards* “box.” Team members must review the list with an eye towards general compliance; major omissions should be noted.

Conclusion (written by Team Leader) – refer to *Steering Committee Report* and *Head of School Summary Report*

- Correlation between Steering Committee observations and conclusions and OSV Team observations and conclusions
- Summary of the school’s plans for change/improvement
- Changes in collection and use of data for operations and program
- Priorities for school action, overarching themes and/or major challenges as observed by Team
- Reflections on/Incorporation of skills for Schools of the Future
- Fulfillment of membership and accreditation requirements
- General statement about compliance with *SAES Documents in Adherence to Standards* (see *Documents Compliance Checklist* that should be inserted in final report)

*Statement of Confidentiality & Disclaimer - standard statement*

*The SAES report of the Visiting Team is submitted to the SAES Standards Committee, the SAES Executive Director, the SAES Director of Accreditation Services, the SAES Associate Director of Accreditation Services, and the Head of School and President of the Board of Trustees of the evaluated school. Copies are not sent to members of the Visiting Team. The report is a privileged document to be used only by the SAES Standards Committee and by the school's governing body, administration, and faculty for internal purposes of the school. Therefore, confidentiality of information is of the utmost importance and expected. Report recipients are not authorized to release information contained in the report without the written consent of the Head of School. The school may choose to release the report or excerpts of the report to the larger school community.*

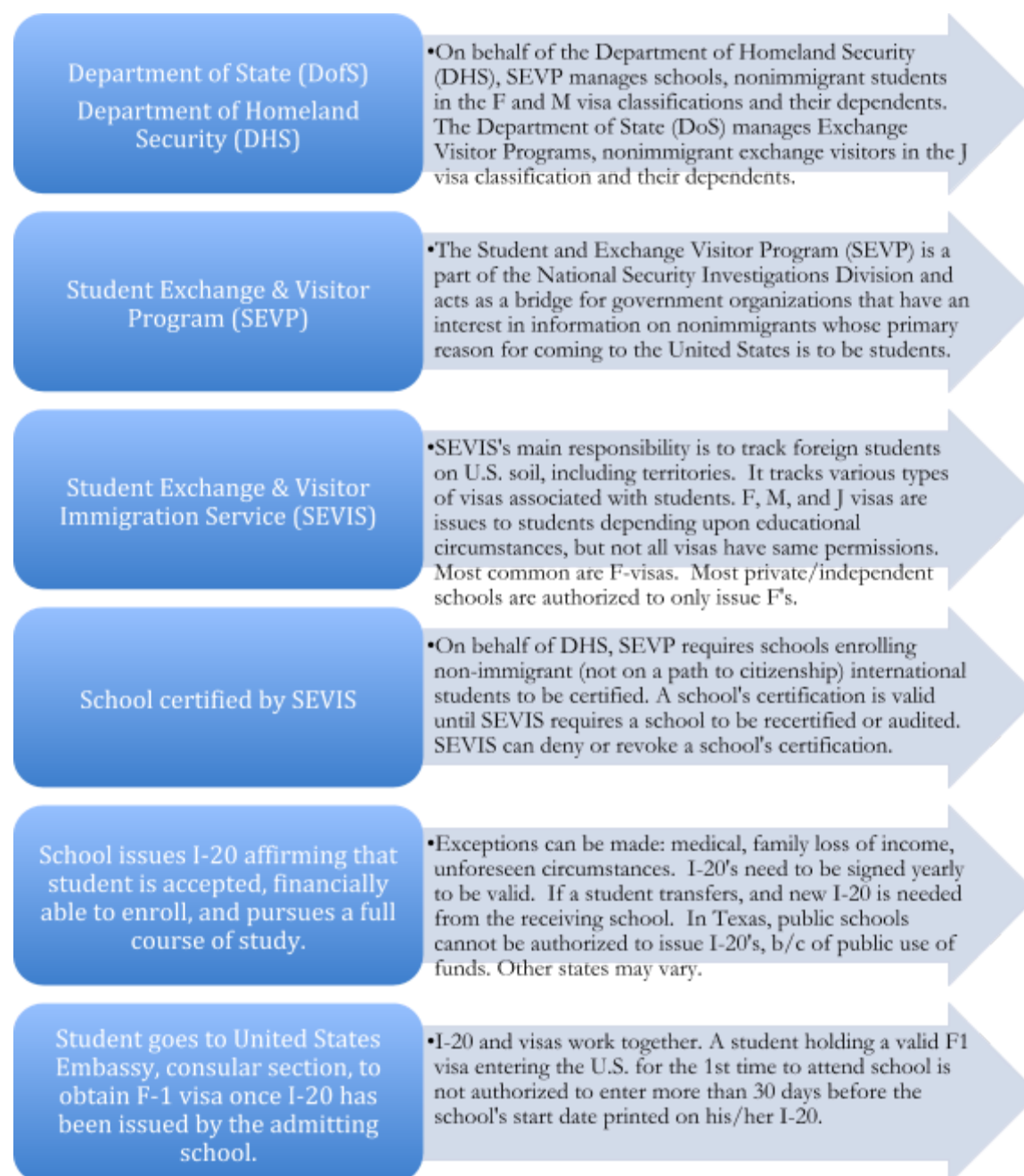
*The SAES Visiting Team's job was to assess the school's program and operation in light of the school's mission as reflected in the Self-Study and not to evaluate the professional personnel of the school. Visiting Team members have voluntarily expressed their individual and professional judgment in arriving at the observations, recommendations, and conclusions in the report and are not to be held accountable for injudicious interpretation or unauthorized use of this report. Therefore, the report is an objective description of the school's program and operation by trained and experience educators at the time of the on-site visit. Use of the report as an official assessment of any member of the administration, faculty, or staff would be a misuse of its intent and purpose.*

*Any recommendations on safety issues should be addressed as soon as is feasible. While the SAES Visiting Team may comment on conditions related to safety, this report is not to be construed as substituting for periodic inspections of the facilities as required by law and by principles of good practice in risk management gleaned from professional counsel to the school.*

## **HOMESTAY PROGRAMS, RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS & INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

### **Summary of the SEVIS Process for Schools Enrolling International Students**

The immigration laws are complex, with many exceptions and differing scenarios depending on student and family situation. Many schools that are enrolling international students either in boarding or homestay situations are finding it necessary to assign the work related to this enrollment to a staff member who is an expert in immigration protocols. However, the fundamental requirement for both day schools and schools with residential (boarding) programs that wish to admit international students is to be certified by the *Student Exchange and Visitor Immigration Service (SEVIS)*. Both Student Exchange & Visitor Program (SEVP) and Department of State use the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to track and monitor schools; exchange visitor programs; and F, M, and J nonimmigrants while they visit the United States and participate in the U.S. education system. The flowchart below shows how SEVIS and schools are connected:



There are many corollaries to the above scenario, and this summary is by no means a definitive explanation of all SEVIS functions and requirements. On another note, SEVIS now says that when a child turns 14, it is her/his responsibility to keep track of her/his personal immigration documents. Most school people know that it is prudent to provide support in this regard, and in fact, if the school is a SEVIS certified school, one of its required tasks it to track/log its international students. For this reason, SAES standards reflect these best practices. This document serves as an introduction only; if there are questions, it is advisable to contact an immigration specialist.

***Residential/Boarding programs*** are programs that enroll students who will live in dormitories either on campus or in an off-site boarding facility. Most of us understand the traditional boarding model, but recently some schools are undertaking a new version of boarding whereby they are join



with other schools to share the expense and responsibilities of dormitory/boarding facilities and programs. The visiting team's challenge will be to determine whether or not the school provides a safe and viable residential/boarding program to its students, domestic and international.

**Homestay programs** are programs that day schools may implement in order to enroll international students either as one- or partial-year exchange students or students on a path toward graduation from the school. Unlike residential/boarding programs where students stay in school dormitories, homestay programs involve students staying in host family homes. Homestay programs are becoming more prevalent in schools. These are programs where students, often international, stay in host family homes. Challenges for a visiting team are (1) to assess the viability of a homestay program, (2) to decide if the program suits the school's mission, and (3) to determine whether or not homestay situations are adequate, safe, and meeting students' needs and in compliance with requirements. There is not a one-size-fits-all guide to these programs, but the *SAES Standards* will help focus team members' thinking regarding best practices.

**Summary of Essential Capacities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Schools of the Future Committee  
NAIS Commission on Accreditation  
February 11, 2009**

**1. Analytical and Creative Thinking and Problem-Solving**

- Identify, manage, and address complex problems
- Detect bias, and distinguish between reliable and unsound information
- Control information overload
- Formulate meaningful questions
- Analyze and create and ideas and knowledge
- Use trial and error; devise and test solutions to problems
- Imagine alternatives
- Develop cross-disciplinary knowledge and perspectives
- Engage in sustained reasoning
- Synthesize and adapt
- Solve new problems that don't have rule-based solutions
- Use knowledge and creativity to solve complex “real-world” problems

**2. Complex Communication—Oral and Written**

- Understand and express ideas in two or more languages
- Communicate clearly to diverse audiences
- Listen attentively
- Speak effectively
- Write clearly and concisely—for a variety of audiences
- Explain information and compellingly persuade others of its implications

**3. Leadership and Teamwork**

- Initiate new ideas
- Lead through influence
- Build trust, resolve conflicts, and provide support for others
- Facilitate group discussions, forge consensus, and negotiate outcomes
- Teach, coach and counsel others
- Enlist help
- Collaborate sensitively and productively with people of varied backgrounds
- Coordinate tasks, manage groups, and delegate responsibilities
- Implement decisions and meet goals
- Share the credit

**4. Digital and Quantitative Literacy**

- Understand, use, and apply digital technologies
- Create digital knowledge and media
- Use multimedia resources to communicate ideas effectively in a variety of formats
- Master and use higher-level mathematics

- Understand traditional and emerging topics in math, science, and technology—environmental sciences, robotics, fractals, cellular automata, nanotechnology, and biotechnology

### **5. Global Perspective**

- Develop open-mindedness, particularly regarding the values, traditions of others
- Study and understand non-western history, politics, religion, and culture
- Develop facility with one or more international languages
- Use technology to connect with people and events globally
- Develop social and intellectual skills to navigate effectively across cultures
- Use 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to understand and address global issues
- Learn from, and work collaboratively with, individuals from diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue
- Leverage social and cultural differences to create new ideas and achieve success

### **6. Adaptability, Initiative, and Risk-Taking**

- Develop flexibility, agility, and adaptability
- Bring a sense of courage to unfamiliar situations
- Explore and experiment
- Work effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing priorities
- View failure as an opportunity to learn, and acknowledge that innovation involves small successes and frequent mistakes
- Cultivate an independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas, and strategies
- Develop entrepreneurial literacy
- Use creativity and innovation to produce things that are unique and that have value and meaning

### **7. Integrity and Ethical Decision-Making**

- Sustain an empathetic and compassionate outlook
- Foster integrity, honesty, fairness, and respect
- Exhibit moral courage in confronting unjust situations
- Act responsibly, with the interests and well-being of the larger community in mind
- Develop a fundamental understanding of emerging ethical issues and dilemmas regarding new media and technologies
- Make reasoned and ethical decisions in response to complex problems

## GENERAL THINGS TO CHECK DURING ON-SITE VISIT

### Records Information – Employee, Student, Graduate, and Financial Information Items/Areas to Check & Good Practice

SAES requires a school to have policies and facilities to maintain sufficient and accurate records for personnel, students, graduates, and financial information. Many schools interpret this as meaning that they must purchase fire-proof/water-proof cabinets. While this may be so for paper records, in view of advances in technology that provide for electronic storage, both on-site and off-site back-up of records also must be considered as a necessary practice. Schools are required to provide protection of some records in perpetuity. This may mean an agreement with the Church, another school, or alternate storage service (the Cloud, etc.). Written agreements of such are needed, as well as record-keeping, destruction, and access policies. *NOTE: Team members not only ask questions, but they should ask to see student, personnel, admissions, graduate, and financial files and carefully look through them.*

1. Student Attendance Records
2. Academic Records (for students all divisions, former and current)
3. “Teacher” Notes
4. Disciplinary Reports and Records (minor and major, suspension and expulsion)
5. Health/Medical Records (including accident reports)
6. Admissions/Re-enrollment Records
7. Family Financial/Tuition Assistance Records
8. Family/Alumnae/i Fundraising Information
9. College Admissions Records and Student Transcripts
10. Alumnae/i Records
11. Residential Life/Homestay Records (if applicable)
12. Financial Records (coordinate with team member responsible for Finance section)
13. School Archives
14. Personnel files – biographical, medical, and evaluative
15. Good Practice and Questions to Ask:

- a. Are the records complete and accurate?
- b. Are records kept cabinets, rooms, or closets that are protected from fire, water damage, and theft? If stored in file cabinets, are the cabinets fireproof and/or waterproof? (Some schools construct fire/waterproof closets or rooms. If so, check for sprinkler systems and water seepage). Are records kept in a secure, locked place with limited and controlled access to authorized persons only with procedures delineated for record review/access?
- c. Does the school have systems of data back-up, both on-site and off-site?
- d. Are there procedures and policies in place for best practice in handling, reviewing, and maintaining records? Biographical, academic/discipline, medical, immigration, and evaluative records must be store in separate files. Teacher/personal notes should NOT be stored in files.
- e. Does the school have a designated Archivist, a person responsible for the collection, maintenance, and storage or the School's archival records and historical items?
- f. Are records stored electronically? If so, how are they backed-up and protected?
- g. All school records may be subpoenaed in a court of law. Has the school protected itself appropriately? (For example, "teacher" notes and Admissions Committee action notes and teacher recommendations should NOT be filed with the student's official school academic records).
- h. Are medical records kept confidential and within the requirements of HIPPPAA/FERPA regulations, if applicable? Does the school know if it needs to comply with HIPPPAA/FERPA? Is medical information filed separately from student academic or personnel employment information? Who has access to these records and how is pertinent information disseminated?
- i. How are a teacher's, advisor's, etc. personal notes about students handled? (These are regarded as legal documents, and all school records may be subpoenaed in a court of law). Email messages may also be subpoenaed in a court of law. If email is used to report student issues and information or report parent conversation summaries, are there best practice procedures for doing so? (For example, some schools have a policy of writing in emails and handwritten summary notes only the facts, no opinions or assessments, regarding a student issue of parent conversation).
- j. Does the school have policies in place for the release of records, such as transcripts, in cases where the family/student accounts are not in good standing?
- k. How is student attendance reported? Is it carried out efficiently, so that at any time of the day, an administrator may determine the student's attendance?
- l. Does the school have a records retention and destruction policy?

NOTE: See the financial section of SAES *Standards* and SAES *Documents in Adherence to Standards* for details of what financial records are required. Team members not only ask questions, but they should ask to see student, personnel, admissions, graduate and financial files and carefully look through them.

## Required Number of School Days & Faculty/Staff Professional Development Days

In some states (such as Texas) waivers are granted for public schools for reasons of professional development, conferences, etc. In reality, very few public schools will be in attendance the exact number of days as required by the state. Private schools in some states (such as Texas) do not need to request waivers. SAES asks schools to follow their respective state guidelines regarding the number of instructional days per school year and make an effort to follow the calendar of the local public school district. SAES asks schools to aim for at least 175 instructional days during the school year, including early release days, assuming that schools will have enough faculty/staff professional development days to make up the remaining 5 days to meet the 180-day requirement of the state (TEA in Texas). SAES feels that it is not advisable for a school to drop below 172 instructional days, even if the combined number of days totals 180. If a school does not comply with this expectation, the OSV Team Report should reflect this, and a recommendation for compliance should be made.

NOTE: According to TPSA, the following change to Texas school time went into effect in 2016 – HB 2610 and private schools, 180 days vs. 75,600 hours. A bill that passed in the 84<sup>th</sup> session has some private schools wondering about applicability for private school daily scheduling. It was designed to provide flexibility in scheduling and daily function for public schools that may suffer an interruption for weather or other emergency situations. It replaces the minimum 180 day (with allowance for a waiver for professional development time) statute with one requiring 75,600 minutes. This allows public schools to schedule longer days to avoid extra make-up days. The TEA confirmed that there was never any legislative intent to affect private schools.

## Licensing

SAES accredits programs for children 3 year old and older. If a SAES accredited school enrolls children under 3 years old, the programs must be licensed in accordance with the state licensing requirements. SAES will not accredit programs not sponsored by the school that are housed on the school campus. Though SAES does not accredit programs for children under three years old, the impact of these programs on the school's finances, facilities and safety, and educational program shall be addressed in the school's self-study and will be observed and reviewed by visiting team at the time of the on-site visit. Schools should check with the state licensing office regarding program licensing requirements.

## Degreed Teachers

The SAES standard reads: *E.6. All administrators, faculty and staff shall be qualified for their positions and responsibilities by education and experience, and shall engage in ongoing professional development. Teachers of children up to and including age 3 shall hold no less than a Child Development Certificate (CDC or CDA) or an Associate's Degree (AAS) reflecting specialization in child development. Teachers of children age 4 and older shall have no less than a baccalaureate degree (BA/BS/BFA, etc.) in an appropriate field. Assistants and extended care staff are not required to hold college degrees but should have other child-care related experiences.*

Most of the time, teachers of children age 4 and older are degreed. Where a school is out of compliance is usually in preschools, where the program has grown over the years from a church-run mother's day out into a preschool program. If a school is out of compliance with this standard, the school may still be accredited, as long as this is the exception and not the norm, and it has a plan and good faith effort to meet these requirements in a reasonable amount of time. If the Head of School (aka school director) is not degreed, the stakes are a bit higher. Again, a plan to fall into compliance with this standard in a short amount of time is needed. It is the Team's assessment of the urgency of need in these cases. [NOTE: SAES would not recommended the hiring of a Head of School who is not degreed from the start.]

If a school is not in compliance with this standard, a recommendation needs to be made. It is good practice for a school to then devise a plan for compliance that might include underwriting or reimbursing expenses associated with achievement of the degree in a negotiated agreement requiring continuance in order to receive funding.

### **Programs that Operate Outside of the Regular School Day or Program**

Many schools operate programs that occur during evenings, weekends, before or after regular school hours, or in the summer. Others may operate a daycare for young children that are either part of the school program or for-profit and apart from the school. In these cases, keep in mind the following. IF the school has a summer program, it is necessary to mention this program in the OSV Team Report.

1. SAES recommends calling programs that supervise students before and/or following regular school hours "extended day" programs rather than "before or after-school care." This implies the program is an extension of the school day, rather than just baby-sitting.
2. Parents expect that when a team visits a school these programs are considered, and when SAES accredits a school, it includes these programs. True, programs for students under three years old must be state licensed are not actually accredited, but this is a detail that parents, current and prospective, often overlook. Therefore, when a team is on campus for the visit, these programs should be observed, and the operational aspects of the programs (enrollment numbers, budget, staffing, safety, etc.) should be reviewed.
3. SAES will not accredit non-school sponsored programs housed on the school campus. SAES does not accredit day care type programs that are similar in nature to for-profit care centers; however, mention of the existence of such a program should be made in the OSV Team Report.
4. Since the SAES On-Site Visit Team is unable to observe any summer programs, the On-Site Visit Team Report will not comment on the quality of such programs; however, the report will address the impact of these programs on school operations (income from revenue stream, additional insurance coverage, wear-and-tear on facilities, etc.). SAES will accredit a summer program, provided program documentation is submitted and a site visit is made to

the school in the summer. The summer program observer is likely to be a member of the original visiting team who lives locally or by a member of the SAES Standards Committee or staff.

### **International Students/Homestay Programs**

See section in this Guide on SEVIS Certification, international students, homestay programs.

### **Health & Safety Regulations and Codes**

It is highly unlikely that anyone other than a state health and safety inspector knows all codes and regulations for schools. That is why SAES created the *School Safety Checklist*, which provides a comprehensive list of best practices, obvious regulations, and common mandated codes. The *Checklist* is there to raise health and safety awareness and is to be signed by the Head of School.

One particularly foggy area is in regard to asbestos. Most schools need documentation on file that an official AHERA inspection has been completed and subsequent updates need to be done. Unfortunately, because of cost and perhaps inconvenience, few schools follow through with renewal every three years with the rationale being that building materials with asbestos cannot be purchased these days, so nothing in the school changes from one inspection to the next. If you find this to be the case, make a recommendation that the school look into what is needed for compliance with AHERA inspections.

The State of Oklahoma requires its non-public schools to report drill results to the Oklahoma Security Institute. This is to be done online following each drill. It is not something that SAES monitors, but as a Team Leader, having awareness of it is important.

Be aware of current *Epi-pen* legal requirements.

### **IRS Regulations for Ordained Clergy Pension Plan**

If a school pays pension assessments to the Church Pension Fund on behalf of ordained Episcopal clergy in lieu of making a contribution to the school's pension plan, the school's pension plan should include a provision expressly excluding ordained Episcopal clergypersons on staff who participate in the Church Pension Fund from participation in the school's pension plan. If the clergy participating in the plan are not expressly excluded under the terms of the school plan, the school's plan may be in violation of the provisions of the IRS code governing these plans. This could result in penalties and the requirement to make additional contributions to the school pension plan on behalf of Episcopal clergy, on top of the assessment paid to the Church plan.



## **Diocesan Canons**

Please be familiar with the Diocesan Canons for the diocese in which the school resides. These can be found on the diocese website if the school does not provide them to the Visiting Team. Areas likely to be sensitive are (1) whether or not the school CAN BE separately incorporated, and (2) the authority of the Rector/Vestry in relation to the Head of School and Board of Trustees. If questions arise, please speak to the SAES staff person on the team for clarification and game plan.

## **Texas Open Carry, Concealed Carry, and Private Schools**

There is confusion about the gun laws that took effect on January 1, 2016. The implications of this law still is being clarified for Episcopal schools, as it is not only the state mandates that impact schools, but also diocesan regulations, and the interpretation of school property (as in schools with residential programs). At this point, while college campuses have some decisions to make, there is no change to policies for K-12 private schools, which may choose to allow or deny open or concealed carry on campus, depending upon the decision-making entity for that school. For Episcopal schools, that likely would be the diocese. If a school chooses to ban guns, there is an “official” sign, with mandated wording, style, and campus placement that may be posted. School officials may also inform visitors that guns are not allowed or distribute this fact in printed form. However, any licensed childcare facility may only allow guns to be carried by commissioned police officers. If a private school hires armed security personnel that are NOT commissioned police officers, then they are not allowed to enter the licensed childcare facility area armed. TPSA is in discussion with child care licensing to see if a level 4 security officer may be allowed to carry weapons into licensed child care facilities.

Clearly, this matter has many questions in need of clarification. Schools are advised to make sure they are aware of any canons passed by their Diocesan Convention on the topic. In addition, SAES highly advises that a school contact its legal counsel and diocese regarding this law and how it affects the school community

## **Financial Viability of the School**

The issue of accepting re-enrollment contracts when there is question about a school’s financial viability (i.e., ability to open the following year) should be reviewed and discussed by the Visiting Team if this is found to be the case during an On-Site Visit.

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**RESOURCE:****SCHOOL VITAL SIGNS**

Today's schools have many challenges. To remain a healthy school in today's educational marketplace and to provide a quality education for students, school leaders must wrestle with issues of:

- Marketing and enrollment;
- Fundraising and other advancement efforts;
- Faculty and staff compensation, development, and nurture;
- Overall program assessment, development, and relevancy;
- Facility and equipment maintenance and repair;
- Budgeting and long-term financial planning;
- Board-Head relationships;
- School-Church relations, and others.

The following items are indicators that a school should be able to sustain vital aspects of its operations, or that immediate steps should be taken to address the danger signs of inadequacy.

1. **Faculty salaries** are at least **85-90% of the local ISD** salaries (i.e., if those salaries are in line with national tables), and **basic benefits** (health and retirement) are offered to enhance the likelihood of recruiting the quality of faculty and staff that parents expect, or, there is a solid plan in place to deal with this vital issue.
2. **Professional development** is a significant investment on an annual basis in order to enhance a sound, up-to-date and relevant program. Otherwise, the instructional program, over time, will be marginal.
3. **A pro-active marketing plan** is in place, and there is a **school-wide** (faculty, staff, Board) **understanding** of the importance and complexities of both internal and external **enrollment management**. This includes on-going and meaningful communication with current parents to reaffirm their choice to enroll their children in the school, and also includes admission guidelines that are in line with the school's mission. Parents should be provided with appropriate "bragging points" as substantial evidence of quality work being done there.

4. **Technological resources**, including the school's **website**, are continually evaluated for relevance and accuracy, and all information is kept current.
5. **Facility and grounds maintenance needs** are addressed promptly, and every effort is made to create an attractive, beautifully maintained, clean and safe environment.
6. The school invests a significant amount of attention and funding to educate faculty regarding the importance and mechanics of **current best educational practices**, such as **differentiating instruction**, and offers an enriched and up-to-date curriculum that clearly defines content, skills, and assessment strategies to substantiate the school's instructional program. Academic leaders recognize the necessity of addressing the **vastly diverse aptitudes, abilities, and learning styles** of current students.
7. The **size of the administrative staff** is adequate to effectively address the daily operational needs and normal demands of its constituents. Otherwise, not only will constituent needs and expectations be compromised, but the mission of the school cannot be fully realized when the staff is consumed with management details—with being reactive rather than proactive.
8. The **Board and administrators lead the school community** in understanding and supporting the Episcopal character of the school's mission and are able to differentiate it from other private and/or church schools. The faculty and staff are also able to succinctly explain the “value-added” elements of Episcopal identity to parents, thus contributing to a culture of promoting the school as a unified and supportive community.
9. The **Board has a clear understanding of what is expected of it** as a whole and as individuals within the governing body. Board members recognize their strategic responsibility for the continued viability of the school, and avoid becoming overly involved in the daily operational matters. Expectations and terms for Board Standing Committees and task forces are outlined in writing.
10. The Board has a fair and constructive process for ongoing **evaluation of the Head of School and of the Board itself**. This process clearly outlines the roles, responsibilities, and basic expectations, both individually and corporately. Without this clarity for both the Board and the Head, either could interfere with the other's effectiveness or dilute the other's authority, eventually compromising this vitally important relationship.
11. The school has a procedure to **annually review and evaluate the efficacy of all of its programs**. If there is resistance to “retiring” outdated programs when new/innovative ones are added, or when enrollment does not justify their continuation, not only will the program (and the staff to support it) become unaffordable, but also it can become cluttered and disconnected.
12. The school **engages in strategic thinking** on an ongoing basis. It develops and regularly updates a **strategic plan** and accompanying **strategic financial plan**.

13. **Financial management is professional, timely, and includes regular oversight** by a competent treasurer, Finance Committee, and the full Board. Transparency, accuracy, timeliness, and inclusivity are key factors in maintaining sound financial operations. Financial operations include the following characteristics:
- a. Cash reserves are adequate to meet at least 120 days operations budget in anticipation of emergencies.  
Measure of liquidity =  $[(\text{total unrestricted cash} + \text{unrestricted cash equivalents}) \div \text{total annual cash operating cost}] \times 365$
  - b. Payroll taxes are current.
  - c. The Board is advised monthly on the status of the finances and understands exactly where the school stands financially.
  - d. The financial operation of the school is audited or reviewed by an independent CPA on an annual basis.
  - e. The Head of School has access to all financial information, and regularly discusses with the finance officer (or business manager) and Board treasurer the state of the school's fiscal health. The school does not use next year's money to pay the current year's debts as a regular operational strategy. If this is a current practice, a solid plan is in place to reverse this trend.
  - f. The budget is no less than 85-90% hard-income (tuition, standard fees) driven rather than relying on soft (variable and undependable) income (Annual Fund, etc.) to meet its budget.
  - g. Policies concerning fundraisers are in place, naming the school as the recipient and manager of all funds generated in support of *any* school program.
  - h. The school takes seriously its risk management: adequacy of insurance coverages, plan for safety and security (crisis response plan, hazard mitigation).
  - i. If the school carries long-term debt, it has a schedule of debt management. Benchmark: An amount that is less than 1-year's tuition/student.
  - j. The school has a clear picture of its solvency. A current ratio (ration of what is cash and what can be turned into cash within the next 12 months to what is owed and payable during the next 12 months) of 1.1 is typical.
  - k. The school maintains a financial dashboard based on history and trends, whereby it tracks at least enrollment, cash, current ratio, debt, fundraising, total net assets (sum total of what the school owns in physical plant and investments), and compensation.
  - l. The school develops and regularly reviews a multi-year financial plan.