



# ***Accreditation Handbook 2025***

*The mission of the Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools is to lead, to nurture, and to unify Episcopal schools in order to advance educational excellence within the faith community of the Episcopal Church.*

**[www.swaes.org](http://www.swaes.org)**

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# **I. Understanding Accreditation**

## **Rationale for Accreditation**

Accreditation blends external quality control (compliance with standards and best practices) with an assessment of the degree of adherence to a school's mission. Accreditation:

- Attests to a school's excellence through provable and respected standards of quality.
- Employs a process of evaluation that combines internal self-scrutiny with an external review by a team of professional peers. Both the internal and external reviews bring helpful and accurate observations, comments, and suggestions for the purposes of validation and improvement.
- Assists the school in better realizing its own mission and objectives by enhancing the school's unique character.
- Helps refine school goals and provides direction and focus for future planning.
- Strengthens the voice of all SAES schools by speaking collectively for the interests of Episcopal schools.
- Is an essential credential for some foundation fundraising, SEVIS certification, some Episcopal dioceses, and other state and federal programs.

## **Being an Accredited Episcopal School**

Accreditation is earned through a voluntary process that is greater than any one event. Standards have been developed carefully over time to indicate best practices in the ongoing organization and management of Episcopal schools. The process provides a framework for open inquiry into the school's philosophy, policies, and procedures. It allows professional peers to make observations, suggestions, commendations, and recommendations that will benefit the school in its continuing quest to improve. This quality evaluation process involves all constituent groups that form the school community.

## **Recognition of Accredited Status**

The Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools (SAES) serves Episcopal schools—richly diverse in location, size, and scope—throughout the states of Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. SAES is the only Episcopal accrediting association in the United States. As a member of the International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA), SAES has voluntarily submitted to a rigorous and impartial review of its accreditation program and demonstrated adherence to the Council's Criteria for Effective Independent School Accreditation Practices. SAES is commended by ICAISA for the quality of the Association's accreditation program for its member schools.

SAES is recognized by state agencies and by ten Episcopal dioceses within the six states served by SAES. Accreditation with SAES is recognized by the state accreditation commissions in Texas – Texas Private School Accreditation Commission (TEPSAC) and Oklahoma - Oklahoma Private School Accreditation Commission (OPSAC); as well as the New Mexico Department of Education.

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## II. SAES Affiliation Types

- **Member Schools** are schools who have applied for membership using the Application for SAES Membership, have paid initial membership dues, and meet the membership criteria described below and in the SAES By-Laws:
  - Be affiliated with The Episcopal Church (TEC), which is part of the Anglican Communion. The school shall be a parish day school, a school owned or administered by a diocese or religious order or group of parishes, or an independent school which espouses the faith and worship of TEC as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, and operates with the knowledge and consent of the Bishop of the diocese.
  - Be a non-profit institution 501(c)(3) or part of a non-profit institution.
  - Implement employment and admissions policies, in keeping with its mission and culture, and employ practices that reflect the Episcopal tradition of respect for the dignity of every human being. The school promotes an equitable, just, and inclusive community, and its policies and practices shall reflect accordingly. Unlawful discrimination has no place in SAES schools. A school is expected to abide by a non-discrimination policy that complies with IRS regulations.
- **Applicant Schools** are schools that have applied to begin work towards accreditation and meet the additional criteria below:
  - Retain its membership in the association.
  - Meet its SAES financial (membership & accreditation dues and fees) obligations.
  - Demonstrate commitment to ongoing school improvement and fulfill the requirements of the SAES accreditation process.
  - Complete the SAES Annual Report.
- **Accredited Schools** are schools that have fulfilled the accreditation requirements and met the SAES Standards as determined by the SAES Standards Committee and the SAES Board of Trustees. Accreditation is maintained through the successful completion of all requirements during the 10-year accreditation cycle and the regular submission of requested data and reports.

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## III. SAES Accreditation Processes

### Process for a School Seeking Initial Accreditation

The SAES Standards Committee has established the following process to seek accreditation:

1. A member or non-member school initiates the process in a phone conversation with the Executive Director or the Director of Accreditation.
2. A non-member school must first join SAES as a member to apply for accreditation.
3. With the approval of the Director of Accreditation, a member school submits an application and the application fee.

4. One SAES staff member and one Standards member visit the school to determine accreditation viability (travel costs are paid by the applicant school). The visit includes:
  - A tour of the complete facilities and brief classroom observations.
  - A meeting with school leadership to discuss administrative duties, school operations, and the accreditation process.
  - A meeting with members of the Board and the Rector (if applicable) to discuss governance practices and explain SAES Standards.
  - A discussion with the Head about expectations for both the Initial and Complete Documents in Adherence to Standards (DAS), and the Self-Study.
5. The Applicant School submits the **DAS for Applicant Schools** to the Director of Accreditation.
6. The Standards Committee votes to grant Preliminary Accreditation and sets a date by which the **Self-Study** and **On-Site Visit** must be completed, not to exceed 2 ½ years from the date preliminary accreditation was granted.
7. The Director of Accreditation and Head of School establish the date of the initial **On-Site Visit**.

**Note:** Preliminary Accreditation cannot be extended beyond the initial period except in exceptional circumstances which are beyond the control of the school.

### **Process for a School Seeking Re-accreditation**

In the 9th year following the On-Site Visit, a school conducts a new **Self-Study**. In the fall of that year, the Director of Accreditation will contact the Head of School to establish the date for the **On-Site Visit** in the following school year.

### **Process for Schools Seeking Initial Dual Accreditation**

For initial dual accreditation with another accrediting association, schools located within the SAES region must meet the criteria of both associations. An application for membership, the associated fee, and a letter from the Head of School are sent to the SAES office. The letter provides written notification of the school's interest in dual accreditation and indicates the other association that already accredits the school. SAES will work with the school and the other association to coordinate a joint Self-Study, visiting team, pre-visit, and on-site visit. In most instances, one Association will be designated as the "Lead" association for the purpose of coordinating the on-site visit.

Each association will independently make its determination on accreditation. After the visit, if SAES is the lead association, all SAES accreditation requirements, including submission of annual and interim reports, must be fulfilled. If SAES is not the lead association, SAES may adjust its schedule and accept interim reports required by the other association as acceptable substitutes for the SAES interim reports to minimize duplication of efforts. SAES reserves the right to require reports on Episcopal identity and additional reports or documents it deems necessary.

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## IV. The Ten-Year Cycle

### Year Nine - The Self-Study Year

The most comprehensive step of the accreditation process is the school's **Self-Study**, an opportunity for self-reflection and evaluation. The school should allow six to twelve months to complete this stage of the process. The Self-Study is closely linked to the Standards of the Association and asks the school to assess its compliance to the Standards, and to describe, evaluate, and reflect on the school's Mission, Episcopal Identity, Governance, Organization & Administration, Teaching & Learning, Fiscal Responsibility, Facilities, Safety & Security, and Health & Well-being.

### Year Ten - SAES Annual Report and the On-Site Visit Year

The **on-site visit** to the school by a **Visiting Team** of Episcopal school educators from other SAES schools takes place on an arranged date chosen by the Head of School. On-site visits typically begin on a Sunday afternoon and end on the following Wednesday afternoon. For reasons of objectivity and balance, the SAES Director of Accreditation is responsible for the identification and selection of team leaders and team members. The SAES On-Site Visiting Team's responsibility is to assess the school's program and operation considering the school's mission as reflected in the Self-Study and not to evaluate the personnel of the school. The report is an objective description of the school's program and operation and whether they meet SAES Standards, along with commendations and recommendations for improvement, by trained and experienced educators at the time of the on-site visit.

### Year One - SAES Annual Report and The Head of School Letter

The **Head of School Letter** is submitted in the first year following the On-Site Visit. The letter includes the manner in which the school plans to address the overarching recommendations made by the visiting team and any planning that has resulted as a follow-up to the Report of the On-Site Visiting Team.

### Years Two-Four - SAES Annual Report and Working on Recommendations

No report is scheduled during these years unless a school's accreditation level is provisional or probationary and the Standards Committee has required a Special Interim Report, or there is a need for a Substantive Change Report. Planning and work done on the individual section recommendations made in the Report of the On-Site Visiting Team prepares the school for the next step in the process.

### Year Five - SAES Annual Report and Five-Year Interim Report

The emphasis in the **Five-Year Interim Report** is the status of all recommendations listed in the Report of the On-Site Visiting Team. Additionally, the school will submit documents, copies of newly formed policies, and answers to questions about Episcopal Identity, Governance and Financial Management, and Instructional Quality.

## Years Six-Eight - SAES Annual Report and Continued Work Toward School Improvement

During these years, schools must continue to submit Annual Reports, plus any Special Interim Reports **that** may be required by the Standards Committee. In addition, schools are encouraged to continue addressing the recommendations from the Report of the On-Site Visiting Team, and to engage in Strategic Planning for the future.

## Year Nine - SAES Annual Report and the Self-Study Year

The cycle is complete, and schools once again begin their **Self-Study** for reflection and program evaluation.

In all years of the cycle, accredited schools are expected to submit the SAES Annual Report, which collects important statistical data from schools and is necessary in order for SAES to comply with various state, diocesan, and ICAISA requirements.

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## V. The Accreditation Process Begins

SAES is committed to helping schools throughout the accreditation process by providing resources and information necessary to understand and complete the entire process. Many of those resources are linked throughout this handbook, and other resources are on the SAES website for your review.

The Director of Accreditation, as well as an assigned Team Leader, will work together with the Head of School as the school prepares the Self-Study and plans for the On-Site Visit. Considerations which may affect the size of the team or special requirements for the On-Site Visit will include school size and scope, factors of differentiation, and plans, if any, for major changes to the school's leadership or campus.

In the summer prior to Year 9, a personalized template will be sent to the Head of School with complete instructions for writing the Self-Study. A date will be chosen for the following year to host an On-Site Visit, and SAES will choose a team of peers to serve as the **On-Site Visiting Team** to the school. The team will include the **Team Leader**, who is typically a member of the SAES Standards Committee, an SAES Staff Member, and a number of peer educators. In addition, the SAES Executive Director may attend part of the visit at SAES's expense. The size of the team will be determined by SAES according to factors including school size, number of divisions, and campus size and arrangement. Generally, team sizes follow the schedule below but may be increased if the School hosts more than one campus:

School Enrollment	Team Size (excluding the Director of Accreditation)
Up to 85	4
86-150	5
151-250	6
251-350	7
351-450	8
451-550	9
551-650	10
651+	11

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## VI. The Self-Study, Documents in Adherence to Standards, and Preparation for the On-Site Visit

The **Self-Study** offers a school a means of engaging in self-reflection and planning, whereby the school responds to standards-based questions, provides evidence of compliance to Standards, and identifies strengths and areas of need. In doing so, the school demonstrates compliance and current practice.

- **Self-Study:** The school is notified of its obligation to begin the Self-Study approximately 24 months prior to the expiration of their accreditation. A template is sent with detailed instructions of how to begin and eventually complete the Self-Study.
- **Documents In Adherence To Standards (DAS):** The Self-Study template contains a list of documents that must be completed and ready for the team upon their arrival. These Documents in Adherence to Standards are evidence of the school's compliance with SAES Standards and of the school's demonstration that it is employing best practices in its policies and operations. It is important to locate, update, and/or create these throughout the process. This often includes Board planning and participation regarding school policies.
- **Preparation For The On-Site Visit:** The date for the visit is usually set 12-18 months ahead of time, allowing the school adequate time to organize and prepare for the team, including securing the budget for the visit, and planning to host a team of colleagues on campus for a Sunday-Wednesday visit.



## Instructions for the Head of School and Initial Planning

Upon receipt of the **individualized Self-Study template**, take the time to read it thoroughly to understand the work and the process ahead. The school's Self-Study template will be formatted as a Google Doc, but you may request a Word template if preferred. You are not required to use the template, but it does provide ease of compilation.

- Download the Standards of the Association, Documents in Adherence to Standards, Surveys, and Profiles and Information Forms (Appendix A - G). Make certain that you are familiar with each and can access them easily throughout the process.
- Begin a **budget** for the Self-Study/On-Site Visit. Expenses listed are estimates and vary by the size of the team, accommodations provided, and the location of the school.

SAMPLE BUDGET CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Costs of writing, organizing, and publishing the Self-Study (ex. files boxes for organizing DAS, office supplies, copying). Note that SAES does NOT require printed copies of the Self-Study to be sent in advance to team members, but does request two printed copies available in the workroom during the Self-Study.	\$100
Travel expenses for Team Leader's pre-visit (airfare, car mileage, hotel)	\$300-\$700
Team member travel, accommodations, and food expenses (hotel, airfare, airport parking, local transportation, driving mileage, other reimbursements)	~\$1000-\$1400 per team member
Reception for Visiting Team - Sunday afternoon	\$100-\$500
Materials and supplies for Team workroom (see suggested list)	\$50-\$75
Technology costs (ex. extension cords and equipment necessary for connectivity)	\$50-\$150

If the human resources of the school allow, the Head of School is encouraged to delegate the tasks of the Self-Study process to a **Steering Committee**. While the Head of School should be a member of this committee and ultimately has responsibility for the entire accreditation process, s/he is encouraged to delegate tasks. A key element in the completion of the Self-Study is engaging constituents from all areas of the school community, and the Steering Committee is a wonderful way to involve administrators,

faculty, staff, trustees, clergy, vestry, parents, students and alumni (if age-appropriate and applicable) in the writing and planning of the process.

Heads are encouraged to appoint a staff member to serve as the **Logistics (Hospitality) Coordinator**, so many of the tasks relating to accommodations, meals, and transportation for the visiting team may be handled by that person.

With the help of the Steering Committee Chair, create **sub-committees** and make assignments for Self-Study section writing responsibilities. Create a calendar of dates for committee meetings and due dates for sections of the Self-Study. The Steering Committee Chair oversees completion of specific sections of the Self-Study; however, the Head of School is the final editor of the entire report.

Begin the process with the required **constituent surveys** to inform the work of the subcommittees. (Stand-Alone preschools are not required to do an alumni survey.) Surveys include the Parent Survey, Board Survey, Faculty and Staff Survey, and the Alumni Survey. Alumni surveys can be conducted with either the students themselves or parents of alumni, depending on the age of the student. SAES can be contracted to do the survey and assemble the results for you. Contact the SAES office for more information.

Create a **timeline** for completion of the Self-Study, DAS, planning for the On-Site Visit, and other required information. A sample timeline can be found [here](#).

## It's Time to Get to Work

Now that the framework and schedule for accreditation has been set, the work can begin. The first meetings with each of the constituent groups are important to the success of the entire accreditation process. The Head of School sets the tone for how others will view the work and the importance of the tasks ahead. Gather for the explicit purpose of “kicking off” the process and helping others to understand what is happening. Make sure everyone knows that this is a team effort with input from all constituents.

Schools may contact the SAES Director of Accreditation (DoA) to arrange an **optional accreditation pre-visit** to the school. The DoA pre-visit may take the form of a simple accreditation kick-off event or a more intensive pre-visit consultation to help the school prepare for the Self-Study and the On-Site Visit. A DoA accreditation pre-visit could include meetings with the Head of School; the Board of Trustees, Board Officers, or members of the Board and Vestry; and faculty and staff, and could be crafted to meet the individual needs and circumstances of the specific school. Schools are responsible for travel and lodging expenses associated with a pre-visit, as necessary, plus an additional consultation fee, if any, to be determined in advance by the SAES Executive Director based on the scope of the proposed pre-visit.

Present assignments for each subcommittee along with the timeline and deadlines for work to be accomplished. Small subcommittees (each in charge of one section of the Self-Study) work best, and each is encouraged to collect input from additional members of the school community. Subcommittees are successful with a clear timeline of assignments and deadlines for their work.

The subcommittee or members assigned to the collection and organization of the Documents in Adherence to Standards (DAS) should begin their work very early in the process, as the locating, updating and creating of these essential documents is time-consuming and often includes Board policies.

This subcommittee should include, but is not limited to, the Head of School, administrative assistant, Business Manager/CFO, and a Board member.

Several of the required documents, Appendix E - Faculty/Staff Profile, Appendix F - Faculty/Staff Information Form and Appendix G - Enrollment Profile should be current and completed at the beginning of the year in which the school hosts the On-Site Visit.

## **Writing the Self-Study and Early Planning for the On-Site Visit**

### **Self-Study**

Writing a Self-Study is a months-long process that involves many people and much coordination. A well-developed timeline will help to manage meetings and deadlines, and ensure that the Self-Study is well written, edited, and published in a timely manner.

The **Self-Study Template** details each individual section's instructions. It is important to have multiple contributors to each of the responses, but one person should be assigned to the writing of each section in order to arrange and give one voice to reflect the school's practices sufficiently.

Once the Self-Study is complete, the Head of School reads the report in its entirety to be certain it is a true reflection of the school and its program and practices. This step may result in further writing or editing, so plan accordingly.

The final section of the Self-Study template is the Documents in Adherence to Standards (**DAS Checklist**). While SAES expects all documents that are listed at the end of the Self-Study to be made available to the visiting team at the time of the On-Site Visit, if a document is not available, the school is to indicate the status of that document before publishing the Self-Study.

### **Early On-Site Visit Planning**

The Head of School and Logistics Coordinator begin to plan for the On-Site Visit months before the visit itself. One of the most important planning aspects is the lodging for team members at a nearby hotel. It is a good idea to make a visit to the hotel to inspect the rooms and hotel layout prior to booking the rooms. Payment arrangements are made by the school, so that team members are not responsible for payment upon checking out. All room costs are borne by the school. Team members are responsible for incidental items, special services, and room service and will be asked to supply a personal credit card upon check-in to cover these costs. The following are necessary:

- Each person must have a separate room with reliable Wi-Fi.
- The Team will need a hotel meeting room Sunday afternoon and Monday and Tuesday evenings. This space should provide an opportunity for all team members to meet, discuss, and work on the report after school hours. The meeting room must have reliable Wi-Fi. For small teams, the Team Leader's room could be a suite with a worktable in lieu of a separate workroom for the team. Discuss this with the Team Leader during the Pre-Visit.
- Plan for the team to have a private workroom at the school. This will be the team's headquarters, and must be a lockable, dedicated space, not used by any other group during the time the team is there. This space must be large enough to allow team members to spread out the various

materials and laptop computers that they will use to create the **Report of the On-Site Visiting Team**. The room must have reliable Wi-Fi and electrical connections.

A sample visit schedule will assist in planning for the actual visit. Things to remember and plan:

- Be certain that there will be no special events, such as concerts, field trips, or major fundraising events during the time of the visit. If at all possible, faculty and staff members should avoid being away at conferences or other off-campus meetings during the visit. Faculty should not give tests during these days.
- Arrange for part-time faculty and staff members to be present sometime during the team's visit.
- Make sure that a typical chapel/worship service is scheduled when the team is present. It may be necessary to rearrange chapel days since the team is not present on Thursday or Friday.
- Arrange for the different individuals and groups listed in the sample schedule to meet with team members at various times during the visit.

Meals are arranged by the school according to the following schedule:

- Sunday afternoon reception at the school with light refreshments
- Sunday dinner at a local restaurant
- Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday breakfast, preferably at the hotel
- Monday and Tuesday lunch at the school. These are usually in conjunction with constituent meetings.
- Monday and Tuesday working dinner ordered into the hotel

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## VII. Final Steps

### Completing the Self-Study

Throughout the process, committees have written, edited, and rewritten according to the template instructions. Now, it's time to **format and publish the Self-Study**. This part requires coordination and organization to ensure that the Self-Study is in its best form.

- Create a PDF of each of the 8 school response sections, as well as of the introduction, conclusion, and appendices, and send to [ccarter@swaes.org](mailto:ccarter@swaes.org).
- Create a PDF of the entire report as one document file, pages numbered, and email to Pat Blevins ([pblevins@swaes.org](mailto:pblevins@swaes.org)) and [ccarter@swaes.org](mailto:ccarter@swaes.org). The Self-Study must be complete and ready for the team's review at least **six weeks before the On-Site Visit**.

### Organizing the Documents in Adherence to Standards (DAS)

A **DAS checklist** is the last document in the school's Self-Study template. While SAES expects all DAS that are listed at the end of the Self-Study to be complete and ready for examination, if a document is not available, the school is to indicate the status of that document. Organize the printed documents in a "documents box" with one file folder per document clearly labeled by Self-Study section letter, item number, and document name. The document box is to be available in the team's workroom at the time of

the On-Site Visit. Schools may also choose to link digital documents to the documents listed in the DAS or to use a shared Google Drive to assemble the documents and share the folder with the Visiting Team. Contact [ccarter@swaes.org](mailto:ccarter@swaes.org) for an embeddable list if choosing this option.

## Final Planning for the On-Site Visit

Several weeks before the visit:

- Send the **Team Contact, Accommodations, and Travel Form** (see On-Site Visit Documents on Accreditation Resources Page) to all team members. Team members have been instructed by SAES to make their own travel arrangements and to do so in a timely manner in order to take advantage of lower flight costs. Once the school receives the information from each member, plan schedules for airport pick-up and drop-off, transportation to and from the school each day, and meals at night. Provide contact information for all in case of a delayed flight. Should a team member need to arrive on Saturday or depart after Wednesday because of flight schedules that necessitate an extra night on either side of the On-Site Visit, the school bears the cost. Personal expenses and costs of extending one's visit for personal reasons are the responsibility of the team member.
- **Verify hotel arrangements** to ensure that all preparations are in order.
- **Confirm meal and hospitality arrangements.** Many schools find that parent volunteers are willing to help with light refreshments in the team's school workroom. Refreshments need not be extravagant; healthy choices are preferred. Coffee and non-alcoholic beverages in the hotel workroom are appreciated.
- Plan for **school workroom** set-up.
- Make sure that the school facilities are prepared for the team's visit. Signs outside classrooms identifying the teacher, subject, and grade are helpful.
- Make arrangements to reimburse team members for travel expenses before their departure from your school. Team members will file an SAES reimbursement form (with receipts) with the school office on Tuesday.

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## VIII. The On-Site Visit and the Report of the Visiting Team

### The On-Site Visit

The week preceding the visit is busy with details and final arrangements for the arrival of the Visiting Team. Finalize the visit schedule with the Team Leader and publish it to everyone involved. Confirm reservations, meeting times and locations, and other planned events. Set up the workroom, clean the school, check everything off your list! Remind the students and parents about the visitors and any changes to schedules that were made to accommodate the team. Reassure the teachers and staff that the visit is not an evaluation of them, but of the school. Thank everyone for their commitment to the process and remind them all to get rest over the weekend.

The **organizational meeting of the Team** takes place on Sunday afternoon at 3:00 PM in the hotel meeting room. Prepare and deliver to the Team Hotel an information packet containing a name tag,

campus access badge (if applicable), the final Visit Schedule, a campus map, and a teaching schedule for each faculty member (including those who work part-time). Since Team members plan their classroom observation schedules on Sunday and, as many members have cross-divisional responsibilities, it is imperative that schedules are easily understood, that times are listed for each schedule block, and that the rotation schedule is clearly indicated for each day of the visit.

After the organizational meeting, the Team is transported to the campus, and school representatives (administration, faculty, or students) conduct a **tour of the campus**. A reception with the entire faculty and with representatives of the Board of Trustees and/or Vestry, if applicable, follows. The purpose of this event is for the Head to welcome the Visiting Team, for the Team Leader to introduce Team members and SAES representatives, and for Team members to meet faculty members with whom they will be interacting.

The formality and style of the reception vary depending on the culture and custom of the school. The essential element is the opportunity for interaction between Visiting Team members and the school community. Most schools choose to host a reception of light refreshments in the school dining room or hospitality area. The Team goes to dinner after the reception.

Typically, the Team is at the school from 7:30 AM until 5:00 PM on Monday and Tuesday. The Team meets and works in the evenings in the hotel meeting room. SAES encourages schools to arrange for dinners to be brought to the hotel so that teams can get to work more quickly and not need to work as late. If the school wishes the Team to dine in a restaurant, the site should be quite near to the hotel to minimize travel time.

## The Report

While on-site, the Visiting Team will write a comprehensive report of its observations and conclusions. The report is divided into sections that correspond to those in the school's Self-Study. The report will include:

- **Overarching Commendations and Recommendations:** These major areas of focus serve as a way of understanding the themes or trends that emerged over the course of the On-Site Visit.
- **Narratives:** A statement that summarizes the section of the Self-Study and describes what the team observed relative to that particular area of school operation.
- **Commendations:** Those areas the team found particularly commendable, making reference to specific SAES Standards.
- **Suggestions:** Ideas that team members wish to share regarding ways to improve the program. Suggestions should be considered but are not binding.
- **Recommendations:** Actions that the school must take to resolve areas of non-compliance or to create more complete adherence to a specific Standard. Recommendations are intended to ensure compliance and to foster school improvement. All recommendations must be addressed by the school in subsequent interim reports to the SAES Standards Committee.

Within two weeks following the conclusion of the On-Site Visit, a **draft copy** of the report will be sent to the Head of School. The Head of School responds as directed regarding factual errors and errors of



omission in the report. At this time, the report remains confidential and is not circulated to any members of the school community.

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## **IX. Notification, Terms, and Level of Accreditation**

The **Report of the On-Site Visiting Team** will be reviewed and discussed by the SAES Standards Committee at their next scheduled meeting after the completion of the report. In some cases, this may be a few months after the actual visit. The Standards Committee will then make a recommendation regarding the school's accreditation status to the SAES Board of Directors. The recommendation must be approved by the Board of Directors before it is official.

### **Terms of Accreditation**

- **Full Accreditation** for ten years
- **Full, Provisional, or Probationary Accreditation** for a specified lesser period of time, pending corrective action with Special Interim Report(s) due, and/or Interim Visit(s) made
- **Denial of Accreditation**

### **Accreditation Levels**

SAES considers schools to be accredited or not-accredited. In order to support schools in their ongoing efforts to maintain compliance with standards, accredited schools are assigned to specific levels of accreditation. These levels are internal designations only and are not published or posted.

#### ***Preliminary Level Accreditation***

Schools which have not previously been accredited but which have hosted a preliminary accreditation visit from an SAES Staff Member and an SAES Standards Committee member and have submitted the Documents in Adherence to Standards for Applicant Schools may be granted Preliminary Accreditation for a period not to exceed 2 ½ years. During that period, the school must complete a Self-Study, host a full accreditation visit by an On-Site Visiting Team, and submit the complete Documents in Adherence to Standards. Preliminary Accreditation cannot be extended beyond the initial period except in exceptional circumstances which are beyond the control of the school.

#### ***Full Level Accreditation***

Schools who have completed a Self-Study and hosted a successful On-Site Accreditation Visit will generally be granted the full level of accreditation. These schools have demonstrated high levels of compliance with SAES Standards and a commitment to continuous improvement.

#### ***Provisional Level Accreditation***

Schools which need to address non-compliance with the SAES Standards may be awarded provisional level accreditation. Reasons for placing a school's accreditation on this level include:

- Failure to demonstrate full compliance with some standards

- Missing or inadequate documents in the DAS
- Failure to make timely and significant progress toward correcting previously noted deficiencies
- Failing to address recommendations made in a Report of the On-Site Visiting Team
- Failure to provide any requested information in a timely manner, including the SAES Annual Report
- Failure to submit dues and accreditation fees to the association
- Postponing the Self-Study or On-Site Visit

### ***Probationary Level Accreditation***

Schools whose accreditation status may be revoked if specific issues of non-compliance with SAES Standards or requirements are not remedied within a specified and limited time will be assigned probationary level accreditation. Reasons for placing a school on this accreditation level include:

- Failure to demonstrate compliance with many SAES standards
- Failure to correct previously noted deficiencies, failure to make satisfactory progress toward compliance with the SAES Standards, or failure to meet the deadline(s) for the requirements set by SAES, whether or not the institution is already on Provisional Accreditation
- Significant deficiencies relating to safety

Provisional level and probationary level accreditation are not necessarily sequential, and SAES may place a school on either of these levels with or without having previously requested a Special Interim Report, depending on the seriousness and extent of noncompliance. In certain extreme circumstances, a school's accreditation may be revoked altogether without having previously been alerted to provisional or probationary level. A school's revocation of accreditation is appealable to the SAES Board of Directors.

### **Denial of Accreditation**

In rare cases, schools may be denied accreditation, re-accreditation, or an extension of accreditation. The following issues could contribute to the denial of accreditation:

- Failure to maintain membership in the Association
- Failure to demonstrate that the school is indeed an Episcopal school
- Failure to demonstrate adherence to SAES Standards of Accreditation
- The existence of a major deviation in observed practice from that which was outlined in the school's Self-Study
- Failure to satisfactorily address recommendations in the most recent Report of the On-Site Visiting Team, or failure to submit satisfactory Interim Reports
- Failure to comply with annual or interim reporting requirements

### **Appeal of Denial**

A school that is denied accreditation or re-accreditation may appeal that judgment in the following manner:

1. A letter of appeal should be addressed to the SAES Executive Director, who will notify the chairperson of the SAES Standards Committee, the President of the SAES Board of Trustees, the visiting team leader (when the appeal follows an accreditation decision made after an On-Site



Visit), and the SAES Representative and/or Director of Accreditation. A review of the appeal will be scheduled in a timely fashion.

2. If, following discussion and informal review by the above listed individuals, the school remains dissatisfied, the matter will be referred to the SAES Board of Trustees for consideration.
3. At the discretion of the SAES Board of Trustees, a separate Review Committee may be convened. Either the Standards Committee or the Review Committee could call for another visit to the school by three members with experience related to the issue in question. At least one of the three members must be a member of the SAES Board of Trustees. The visit should take place within three months from the denial of accreditation. All costs involved as part of the review, including travel, lodging, and meals for the visiting team, are borne by the appealing school.
4. A report will be submitted in a timely fashion to the SAES Board of Trustees for its final decision.
5. The school will be notified in writing of the final decision of the SAES Board of Trustees. The notice will include specific statements regarding accreditation or denial of accreditation.
6. The appropriate state agency and diocese will be notified.

## **Grievances about Accredited Schools**

In the event that the Association receives contact from a parent or other individual concerning a complaint about an SAES accredited school, the Board of Trustees has established a policy governing what complaints the Association is able to address and how such complaints will be investigated and addressed.

## **Publicizing Accreditation**

Schools accredited by SAES are encouraged to display the “SAES Accredited” Logo and to use the following language on websites and in publications:

The Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools (SAES), a member of the International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA), has voluntarily submitted to a rigorous and impartial review of its accreditation program and has demonstrated adherence to the Council’s Criteria for Effective Independent School Accreditation Practices. SAES is commended by ICAISA for the quality of the Association’s accreditation program for its Member Schools. SAES is recognized by state accreditation commissions in Texas (TEPSAC) and Oklahoma (OPSAC) and by the ten Episcopal dioceses within the six states served by SAES.

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## **X. Maintaining Accreditation**

There are reporting requirements for maintaining a school’s accreditation. The details and due date of the report are determined by the SAES Standards Committee and communicated to the school by SAES Staff. Notification will be given for the following:

- SAES Annual Report - sent to schools in September of each year
- SAES One-Year Head of School Letter - individualized template sent to the Head of School by the Director of Accreditation

- SAES Five-Year Interim Report - individualized template sent to the Head of School by the Director of Accreditation
- Interim Report for SAES Dually Accredited Schools - individualized template mailed to Head of School

## **Special Interim Report**

Occasionally, interim reports are requested by the Standards Committee to address a school's compliance with the standards of the association. An individualized template is sent to the Head of School with instructions for completion.

## **Substantive Change Report**

Embedded within the relationship between an accredited school and its accrediting association is a covenant of trust that each will be open, honest, and communicative concerning changes that take place in the life of a school. Once notified of the change, SAES will create an individualized template with full instructions for reporting to the association. Reports will be required if a school experiences any of the following:

- Adoption of a new mission statement
- A change in the Head of School
- Adding, dropping, or combining a grade/program/division
- Relocation of any part of the school to a new building or campus\*
- A risk-related liability, including pending lawsuits or investigations
- A significant change in the school's financial condition

\*Note: in the event of changes due to a natural disaster, such as major hurricane damage, SAES will accept verbal reporting.

## **School in Crisis**

A school in crisis should contact the SAES Executive Director as soon as the crisis arises to discuss possible services, advice, and support that may be available to the school. In the rare case that the crisis may jeopardize the safety, health, and welfare of its students and/or employees, the Standards Committee and Board of Trustees will review the situation and make a determination about the school's accreditation.

## **Postponement of Self-Study & On-Site Visit**

In an exceptional or crisis situation, a school may request a one-time, one-year postponement of its Self-Study and/or On-Site Visit. It is only for the most unusual circumstances that a postponement will be considered by SAES. A Head of School change usually is not a reason for a postponement. Please notify the Director of Accreditation if a situation has arisen that would require the Standards Committee's consideration of a postponement. Should the request be granted, a change of accreditation level (to provisional or probationary) is likely, and there may be a requirement for a Special Interim Report and interim visit.

## **Warnings, Denial of Initial or Re-Accreditation, Revoked Accreditation, Removal from Membership**

SAES requires that a member school be in compliance with SAES membership requirements and that SAES accredited schools be in compliance with the SAES standards, adhere to the Association's policies and procedures, and provide information requested by the Standards Committee and Board of Directors in order to maintain membership and accreditation. When a school fails to comply with these requirements, the Association may issue warnings, change the level of accreditation, deny initial accreditation, deny re-accreditation, or revoke accreditation.

The Association's requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity. SAES expects integrity to govern the operation of schools. Therefore, evidence of withholding information, providing inaccurate information, or failing to provide timely information to the Association may be construed as an indication of the lack of a full commitment to integrity and may result in the imposition of warnings or revoked accreditation.



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