NWAIS ACCREDITATION PROVIDES THE TOOLS FOR ONGOING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

You know how important accreditation is to your school. It involves reflecting on your mission, ensuring viability, and planning for a dynamic future. But does your school community know the benefits of accreditation by the Northwest Association of Independent Schools? Our Communication Toolkit helps you keep your families, students, teachers, and administrators informed every step of the way.

TELL YOUR ACCREDITATION STORY
When NWAIS schools provide a unified and focused narrative regarding the value of membership and accreditation, parents can be assured their school is of the highest quality.

WHY ACCREDITATION?
Assure accountability
Assess how well a school is fulfilling its mission
Help schools identify areas for growth

NWAIS Accreditation offers
A vehicle for ongoing improvement
Robust standards for success

WHY JOIN NWAIS?
- Collegial community of high quality schools
- Guides, inspires, and advances schools
- Extensive professional development

KEY THEMES IN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS
Guiding, Inspiring, Advancing
Independence
Ongoing school improvement
Accountability

A reflective, mission-driven process
WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS?

**SELF STUDY:**
- Inclusive and collaborative
- Reflective process to look at congruence between mission and practice
- A voluntary one to two year self-examination of strengths, weaknesses, priorities and plans
- Look at where we’ve been and determine where we want to go

**ACCREDITION VISIT:**
- Outside perspective on school
- A team of administrators and teachers come to support the school in achieving its mission
- Other independent school professionals
- Alignment with Standards

FOR MORE INFORMATION
contact sakhalsa@nwa.is.org or ckeefe@nwa.is.org.
EDUCATE YOUR CONSTITUENCIES

NWAIS schools enhance their marketing effectiveness if they actively promote the value of accreditation. This promotion will demonstrate to families that independent schools are held accountable by means of a rigorous accreditation process that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a quality educational program through ongoing school improvement.

The way a school talks about NWAIS and accreditation can help determine its market position. Furthermore, when NWAIS schools provide parents with a unified and focused narrative regarding the value of membership and accreditation, independent school education benefits.

When looking at your website consider including all of the following elements to highlight your school’s membership in NWAIS:

- NWAIS logo
- NWAIS accreditation/membership level
- Comments on the accreditation process
- Value of the accreditation process to school

Themes to strengthen your message:

- **GUIDING...INSPIRING...ADVANCING** NWAIS helps schools at all stages of development provide high quality education for children.
- **INDEPENDENCE** NWAIS schools determine their own missions and philosophies, select their faculty and students, and develop their curricula.
- **ONGOING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT** NWAIS schools engage in a continuous process of research, reflection and on-going improvement.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** NWAIS schools voluntarily operate in accordance with good independent school practices and NWAIS accreditation standards while recognizing and benefitting from the collective expertise within our schools.

While we recognize that you can’t include each theme in every communication, weaving them into your messaging will help you articulate how you deliver on the promise of your mission. Each section of this guide provides additional themes to consider, sample text that may be highlighted or combined in different ways, and helpful hints for telling your school’s story.

If you need more in-depth information about any particular aspect of accreditation, please contact the NWAIS office or refer to the NWAIS Accreditation Handbook.

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Use these symbols to navigate the Communication Toolkit:

- Affiliate Schools
- Founder Schools
- Subscriber Schools
- Candidate Members
- Accredited Members
WHAT NWAIS ACCREDITATION MEANS FOR SCHOOLS

Copy Points
NWAIS Accreditation....

• Provides value due to the thoroughness of the process.
• Offers assurance of quality education and accountability for families.
• Assesses a school’s effectiveness in delivering on the promise of its mission, advances mission-driven initiatives and helps to ensure the school’s future capacity.
• Is recognized by other agencies, regionally and nationally.

Sample Copy
Schools are not required by law to undergo the rigorous process of NWAIS accreditation; it is a choice that schools make. Then why would a school voluntarily commit considerable time and resources to pursue accreditation?

For the faculty, staff, administrators and trustees, the opportunity to gather and reflect on the Standards and Indicators can be invaluable. Schools are busy places where there is a lot to be done. Sometimes it can be challenging to take the time to step back from the work and take bearings. In the process of writing a Self Study, schools continually reflect on their mission and how well its work aligns with this mission. These reflections serve as the basis for future planning. The involvement of colleagues from peer independent schools during the accreditation visit adds to this reflection and enhances the school’s ability to plan its future direction.

For parents, accreditation means that the school they’ve chosen is truly focused on providing an enriching and safe learning environment for students. Parents can be confident that the school is consistently working to provide a unique and valuable experience for their children both now and in the years to come.

NWAIS accredits member independent elementary and secondary schools in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. NWAIS is a member in good standing of the NAIS Commission on Accreditation and has voluntarily agreed to abide by the Criteria for Effective Independent School Accreditation Practices and to submit to a thorough ten-year evaluation of its accreditation procedures by the Commission. Additionally, NWAIS accreditation has been recognized by NWAC, a division of AdvancED and the states of Washington and Utah.

Personalizing Your Copy:

• Ask Head for his/her perspective on the value of accreditation.
• Ask parents why accreditation is important for them.
Copy Points
NWAIS...  
• Is a collegial community of excellent schools where sharing best practices is the norm.  
• Guides, advances and inspires schools through all stages of development.  
• Provides accreditation standards while recognizing the unique mission and culture of each school.  
• Is more than just an accrediting body.  
• Offers extensive annual professional development programming and promotes schools and job openings within schools.

Sample Copy
We are pleased to announce that our school has joined the Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS), a regional association of 110 independent schools in 8 states known for its commitment to guiding, inspiring, and advancing schools. By joining the Association as a Founder School, Subscriber School, or Candidate Member, the Board and administration have voluntarily decided to pursue accreditation through NWAIS’ thorough and nationally recognized accreditation program. By striving to gain this accreditation, we are making a statement to our school community about our commitment to being the best school we can be.

The school will benefit from the Association’s excellent resources, and our Board, administration, and faculty and staff welcome the opportunity to interact with other independent school colleagues in sharing best practices and keeping informed about the latest in educational trends.

Our next step in pursuing accreditation will be...

Our goal is to...

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Personalizing Your Copy:
• Ask your Head and/or Board Chair why the school decided to join NWAIS? What did they see as the potential benefits?
CHANGING NWAIS AFFILIATION

Copy Points

• Sense of accomplishment – met Association’s expectations and we are one step closer to gaining accreditation.
• Reinforces school commitment to Association core value of ongoing school improvement

Sample Copy

Founder to Subscriber

We are pleased to announce that our school has been approved as a NWAIS Subscriber School after having met the developmental expectations outlined by the Association. Key to this approval was the school’s work on *(insert key initiatives perhaps recognized by Association’s Executive Director)*. The school’s next step on the path toward gaining accreditation will be to assess the appropriate timetable for becoming a Candidate Member. It is the school’s goal to accomplish this during the 20XX-20XX AY.

Subscriber to Candidate Member

We are pleased to announce that our school has been approved as a NWAIS Candidate Member after having met the expectations outlined by the Association. Our school is now a voting member and as such has a greater voice within the association. Key to this approval was the school’s work on *(insert key initiatives perhaps recognized by Association’s Executive Director)*. The school’s next step will be to assess the appropriate timetable within the next five years for conducting a year-long Self Study process prior to hosting an accreditation visiting team...

OR

The school’s next step toward gaining accreditation will be embarking upon the year-long Self Study process beginning in the 20XX-20XX academic year with the goal of hosting an accreditation visiting team the following year.

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Personalizing Your Copy:

• Ask Head what moving up next affiliation stage of development entailed.
• Ask Head about the timeline for moving to next stage.
OVERVIEW OF ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Copy Points
- Tool for ongoing improvement – continually advancing
- Inclusive process engaging whole school community
- Reflective, mission driven process

Sample Copy
The NWAIS accreditation process is based on the principle that schools are in a continual process of development. At each step of the process, there is possibility for improvement. Through accreditation’s structured reflection, schools can identify areas for growth and benefit from the experience and perspective of their peer schools. For schools to flourish movement needs to be mission-driven. Every school has a unique mission, so every school has its own way to address the opportunities for growth.

NWAIS Accreditation Standards and Indicators describe the elements the Association has determined are necessary for quality institutions to possess based on decades of experience in independent schools. They span the range of operations, systems, structures and facilities at a school. The Self Study questions are designed to enable schools to conduct a comprehensive self-assessment. When schools engage in the reflective and collaborative process of accreditation, they can better articulate who they are, where they want to go and how they can get there.

There are a number of steps in the eight-year cycle of NWAIS accreditation. Once a school has determined that it is ready to pursue accreditation, the school’s staff and community write a Self Study. This document articulates how the school fulfills its mission and meets the NWAIS Standards and Indicators. A team comprised of educators from other independent schools visits the school to see how well the Self Study document reflects what is actually happening at the school. This visiting team writes a report that is then presented to the NWAIS Accreditation Committee, which makes a recommendation to the NWAIS Board of Governors about the school’s accreditation status.

Even after the accreditation decision has been reached, the school still has work ahead of it, as the NWAIS Annual Report requires that schools report on their progress in addressing the major recommendations from the report. Additionally, three years after the visit a school must submit a Response Report addressing all recommendations.

Personalizing Your Copy:
- If school is seeking re-accreditation, ask the Head how the school benefited from the last accreditation process and what does he/she hope to get out of the current process.
- If the school is seeking its initial accreditation, ask the Head what he/she hopes to get out of the current process.
ACCREDITATION PROCESS:
THE SELF STUDY

Copy Points

• Value of inclusive, reflective process
• Assess the congruence between mission and day-to-day experience
• Assess compliance with NWAIS Standards and Indicators
• Enables all school personnel to learn more about their own school
• Develops plan for future action

Sample Copy

The NWAIS Self Study process is designed as a vehicle for each school to reflect upon the effectiveness of all aspects of its operations. The majority of the school’s staff and representative members of the larger school community (trustees, parents, students and alumni) will be involved in writing the Self Study. The intention is to have the Self Study provide the visiting team with an accurate portrait of how the school currently fulfills its mission, provides students with a quality programs, and is both viable and sustainable.

The document itself can serve both as a chronicle of the story of our school as well as a roadmap for school improvement in the years to come. Those who have completed the Self Study repeatedly comment on the opportunity to step back and look at their school with more discernment and objectivity. Greater clarity and direction for schools at all developmental stages often the result from this work.

We embark on our Self Study with the expectation that the process will be an inclusive one. Along with the surveys we will be conducting of students, parents, and alumni, we seek members of the larger school community who might be interested in serving on one of the many committees that will review the various Self Study sections. In particular, we are seeking volunteers to participate on the following committees...

Personalizing Your Copy:

• Ask Head and/or Self Study Coordinator about how the process will be an inclusive one.
• Ask Head and/or Self Study Coordinator about the timetable for completing the Self Study.
• Ask various staff members for their reflections on the value of the Self Study process.
ACCREDITATION PROCESS: 
THE ACCREDITATION VISIT

Copy Points

- Emphasize what school learned during the process – strengths, areas self identified as needing work, and next steps
- Re-emphasize commitment to ongoing school improvement
- Mention interesting areas of reflection, e.g. school culture
- Express appreciation for everyone’s involvement

Sample Copy

Faculty, staff and community representatives have spent the past year reflecting on the NWAIS Standards and the questions posed in the NWAIS Self Study. We have engaged in hours of conversation and even more hours of writing to complete our Self Study. As a result, we have a wonderful document that provides a shared understanding of where our school has been, where it is now, and where we would like to go. This document is available in the school’s library to review.

We are about to begin the next stage in our accreditation journey – hosting a visiting team. In a couple of weeks, a team chaired by (insert name and school) and comprised of other school heads and staff from peer schools will be arriving to offer their perspective on our school. They have received a copy of our Self Study and will be on campus for three and a half days. The team’s task is to see if what we have written in our Self Study accurately reflects what is happening at our school. The team will also be looking at whether what we do meets the NWAIS Standards for accreditation. While the team is here, members will be observing the overall school program and meeting with various groups with these two goals in mind. It is important to note that team members are not evaluating individuals.

The team will write a report outlining what they observed and offering commendations, recommendations and suggestions based on their observations of our school. There are members of our community who have served on teams for other schools who can attest to the care and attention given to crafting recommendations that are not prescriptive. The visiting team report is meant to serve as a tool for schools to meet their goals while staying true to their mission.

The team does not decide whether or not the school receives accreditation, but rather makes a recommendation to NWAIS. This report will be available for the community after the NWAIS Accreditation Committee and NWAIS Board have decided upon the school’s accreditation status.

Personalizing Your Copy:

- Ask Head to comment on the recommendations the school made for itself during the Self Study process and how they will guide the school’s future work.
ACCREDITATION PROCESS:
AFTER THE ACCREDITATION VISIT

Copy Points
- Value of visiting team report

Sample Copy
A few weeks ago we hosted an NWAIS accreditation team. Team members read our Self Study, observed classes, interviewed staff and community representatives, and wrote a report synthesizing all that they read, saw and heard. Visiting team chair (insert name and school) will present the report to the NWAIS Accreditation Committee on (add date). This committee, comprised of Heads from NWAIS accredited schools, has considered numerous reports and works to ensure that its recommendation regarding the school’s accreditation status is consistent with the Association’s standards and expectations. The committee will make a recommendation to the NWAIS Board of Governors who will make the accreditation decision.

We will communicate the decision with the school community as soon as possible as we know many of you have contributed time and energy to this process.

Personalizing Your Copy:
- Ask various staff members for their reflections on having the visiting team on campus.
ACCREDITATION PROCESS: THE ACCREDITATION DECISION

Copy Points
- Sense of accomplishment
- Collaborative work of the school community leads to successful outcome
- Assurance to community that school is in good shape
- Reinforce transparency of process

Sample Copy
Initial Accreditation/Re-accreditation
We are pleased to announce that our School has received accreditation/re-accreditation from the Northwest Association of Independent Schools. This significant achievement illustrates that the visiting team found congruence between how we said we fulfill our mission and how they observed us doing that. Additionally, accreditation means that NWAIS feels that we have the necessary resources and structure to deliver on our mission both now and in the foreseeable future. This is a gratifying realization of which we should be most proud.

While we are certainly proud of what we have accomplished, our commitment to delivering a quality program for your children demands that we continue our good work. Our own Self Study document and the visiting team report provide many useful recommendations, and we will continue to keep you informed as we develop an action plan. [insert specifics]

As you know, achieving this came about due to the work of so many people over a long period of time. Bravo to...

Condition/Additional steps
Many of you have been following our school’s progress towards accreditation for the past few years. You have contributed your time and energy to the completion of our Self Study and met with members of the accreditation team. We were pleased to see that the team’s report offered a number of commendations (add some highlights). We will continue to celebrate these important aspects that make our school special.

At the same time, the Association recommended that we do additional work prior to having the school gain accreditation. In the coming year, the Board and administration will focus on these areas (add text from visiting team report) and submit additional information that will warrant our accreditation.

Personalizing Your Copy:
- Summarize visiting team commendations and recommendations and outline possible next steps in moving the school forward.
- Keep in mind the NWAIS policy stating that excerpts from the Visiting Team Report may not be used in any external marketing efforts (website, press releases, ad copy).