

VAIS Standards, Points for Consideration, Documentation

Approved, January 27, 2015

VAIS STANDARDS FOR MEMBERSHIP

BACKGROUND

In order to be responsive to the diverse membership of its schools, their ongoing paths towards excellence, and shifts in the broader landscape of independent education, VAIS modified its self-study models for accreditation in 2012. As schools began using new models, and in keeping with the typical timeline of reviewing Standards for Membership every five years, an Accreditation Committee task force began its Standards revision work in 2013. Primary goals of the revision process were to ensure that:

- a. VAIS Standards represented best practices in independent education;
- b. State and National expectations were being met through the Standards; and
- c. an appreciation for the diversity of its member schools was recognized while still maintaining VAIS' expectations of its member schools.

Previously, 73 individual VAIS Standards covered individual areas of focus under the general topics of mission and philosophy, community of the school, instruction and program, professional personnel, administration/governance/financial resources, and service management.

The new 11 VAIS Standards for Membership were approved by the VAIS Board of Directors on January 25, 2015 and by the full membership of VAIS on January 27, 2015. The Standards include relevant (and also revised) supporting documentation, and offer points for consideration by schools and visiting teams for each Standard.

The new Standards are available for schools to choose to use beginning July 1, 2015. Heads of Schools with accreditation visits in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 must reach an agreement with the VAIS Executive Director regarding whether the current 73 Standards or the new 11 Standards best serve their school. Just as we experienced with implementing the new self-study models, the transition period allows us to gather feedback from schools and visiting teams and make any necessary adjustments. As with the new self-study models, a symbiotic, collaborative, and open process of understanding between VAIS and individual schools is always our goal. By July 1, 2017, we would anticipate that all schools would be using the new 11 Standards.

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STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Accreditation is a voluntary process intended to be qualitative in nature, undertaken by schools committed to common expectations of excellence. While the school's own mission is the primary lens through which the school should self-assess, the VAIS Standards serve as principles of best practice for independent schools and should be considered by the school on a continual basis. The VAIS Standards represent the collaborative efforts of the appointed Accreditation Committee members and Staff, and reflect both state and national expectations. Schools are expected to demonstrate alignment with the Standards through documentation (see lists below each Standard), the self-study narrative report (which may include a standards "guide" and/or reflections on the Standards themselves), and during the on-site evaluation team visit.

STANDARDS

1. The school's mission guides its policies and practices and is evident in the climate, culture, and program of the school.
2. The program fulfills the educational and developmental needs of the students, meets the requirements of learning and living in a diverse and globally-connected society, and reflects ongoing internal review.
3. The school authentically communicates its mission and values, creating a community that understands and supports the mission while engaging in the life of the school.
4. The faculty, administration, and staff support the mission of the school, are qualified for their positions, engage in ongoing evaluation and professional growth, and effectively implement the program.
5. The Head of School serves as the chief executive, is the sole employee of and only direct report to the governing body, and is ultimately responsible for the operational and educational management of the school.
6. The governing body of the school is independent and deliberative, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and works in partnership with the Head of School to ensure that fiduciary and strategic policies advance the school.
7. The governing body and the Head of School jointly assure that the financial resources are sufficient to sustain the program and are efficiently managed.
8. The school's facilities and equipment are sufficient to meet the needs of the program and are maintained to provide an effective and safe learning environment.
9. The school's care for the health, safety, and welfare of the students is evident in its policies and practices.
10. [IF APPLICABLE] The residential program is so conceived and staffed as to reflect the mission of the school and provide a healthy and safe environment.
11. [IF APPLICABLE] The preschool and/or extended day program is conceived and staffed so as to reflect the mission of the school and provide a healthy, safe, and developmentally appropriate environment.

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REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION:

Absence of any of these documents may halt an accreditation visit.

1. Strategic Plan
2. Published Curriculum
3. Operating budgets (previous two years and current)
4. Current audit, management letter, and opinion letter
5. Three- to five-year financial plan
6. Risk management program
7. Crisis management/disaster response plan

DETAILED LIST OF STANDARDS, SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION, AND POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. **The school's mission guides its policies and practices and is evident in the climate, culture, and program of the school.**

Supporting Documentation

- 1.a Mission Statement and evidence of its regular review by the Board.
- 1.b Statement of Philosophy and/or guiding principles
- 1.c Handbooks (for example, Parent, Student, Faculty, Coaches)
- 1.d Marketing materials, including non-discriminatory statement
- 1.e Sample publications (for example, Annual Report, Directory, School Magazine, Student Newspaper, Yearbook)
- 1.f Strategic Plan*

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Points for consideration regarding Standard 1

- 1.1 Requirements and expectations for students, parents, faculty, trustees, and employees clearly reflect the values and mission of the school.
- 1.2 The educational program is consistent with the mission of the school.

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- 2. The program fulfills the educational and developmental needs of the students, meets the requirements of learning and living in a diverse and globally-connected society, and reflects ongoing internal review.**

Supporting Documentation

- 2.a Published curriculum*
- 2.b Curriculum review process
- 2.c Graduation requirements and sample transcript/grade reports
- 2.d Student record retention, access, and protection policies
- 2.e Policy for protection of records into perpetuity should the school close
- 2.f Test Scores (for example, SSAT, ERB, Stanford Achievement, PSAT, SAT, AP, CWRA, IB, etc.)
- 2.g Listing of co-curricular programs (for example, community service activities, student leadership opportunities, summer programs, sports)
- 2.h Description of counseling and advisory programs (for example, guidance, college)
- 2.i Technology integration plan and related budget
- 2.j School calendar and daily student and teacher schedules
- 2.k Longitudinal data that informs the school's ongoing improvement efforts (for example, surveys results, focus group findings)

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Points for consideration regarding Standard 2

- 2.1 The educational program stems from the school's beliefs about teaching and learning.
- 2.2 The school has in place a procedure for follow-up on graduate success, and utilizes resulting data to assess its goals and programs.
- 2.3 Procedures are in place to assess and effectively communicate individual student progress toward meeting the goals of the program.
- 2.4 The school has a process of regular review of its educational programs and instructional practices, that is informed by relevant research regarding how students learn and the knowledge and capacities they will need to lead purposeful and constructive lives
- 2.5 In keeping with its mission, the school promotes an equitable, just, and inclusive community of adults and students, fosters a culture of learning, and inspires students to respect and value diversity.
- 2.6 The school fosters a commitment to the values of sustainability in all areas, including preservation of the environment for current and future generations.

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- 3. *The school authentically communicates its mission and values, creating a community that understands and supports the mission while engaging in the life of the school.***

Supporting Documentation

- 3.a Admissions materials (brochure, non-discriminatory statement, policies and procedures, campus map, application forms, schedule of tuition/fees, and financial aid policies)
- 3.b Admissions statistics: inquiries, completed applications, geographical representation, diversity representation, attrition and retention, etc., including current and previous four years
- 3.c Financial Aid report, including current and previous four years
- 3.d Enrollment Agreement
- 3.e Description of Honor/Student Conduct System, if applicable
- 3.f Parents: organization/volunteer opportunities, minutes/bylaws, if applicable
- 3.g Alumni: organization/volunteer opportunities, publications, bylaws and minutes, if applicable

Points for consideration regarding Standard 3

- 3.1 The school is intentional in the ways in which it responds to both its internal and external constituencies
- 3.2 The school has procedures in place to ensure that students who are admitted are appropriate to the mission and can be served by the school's program.

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- 4. *The faculty, administration, and staff support the mission of the school, are qualified for their positions, engage in ongoing evaluation and professional growth, and effectively implement the program.***

Supporting Documentation

- 4.a Employment application materials, including non-discriminatory statement
- 4.b Sample job descriptions, description of benefits, and contracts/hiring letters
- 4.c Faculty and staff statistics for current and preceding four years
- 4.d List of employees: schools attended, degrees, licensure (if applicable), verification of transcript on file, areas of responsibility)
- 4.e Professional development program, policies, budget, and evidence of participation
- 4.f Process and schedule for faculty, staff, and administrator evaluation
- 4.g Policies for retention, access, and protection of faculty, staff, and administrator records.
- 4.h Evidence of compliance with background checks for employees

Points for consideration regarding Standard 4

- 4.1 Faculty and staff are well qualified through education and training and/or experience to fulfill the responsibilities of their positions.
- 4.2 Faculty, administration and staff members are sufficient in number to accomplish the work for which they are responsible.
- 4.3 The school implements clearly defined programs for supervision and regular performance evaluation of the administration, faculty and staff.
- 4.4 The administration actively supports the professional development of faculty and staff through allocation of time and resources.

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- 5. *The Head of School serves as the chief executive, is the sole employee of and only direct report to the governing body, and is ultimately responsible for the operational and educational management of the school.***

Supporting Documentation

- 5.a Evidence of Head of School employment agreement and job description
- 5.b Head of School evaluation protocol
- 5.c Organizational chart
- 5.d Minutes of recent administrative staff meeting (if applicable)
- 5.e Sample of Head of School's report to the governing body

Points for consideration regarding Standard 5

- 5.1 The head of school leads efforts to cultivate and maintain good relations with school constituents and the broader community.
- 5.2 The head of school is actively engaged with the governing body in strategic and financial planning.
- 5.3 The head of school and governing body work to develop fair and appropriate personnel policies, benefits, and salaries.
- 5.4 The head of school initiates evaluation of and oversight for all programs, personnel, facilities and resources.

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- 6. *The governing body of the school is independent and deliberative, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and works in partnership with the Head of School to ensure that fiduciary and strategic policies advance the school.***

Supporting Documentation

- 6.a Bylaws
- 6.b Charter/Articles of Incorporation
- 6.c IRS 501(c)(3) letter and any related correspondence
- 6.d List of governing body members, terms, their relationship to the school, and leadership roles/committee assignments
- 6.e Governing body policy manual (if applicable)
- 6.f Confidentiality, conflict of Interest, and whistleblower policy statements indicating regular endorsement by all governing body members.
- 6.g Agendas and minutes of recent governing body meetings
- 6.h Procedures for governing body professional development and orientation
- 6.i Board self-evaluation instrument and results

Points for consideration regarding Standard 6

- 6.1 The governing body develops and regularly reviews the school's mission statement.
- 6.2 The governing body periodically reviews its bylaws, policies, and procedures and demonstrates inclusive decision making.
- 6.3 The governing body initiates adequate risk management policies and procedures.
- 6.4 The governing body selects, supports, and evaluates the head of school.
- 6.5 The governing body and the head of school are actively engaged in strategic and financial planning.
- 6.6 The governing body provides stability during transitions of leadership.
- 6.7 The governing body adheres to the Principles of Good Practice developed by NAIS.

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- 7. *The governing body and the Head of School jointly assure that the financial resources are sufficient to sustain the program and are efficiently managed.***

Supporting Documentation

- 7.a Operating budgets (previous two years and current)*
- 7.b Current audit, management letter, and opinion letter*
- 7.c Three- to five-year financial plan*
- 7.d Debt management plan
- 7.e Annual and Capital fundraising statistics and solicitation materials (current and previous four years)
- 7.f Parent/Student fundraising policies
- 7.g Risk management program*
- 7.h Plans for capital improvements
- 7.i Fiscal policies: (for example, budget-making process, check-signing and processing, billing, purchasing, payroll, segregation of duties)
- 7.j Board fiscal policies: for example, investment, endowment, gift acceptance, debt financing and compliance

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Points for consideration regarding Standard 7

- 7.1 The governing body and the head of school are actively engaged in strategic and financial planning.
- 7.2 The governing body and the head of school exercise fiduciary responsibility.
- 7.3 There are effective policies and procedures for management of operating and capital funds in compliance with generally accepted accounting principles and practices.

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- 8. *The school's facilities and equipment are sufficient to meet the needs of the program and are maintained to provide an effective and safe learning environment.***

Supporting Documentation

- 8.a List of all contracted services and agreements.
- 8.b Fire marshal inspection reports (if applicable)
- 8.c Physical plant and vehicle inspection reports and schedules
- 8.d Health Department inspection reports, if applicable
- 8.e Preventive maintenance plan
- 8.f Evidence of continuing adherence to applicable local, state and federal health and safety regulations for facilities and equipment

Points for consideration regarding Standard 8

- 8.1 Instructional materials and equipment are of sufficient quality, quantity, and variety to provide effective support to the goals and methods of the program.
- 8.2 The school has a process to ensure that it demonstrates compliance with all state, local and federal regulations.

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- 9. *The school's care for the health, safety, and welfare of the students is evident in its policies and practices.***

Supporting Documentation

- 9.a Crisis management/disaster response plan*
- 9.b Procedures and related forms utilized in case of accidents
- 9.c Procedures and related forms utilized in case of illness at school
- 9.d Emergency drill reports
- 9.e Evidence of continuing adherence to applicable local, state and federal health and safety regulations for students
- 9.f Student health and physical form(s)
- 9.g Athletic training rules (if applicable)

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Point for consideration regarding Standard 9

- 9.1 The school shows conformance to appropriate State and Federal legal requirements including but not limited to the information provided in the most recent edition of *Virginia Law and Private School*.

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10. [IF APPLICABLE] The residential program is so conceived and staffed as to reflect the mission of the school and provide a healthy and safe environment.

Supporting Documentation

- 10.a Residential program handbook, for example, student handbook, faculty handbook.
- 10.b List of residential life staff and qualifications
- 10.c Policies for adult supervision of students
- 10.d Schedule of activities during non-instructional hours.
- 10.e Evidence of orientation and training for students and faculty designed to convey the culture of the residential community, the expectations for all resident individuals, and procedures and personnel for resolving issues and obstacles.

Points for consideration regarding Standard 10

- 10.1 The school employs professionals who are responsible for the design and oversight of residential and community life programming and policies and related activities and responsibilities.
- 10.2 The school provides structured programming and activities beyond the typical school day designed to support students in achieving the skills, goals and outcomes stated in the school's mission and other aspirational documents.
- 10.3 The school has well established routines and protocols, and professional personnel, for responding to the needs of students at all times of day or night.
- 10.4 The school's program is executed in such a way that it visibly includes and embraces all students in all aspects of the life of the community beyond the regular school day.
- 10.5 The school provides a healthy and varied food service menu and rotation that meets the nutritional needs of the resident community.

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- 11. [IF APPLICABLE] *The preschool and/or extended day program is conceived and staffed so as to reflect the mission of the school and provide a healthy, safe, and developmentally appropriate environment.***

Supporting Documentation

- 11.a Preschool Licensing or Certification Report (Department of Social Services)
- 11.b Church School or Accredited School Licensing Exemption Documentation
- 11.c Extended Day Licensing or Certification Report (Department of Social Services)

Points for consideration regarding Standard 11

- 11.1 The preschool program is evidence-based and derives from the school's beliefs about early childhood development
- 11.2 The preschool curriculum and outcomes prepare students for academic and social success at subsequent levels.
- 11.3 Systems are in place to effectively communicate individual student progress toward meeting program goals.
- 11.4 The school has a process of regular review of its preschool curriculum and program that is informed by relevant research regarding early childhood development.
- 11.5 The preschool program furthers the overall school mission and values.