

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ACCREDITATION TEAM INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE

The following provides specific instructions for Wisconsin Catholic School Accreditation (WCSA) Team members in assessing school performance under the new Wisconsin Catholic School Accreditation Standards, modeled on the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*. This guide provides general observations on how the Standards operate and how to use the accompanying accreditation team tools and resources. The following also provides clarification on how certain elements of the Standards, Benchmarks, and accompanying Rubrics should be interpreted as regards Catholic schools in Wisconsin.

General instructions for Accreditation Team members:

1. Schools will need more than one source of evidence on most benchmarks to achieve the “Fully Meets Benchmark” rating.
2. Many schools will not meet the “Exceeds Benchmark” rating. This level is something that all schools should strive to meet, but only those schools that have achieved excellence under a Benchmark will achieve this rating.
3. Evaluation should always include a variety of evidence obtained from different constituencies within the school - faculty, school leadership, parents, etc.
4. There should be a comment from the visiting team for each benchmark on the worksheets.

Specific Instructions for Individual Standards, Benchmarks, and Rubrics

1. For **Benchmark 2.4**, accreditation teams should read the Level 2 wording as requiring that, at a minimum, the Benchmark requirements are “on the screen” of the school. Level 3 is supposed to imply that the school has a stronger focus – that expectations and requirements are clearly communicated, and there is some measure of compliance and accountability.

This Benchmark is designed to accomplish two things: 1) to make certain academic rigor is required under the curriculum, including with regard to religious instruction; and 2) to make certain there is an inculcation of the faith throughout the curriculum and the faith, culture (tradition), and life (experience) of the Church are incorporated into all courses, not just religion classes.

2. **Benchmark 3.4** is designed for the student experience – it makes certain that students are exposed to individuals of remarkable faith. The “role model” should be someone who excels at living a Catholic faith life. This is different from Benchmark 4.5, which is designed to make certain that all school staff are adherent to Church teachings and support the faith.
3. **Benchmark 4.1**, Level 2 assumes that opportunities to attend Mass, prayer services and engage in spiritual reflection and growth are provided routinely as part of the school schedule as well as during faculty meetings, in-service days etc. In addition, Level 3 requires that the staff attend an annual retreat for the faculty.

4. For **Benchmarks 4.3 and 4.4**, having opportunities available through a parish affiliated with the school suffice, as long as the school demonstrates a connection to parish activities. For schools without a parish connection there should still be programming to support the role of the parent as the primary educator of their child.
5. For **Benchmark 6.2**, the accreditation team members should ask this question “Does school leadership and community live out the school’s mission and vision?”
6. For **Benchmark 6.3**, it is implied that assessments are to be provided as needed.
7. For **Benchmark 8.5**, collaboration among professional learning communities may be informal. Teachers do not need to be organized into formal PLC groups. In small schools, the entire faculty forms a PLC. Informal conversations and sharing before and after school, at faculty meetings etc., are all forms of professional collaboration.
8. For **Standard 10**, even though the Standard references a three to five year financial plan, this plan need not be formal so long as past precedent and financial activities indicate appropriate planning for future years.

Instructions for Accreditation Team Tools:

The Compliance Checklist

If a school has not provided sufficient evidence of compliance with any item listed on the compliance checklist, the accreditation team member should...

1. Double check the schools list of evidence to ensure that nothing was missed.
2. Check the evidence provided to determine if a piece of evidence submitted for a different item might serve as evidence for multiple items.
3. Ask the school team for the appropriate evidence.
4. Determine if something other than the evidence specified on the checklist might meet the requirement.
5. If all these efforts fail to secure adequate evidence, mark “NO” in the space corresponding to the missing evidence on the Compliance Checklist.

Three possible outcomes of the visitations, which is a team recommendation of:

1. Full accreditation
2. Accredited with provision
3. Not accredited

STANDARDS and BENCHMARKS COMPLIANCE REPORT FORM

As part of the accreditation process, visiting team chairpersons are expected to fill out a copy of the Wisconsin Religious and Independent Schools Accreditation (WRISA) Visiting Team Recommendation Form. While this form is similar to the annual report form that all schools fill out

for annual accreditation, there are a couple of important differences in the manner in which the form is completed.

Visiting team chairpersons, in collaboration with the visiting team, complete the form, indicating the level of achievement in meeting the Standards and Benchmarks.

The Team's determination hinges on how well as school has complied with meeting the Benchmarks. To assist in making this determination, once all of the Benchmarks have been assessed and the school's level of performance for each benchmark has been determined by the Visiting Team, the Visiting Team Chairperson transfers the assessed level for each benchmark from the Benchmark Worksheet to the "Benchmark Scoring Summary." This will provide the Visiting Team with a snapshot of the school's progress toward meeting the benchmarks. The expected performance level for each essential benchmark is indicated by a blue box, while a green box indicates the expected level for non-essential benchmarks.

After all data gathering has been completed, the Standards and Benchmarks Scoring Summary document has been completed, reviewed and discussed in its entirety by the visiting team; a vote is taken on the accreditation recommendation for the school. The final decision is based on consensus. The team may make one of the following recommendations:

ACCREDIT: Choose 'Accredit' if you believe that the school is in substantial compliance with the WCSA Standards with Benchmarks based on the evidence you have observed, heard, read and experienced. All Benchmarks that have a Cross (✝) are considered 'Essential' Benchmarks. The visiting team must have determined that the school meets all these essential benchmarks in order to recommend "Accredit." They must be marked "Fully Meets" or "Exceeds". There should be no indication that the health, safety, and well-being of the students or staff is in jeopardy. The school should have presented documentation supporting the findings of their self-study and showing compliance with the Standards and Benchmarks.

ACCREDIT WITH PROVISION/S: Choose 'Accredit with Provision' if you believe that the school is in substantial compliance with the WCSA Standards with Benchmarks based on the evidence you have observed, heard, read and experienced, but there is one or more Benchmarks that were not met and the team recommends that this 'provision/s' be met before the school is fully accredited.

DENY: Choose 'DENY' for one of the following reason: 1) you find that the school is not in substantial compliance with the WCSA Standards with Benchmarks; 2) a condition or conditions exist that pose a threat to the health, safety or well-being of the students or staff.

At the end of the visit and prior to the Exit Report, the chairperson of the team sits down with the school principal and reviews the document. The chairperson writes down any response from the principal of the school in the space provided.

Conclusion of the Site Visit

At the end of the site visit, the visiting team presents a brief oral report of the visit to those invited (usually pastor and staff, however, parents, committee and council members may also be invited) to an exit meeting.

This oral report serves primarily as a means of concluding the visit to the school and thanking the school community for inviting them into the school and for the hospitality that was shown to them. It is not necessary to state all of the commendations and recommendations, although some teams do choose to do so. Other teams make a few broad commendation and recommendation statements. Most teams tell the recommendation for accreditation that they will make to the WRISA Board of Directors, but it is not necessary to do so since some individuals interpret this recommendation to mean that they will be fully accredited. However, the WRISA Board of Directors is the sole authority in determining accreditation status, and the Board's final decision may be different from the visiting team's recommendation. It is not necessary to ask for questions from the group that is assembled.

The team then returns to their conference room and turns in all self studies, notes, rough drafts and expense vouchers to the chairperson. The chairperson turns in all expense vouchers to the school's principal before the chairperson leaves the school. The team cleans up its area. When all tasks are completed, the team may leave.

Site Visit Follow-Up

Within three weeks following the site visit, the chairperson readies the Visiting Team Report (Narrative and the original Standards with Benchmarks Compliance Checklist). This involves making sure that all reports are complete; all "Partially Meets" and "Does Not Meet" have corresponding recommendations written for each one and that the Benchmark number precedes the recommendation.

The team chair should make sure that recommendations adequately address the Benchmarks. All recommendations should be written in full sentences and should use correct grammar.

The chairperson should email a draft copy of the visiting team report to each team member who reviews the document and reports any errors, corrections, or clarifications. The team chairperson then sends the report to the jurisdiction's representative at the Diocesan Office of Catholic Education for review. Once reviewed, the report is forwarded to the school principal.

The Visiting Team Report consists of:

- Cover Page
- Cover Letter signed by chairperson
- Limitation on the Distribution of this Document
- School Data Information Sheet
- Staff Qualifications Page
- Verified Self Study
- Visiting Team Domain Summary with Commendations and Recommendations
- Visiting Team Benchmark Scoring Summary
- Accreditation Recommendation Form with chairperson's signature

School Responsibility Following the Site Visit

In April, the school will receive notification from WRISA that its documents are due. The school submits the annual membership fee, the entire Visiting Team Report and one Action Plan for each of the four domains (Mission & Catholic Identity, Governance & Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality) to the jurisdiction's representative no later than June 1st or the date set by the jurisdiction.

The documents will be reviewed by the WRISA Board of Directors at their September meeting. The WRISA Board of Directors is the sole authority in determining the accreditation status of a school. Once the determination has been made, the WRISA executive director will notify the school within 30 work days.