

VISITING COMMITTEE MANUAL

ENSURING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

WESTERN CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

MAY 2012

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THE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL'S ACCREDITATION WORK: PRODUCING A SELF-STUDY

The Process of the Self-Study Report

In brief, the process by which the Catholic high school completes its self-study report requires the school to organize into focus groups that will work to accomplish the self-study. This work entails clarifying the school's purpose, amassing data, analyzing the data, discerning "findings"—strengths as well as areas for improvement—and detailing plans for improvement. Having accomplished its self-study report, the school submits it to the WCEA and commences a preparation to receive a WCEA visiting committee, the purpose of whose visit is to verify the contents of the report.

A Self-Study is Familiar

The process of a self-study as described above is not new for a Catholic high school in the WCEA. For the past fifteen years, this kind of self-study has been a normative accreditation-related experience. The particular format that has been in use, Focus on Learning¹, is widely known for its focus groups, its Expected School-wide Learning Results, its criteria, and its school-wide action plan regarding improvement. This format has been a successful one over the years, not least because it has increased the school's ownership of the accreditation process. For example, the format has involved the constituent groups of the school community and has empowered the school to declare its own preferred future—in the form of a school-wide improvement plan.

A New Moment in the Western Catholic Educational Association

With the increasing formalization of the Western Catholic Educational Association over the past ten years², the time has come for a Catholic high school accreditation format that is derived from Catholic school experience and philosophy. The format that has emerged is Ensuring Educational Excellence ("E3"). E3 can be said to represent the new moment in the WCEA. Indeed, there are some new features of the self-study that E3 enshrines. At the same time, there is much within E3 that can be seen to coincide with the format that has preceded it, Focus on Learning.

The School's Self-Study

WCEA accreditation obliges a Catholic high school to enter into an eighteen-month process of self-study. The format for accomplishing the report is entitled Ensuring Educational Excellence (E3). This format has five chapters:

- I. Introduction
- II. Purpose
- III. Self-Study Process
- IV. Findings
- V. Educational Improvement Plan (EIP).

An outline of the self-study format follows.

¹ Focus on Learning—FOL—has been the manual for Catholic high school accreditation of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and the Western Catholic Educational Association (WCEA) since approximately 1995. The two agencies share responsibility for the accreditation of Catholic high schools in the states of California and Hawaii.

² Evidence of this formalization includes: legal incorporation of the WCEA as a 501(c) (3), formation of a governing board, creation of the position of executive director, and the hiring of a director.

OUTLINE of ENSURING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE (E3)

[NOTE: The Catholic high schools that use E3 have organized their self-studies according to this Outline.]

I. Introduction to the School

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| A. Name | I. Instructional Personnel |
| B. Address | J. Staff Personnel |
| C. School's Year of Inception | K. Board/Council |
| D. Nature of the School | L. Parent Organization/s |
| E. Governance Structure | M. Alumni Organization |
| F. Administrative Structure | N. Brief History of the School |
| G. Organization Chart | O. 5 – 7 Most Significant School Developments since the last Self-Study |
| H. Administrative Personnel | |

II. School Purpose

- A. Mission Statement
- B. Philosophy Statement
- C. Integral Student Outcomes

III. Self-Study Process

- A. Organizing for the Work of Self-Studying
- B. Creating/Reviewing and Promulgating the School's Purpose
- C. Gathering Data³
- D. Chronicling the Process of Self-Studying by means of "E3 Process Forms."

IV. Findings (i.e., *key strengths* and *key areas for growth*, in light of Standards⁴ and other criteria⁵)

A. Catholic Identity Standards

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A.1 Catholic Purpose | A.5 Partnership with Parents |
| A.2 Worship | A.6 Service Orientation |
| A.3 Religion Curriculum | A.7 Signs and Symbols |
| A.4 Religion Teachers | A.8 Religious Engagement of All |

B. School Organization Standards

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| B.1 Governance | B.4 Support Staff |
| B.2 Administration | B.5 Organizational Structure |
| B.3 Teachers | |

C. Teaching and Learning Standards

- C.1 Curriculum: What Students Learn
- C.2 Instruction: How Students Learn

³ 'Data' refers to the facts of school experience and to student work. The facts themselves of school experience constitute a Data Library, and are to be kept in a separate binder. This Data Library (binder) is a necessary document in the E3 process. The Data Library must be constructed prior to a school's work on Chapter IV of E3 because the data of school experience inform the school's "findings" in Chapter IV.

⁴ Standards are essential indicators of professional (educational) quality. Some of these standards are unique to *Catholic* schooling. Other standards are germane to schooling as such.

⁵ 'Other criteria' refers to curriculum content standards, to other program criteria, and to a school's integral student outcomes (ISOs).

- C.3 Assessment: Its Forms and uses
- C.4 Reporting Student Achievement
- D. Student Support Standards**
 - D.1 Educational Environment
 - D.2 Co-Curricular Programs
 - D.3 Academic Support
 - D.4 College Matriculation
- E. Material Stewardship Standards**
 - E.1 Enrollment Resources
 - E.2 Educational Resources
 - E.3 Plant Resources
 - E.4 Funding Resources
 - E.5 Business Operations
 - E.6 Promotional Operations
 - E.7 Strategic Material Planning

Discerning Areas for Vital Growth

- V. Educational Improvement Plan (EIP)**
 - A. Implementation of the Prior Plan from the last Self-Study
 - B. Current Educational Improvement Plan

New Features in the E3 Self-Study compared to FOL Self-Study

Regarding the self-study that the school has done according to E3, some new features⁶ include: a ‘Catholic Identity’ set of standards; a Data Library; a more compact format for the Findings Chapter; and a more department-driven analysis of the teaching and learning within the school. E3 acknowledges the fundamental importance of the Catholic Faith by going beyond the Catholic requirements of FOL in giving coherent shape to eight (8) standards of Catholic identity that the school is expected to meet. Data-driven reporting reaches a new level of significance in the form of the Data Library of E3. This library of data—‘library’ because of its extensiveness— must be constructed near the outset of a school’s E3 process, otherwise the school fails to secure the condition that leads to credible “findings” in Chapter IV. The findings chapter itself represents another example of ‘what’s new in E3.’ This (fourth) chapter does not require the (lengthy) narrative writing that was required in its counterpart chapter in FOL. In place of narrative, Chapter IV of E3 first requires robust, data-informed focus group discussions in response to “key questions.” These discussions lead to the discernment/identification of strengths and key growth areas with brief accompanying rationales—these are what is meant by ‘findings’ in E3. Another new feature of E3 that deserves mention here is a process-related feature, (namely) an emphasis on department home-groups as a way of gathering and analyzing data (especially that which is related to teaching and learning). These four features of E3 are new compared to Focus on Learning.

⁶ There are a number of different features in the E3 self-study format compared to the FOL self-study model. The four features here are not exhaustive of what is new. They are new features, for which reason they receive a brief treatment.

THE VISITING COMMITTEE of the WCEA

The WCEA's Visiting Committee

The WCEA visiting committee is comprised of a chairperson and several members (the number of whom is influenced by the size of a school). While the chairperson is drawn from another Catholic diocese,⁷ the members are generally drawn from other Catholic high schools within the school's own diocese. One of the members may be a representative of the regional secular accrediting body with which WCEA partners. In advance of their visit to the school, the chairperson and members are trained for their work by the WCEA. This training involves orienting the visiting committee to the format by which the school has gone about producing its self-study report, namely Ensuring Educational Excellence. In view of their training, the visiting committee members understand the professional obligations that are upon them, including (but not limited to) the need for unity, integrity, and confidentiality. The first of these obliges the members to collaborate, to the point of striving for consensus in important judgments concerning the school. The second obligation means that the visiting committee thinks and acts without prejudice to the school.⁸ The last of these obligations means that the visiting committee does not publicly disclose the proceedings or results of its work.

The Work of the WCEA Visiting Committee

In advance of their visit to the school, the chairperson and members each receive a copy of the school's self-study report. They familiarize themselves with the self-study, according to which they form first impressions of the school. The committee is then trained for its work, training that includes (among other things) how to accomplish some writing in advance of the visit.⁹ Writing-in-advance-of-the-visit is important, albeit this writing is not meant to overshadow the essential work that awaits the committee at the school, namely (the work of) discerning the *actual* educational quality of the school. The school's self-study report serves as an important lens by which to view the school and begin to see its quality. Even more important for discerning the school's quality is the visit, (which serves as the) litmus test of what the school has written in its self-study. The on-site visit allows for an experience of the school itself. This visit entails experiences of: classroom dynamics, the co-curricular programs, students' work, school persons' and groups' reflections on what they do, and (not least) the school's improvement aspirations. By these experiences the visiting committee is able to verify what the school has declared in its self-study. The visit is requisite for gaining a true sense of the school's quality.¹⁰

⁷ The reason for this "outsider" is objectivity. That is, the requirements of objectivity call for a chairperson who is not connected in any way with the school. The exception to this requirement is the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The large size of this Archdiocese and its many high schools make it possible (necessary!) for a chairperson to be selected from a high school within this Archdiocese.

⁸ The requirements of integrity call for the visiting committee to dispose itself to receive both the school's report and the school's reality, to receive these things without any preconceived judgments that are based on a committee member's experience at his/her own school.

⁹ This writing is a first draft, wholly dependent on what the school has written about itself. Hence, there will be (there must be!) editing of this draft after the visiting committee experiences the school in action.

¹⁰ It is to be presumed that what the school writes of itself reveals what the school practices. But accreditation experience sometimes reveals that a school's self-study is *less than* its performance. In this case, the self-study does not (quite) reveal the school. Here, the visiting committee realizes that it is not the self-study that is being

The on-site visit includes more than a visiting committee gathering experiences of the school. There must be time devoted to (the visiting committee's) reflection and discussion of their school experiences. This reflection-and-discussion is interspersed throughout the three days of the visit and is sufficient to engender focused, consensual insights about the quality of the school. These insights are recorded in the visiting committee's report (which is given to the school) and they substantiate an overall recommendation concerning the accreditation of the school (which is given to the WCEA Commission).

Outline of the Visiting Committee's Report: Seven Sections

The visiting committee writes a report of its experiences. The report does not imitate the written format that the school used in its self-study. The visiting committee report is organized according to the seven (7) principles of WCEA accreditation. The basic question that guides the written reporting of the committee is *whether the school sufficiently observes each of the principles*. The following outline reveals the format of the report:

Introduction

- I. School's Observance of Principle A: Authentic Catholic Identity
- II. School's Observance of Principle B: Organizational Efficacy
- III. School's Observance of Principle C: Excellence of Teaching and Learning
- IV. School's Observance of Principle D: Vitality of the Support Programs
- V. School's Observance of Principle E: Stewardship of Material Resources
- VI. School's Observance of Principle F: Commitment to Improvement
- VII. School's Observance of Principle G: Integrity of Self-Study Process.

accredited. The committee realizes (that) 'what the school practices' not 'what the school writes' constitutes the proper object of its visiting and reporting.

SEVEN (7) PRINCIPLES OF WCEA HIGH SCHOOL ACCREDITATION

There are seven (7) principles that a school is meant to observe, according to the requirements of WCEA accreditation. The seven principles are:

A. The Authenticity of the School's Catholic Identity

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school's Catholic identity ought to be authentic. Here, 'authenticity' means that, in all its understandings and operations, the school is oriented toward God as He is worshipped and believed by the Catholic Church.

B. The Organizational Efficacy of the School

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a Catholic school ought to be thoughtfully organized and effectively operated. Here, 'thoughtfully' has to do with systematic carefulness.

C. The Excellence of the Teaching and Learning

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the school's teaching and learning ought to be of the highest quality. Here, 'teaching and learning' refers to the classroom context and dynamic. By 'excellence' (or 'highest quality') is meant (that) an exemplary curriculum is delivered and the maximum learning capacity of each student is stirred.

D. The Vitality of the Co-Curricular Programs

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the co-curricular or ancillary programs (i.e., in addition to the classroom) should add vitality to the overall school program. By 'vitality' is understood that which complements the classroom education and engenders the maturation of the *whole person* of the student.

E. The Stewardship of Material Resources

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the management of a school's material resources ought to be carried out responsibly, for the well-being of others (i.e., primarily students). This 'responsible management' is stewardship. In the Catholic high school context, they who manage a school's material assets (or resources) are stewards. They ought to do so in a spirit of care for these assets. 'Stewardship' also implies accountability, rather like what is owed to an owner or a governing authority (i.e., to the one who has entrusted the steward with things of value).

F. The Commitment to Improvement

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school ought to be committed to improvement, in whole and in parts. What is meant by 'improvement' begins in a school's humble estimation of itself and its operations. 'Improvement' obliges a school to strive for a better fulfillment of its mission.

G. The Integrity of the Process of a Self-Study

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school's self-study process must manifest integrity—i.e., inclusivity, honesty, and thoroughness—throughout the whole of the process.

The Primacy of the Principle of Authentic Catholic Identity

At the outset of this development, it is important to note that the first of the principles—authentic Catholic identity—can be said to have *pride of place* among the seven. Simply put, this principle highlights the faith and traditions of the Catholic Church, establishing the Faith—the formation of students according to this Faith—as the fundamental reason for the school’s existence and identity. The (first) place that this principle occupies derives from the fact that all school reality is meant to be seen in light of this principle and no part of school life may fail to manifest the principle. This principle may be likened to a unifying thread or pattern within the whole fabric of accreditation. It adds beauty, the beauty of coherence, to the fabric. It does so without diminishing any of the parts of the fabric that can be separately distinguished. (To extend the analogy, ‘the parts of the fabric that can be separately distinguished’ refers to the other six principles.) Without confusing the matter of this principle’s significance, another metaphor is helpful here, the metaphor of the heart. Simply stated, Catholic identity is the heart of the matter in a Catholic school because Catholic schooling has to do first with the formation of students in Christ. Thus the accreditation principle that is ordered to Catholic identity is at the heart of accreditation.

The Significance of the Other Six Principles

Each of the other six principles of WCEA accreditation is autonomous, with an inherent significance. Four of the remaining six principles are ordered to specific dimensions of school life—(to) school organization, the classroom, co-curricular reality, and the school’s material reality. The fifth principle has to do with school improvement. Like the Catholicity principle, this improvement principle embraces the whole of the school’s life, and so it is a quite important principle. The sixth principle is ordered to accreditation itself, to what is required for accomplishing the process of a self-study. Each of the six principles is necessary for accreditation, albeit it can be seen that the meaning or significance of each is not equal when viewed in relationship to the school mission. To reiterate, the principle of authentic Catholic integrity is at the heart of this mission. Next in significance comes the principle of teaching and learning (i.e., the “classroom principle”). This principle carries greater weight than any of the other five because it is directed to the second great action that constitutes the school mission, (namely) the formation of students in culture. After these two principles, the improvement principle is especially weighty. The remaining three principles that are directed to dimensions of school life as well as the “process principle” may be of unequal significance *vis a vis* each other. At the same time the inherent significance of each of these remaining principles and their collective significance—they are necessary for accomplishing the whole of accreditation—makes moot any need to rank them in relationship to each other.

THE PRINCIPLES AND CORRESPONDING STANDARDS OF E3

Standards: Constitutive Elements of a Principle

Each of the seven principles of WCEA accreditation is comprised of several or more standards. A standard is an essential element of a principle. Each standard may be distinguished in itself, at the same time the standard does not stand alone, it exists as part of a principle. There are ordinarily several (or more) standards that comprise each principle of accreditation. The standards—taken together—are the means by which a principle is seen.¹¹

Principles and their Constitutive Standards

In what follows, the seven principles of WCEA accreditation are stated, along with the standards that constitute each principle. The principles are ordered from 'A to G.' It will be evident from a viewing of them that the first five of these principles (i.e., A through E) correspond exactly to the "five areas" according to which the twenty-eight (28) standards in Chapter IV of Ensuring Educational Excellence are organized.

A. The Authenticity of the School's Catholic Identity

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school's Catholic identity ought to be authentic. Here, 'authenticity' means that, in all its understandings and operations, the school is oriented toward God as He is worshipped and believed by the Catholic Church. There are eight (8) standards by which the WCEA discerns a school's *authentic Catholic identity*:

A.1 Catholic Purpose

The school has a mission statement and a philosophy statement that indicate the integration of the Roman Catholic Faith into all aspects of school life.

A.2 Worship

The school ensures regular opportunities for the students to experience prayer, retreats, and the Sacraments.

A.3 Religion Curriculum

The school uses a Religion curriculum and instruction that is faithful to Roman Catholic Church teachings, (that is) subject to the authorization of the Local Ordinary, and (that) otherwise meets the requirements set forth by the USCCB.

A.4 Religion Teachers

The formation of religion teachers for catechetical and instructional competence is ongoing.

A.5 Partnership with Parents

The school maintains an active partnership with parents whose fundamental concern is the spiritual and academic education of their children.

A.6 Service Orientation

The school helps students develop a service-oriented outreach to the Church and civic community after the example of Jesus who said, "I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done." (John 13:15)

¹¹ The terms 'principle' and 'standard' are distinguished as such in E3: the former term refers to a broad ideal, an ideal concerning a *major dimension* of a Catholic high school; the latter term also refers to an ideal, an ideal concerning a *more particular facet* of school life that is ordered to a broad dimension. In other words, this latter term—"standard"—represents a *part of* the reality that is meant by the former word 'principle.' As ideals, both terms summon the school to excellence, excellence in a broad dimension of school life and excellence in a more particular feature of that life.

A.7 Signs and Symbols

There is widespread use of signs, symbols, sacramentals, traditions and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the school.

A.8 Religious Engagement of All

All school personnel are actively engaged in bringing the Good News of Jesus into the total educational experience.

B. The Organizational Efficacy of the School

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a Catholic school ought to be thoughtfully organized and effectively run. Here, 'thoughtfully' has to do with systematic carefulness. There are five (5) standards by which the WCEA discerns a school's *organizational efficacy*:

B.1 Governance

The governance body of the school responsibly keeps the school's mission, delegates responsibility as necessary, and monitors for accountability regarding what is delegated.

B.2 Administration

The school administration provides quality leadership for the personnel and the operations by which the religious and educational objectives of the school are realized.

B.3 Instructional Personnel

Instructional personnel are qualified for their responsibilities and are committed to professional development toward ensuring that the religious and educational objectives of the school are realized.

B.4 Support Staff

School support staff engage in duties essential to the effectiveness of the school's religious and educational operations.

B.5 Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the school—its offices, departments, schedules, modes of communication, and deployment of personnel—and the operations pertinent to this structure are optimum for realization of the religious and educational objectives of the school.

C. The Excellence of the Teaching and Learning

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the school's teaching and learning ought to be of the highest quality. Here, 'teaching and learning' refers to the classroom context and dynamic. By 'excellence' (or 'highest quality') is meant (that) an exemplary curriculum is delivered and the maximum learning capacity of each student is realized. There are four (4) standards by which the WCEA discerns *the excellence of a school's teaching and learning*:

C.1 Curriculum/What Students Learn

The school provides a challenging, coherent, and relevant curriculum for students toward students' accomplishment of the educational outcomes that the school sets for them.

C.2 Instruction/How Students Learn

Instructional personnel use a variety of appropriate methods by which to maximize the learning experiences of all students toward students' accomplishment of the educational outcomes that the school sets for them.

C.3 Assessment

School personnel responsibly engage in assessment of students' learning toward students' accomplishment of the educational outcomes that the school sets for them.

C.4 Reporting Student Achievement

School personnel responsibly report students' achievement toward students' accomplishment of the educational outcomes that the school sets for them.

D. The Vitality of the Co-Curricular Programs

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the co-curricular or ancillary programs (i.e., in addition to the classroom) should add vitality to the overall school program. By ‘vitality’ is understood that which complements the classroom education and otherwise engenders the maturation of the *whole person* of the student. There are four (4) standards by which the WCEA discerns *the vitality of the co-curricular programs*:

D.1 School Environment

The school provides an environment that is physically, personally, and academically safe for all students.

D.2 Academic Support

The school provides academic support services sufficient to meet the learning needs of all students.

D.3 Co-Curricular Programs

The school provides opportunities for students to engage in co-curricular activities—in the arts, in athletics, in student government, in clubs, and the like—that are conducive to their development as whole persons.

D.4 College Matriculation

The school provides support services that foster the college matriculation of students.

E. The Responsible Management—i.e., Stewardship—of Material Resources

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the management of a school’s material resources ought to be carried out responsibly, for the well-being of others (i.e., primarily students). This ‘responsible management’ is stewardship. In the Catholic high school context, they who manage a school’s material assets (or resources) are stewards. They ought to do so in a spirit of care for these assets. ‘Stewardship’ also implies accountability, rather like what is owed to an owner (i.e., to the one who has entrusted the steward with things of value). There are seven (7) standards by which the WCEA discerns a school’s *stewardship of material resources*:

E.1 Enrollment Resources

The school’s enrollment operations are well conceived and well run, toward securing the student population that the school mission intends.

E.2 Classroom and Instructional Resources

The classroom and instructional resources are sufficient both in quality and in quantity for the school to deliver an excellent educational program.

E.3 Plant Resources

The school plant—facilities, buildings and grounds—is of such size and quality as to constitute a fit house for the school’s essential operations.

E.4 Funding Resources (i.e., revenue generating)

The school’s funding sources and operations—tuition, annual events, and third-source income*— are of such quality as to yield revenues sufficient at minimum to off-set annual expenses. *Three kinds of revenue-generating operations are included in this Standard: tuition (aka “first source” income), annual events (aka “second source” income), and all other revenue streams (aka “third-source” income).

E.5 Business Operations

The school’s business operations—budgeting, accounting, and the like— are sound as to planning, implementation, reporting, oversight and review.

E.6 Promotional Operations

The school’s promotional operations—public relations and marketing—effectively communicate school news and attract support for the school from within and beyond the school community.

E.7 Strategic Material Planning

The school exercises responsible material resource planning for its future.

F. The Commitment to Improvement

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school ought to be committed to improvement, in whole and in parts. What is meant by ‘improvement’ begins in a school’s humble estimation of itself and its operations. ‘Improvement’ obliges a school to strive for a better fulfillment of its mission. There are three (3) standards by which the WCEA discerns a school’s *commitment to improvement*:

F.1 Conscientious implementation of the improvement plan from the prior accreditation (full-visit).

Its improvement plan from the prior accreditation (full-visit)—a plan that may have included an additional growth area or two as identified by the WCEA visiting committee—was derived after systematic analysis of the data of school experience. This plan identified significant areas for improvement, constitutive action steps, acting agents, necessary resources, ways of assessing progress, ways of reporting progress, and a timeline for completion. In short, the plan was well conceived. A well-conceived plan deserves conscientious implementation. This standard calls the school to such an implementation.

F.2 Ongoing improvement—planning and implementation thereof—between accreditation visits.

After the implementation of the prior improvement plan runs its course, the school is not thereby dispensed from the obligation to improve. School improvement is an ongoing obligation. This standard obliges the school to be continuously planning and implementing, toward more effective operations.

F.3 Requisite conception of an improvement plan as a major outcome of a self-study.

The outcome of a self-study is an educational improvement plan that the school conceives, a plan that addresses all the vital areas wherein the school needs to grow. Each of these vital areas for growth ought to include these elements: (identification of) the vital growth area, the goal of the growth plan for this area, a rationale for the plan, the constitutive action steps, the acting agents, necessary resources, ways of assessing progress, ways of reporting progress, and a timeline for completion. According to this standard, these elements are requisite in the conception of each major area that constitutes a school’s improvement plan.

G. The Integrity of the Process of a Self-Study

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school’s self-study process must manifest integrity—i.e., inclusivity, honesty, and thoroughness—throughout the whole of the process. There are three (3) standards by which the WCEA discerns *the integrity of the process of a self-study*:

G.1 The process is inclusive.

All members of the school community are involved in the self-studying, in a manner appropriate to each. The construction of the self-study itself is essentially the work of those who deliver the school’s educational mission—teachers, administrators, and support staff. Those who receive this education—students (with their parents)—must be heard (e.g., via surveys). Other constituent groups—governance body, alumni, benefactors, friends—have their roles to play in the inclusive process.

G.2 The process is honest.

The school’s educational program is openly studied, leading to an accurate assessment of its quality. By ‘accurate’ is meant candid, truthful. The school endeavors to discern the truth of its operations—not only school strengths but also school weaknesses. A self-study is a confessional not a promotional (or public relational) exercise. Indeed, that school which honestly views itself is in the best position to grow via an educational improvement plan.

G.3 The process is thorough.

The whole of the school’s educational program is studied. All aspects of school life—courses and co-curriculars, offices and operations, purposes and plans—are analyzed in the process of the self-study. Moreover, a self-study is not only about viewing and evaluating school life but also about improving this life. Thus an educational improvement plan is a major end or purpose of the process of self-studying.

SCHEMA FOR CONNECTING THE SCHOOL'S SELF-STUDY WITH THE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

The following schema is provided to the visiting committee of the WCEA. This schema depicts the practical connections between the parts of a school's self-study and the seven principles (i.e., 'A to G') according to which the committee's report is organized. This schema serves to answer the question 'where ought a visiting committee member to look within the school's self-study report in order to glean the school's observance of any given principle.'

Regarding Principle A. The Authenticity of the School's Catholic Identity

See the Self-Study. . . .

| | | |
|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| Chapter I | ..... | D, E, G, O |
| Chapter II | ..... | A,B,C |
| Chapter III | ..... | B, Data Library: A |
| Chapter IV | ..... | A |
| Chapter V | ..... | See Chapter IV: A |

Regarding Principle B. The Organizational Efficacy of the School

See the Self-Study. . . .

| | | |
|-------------|-------|------------------------------------|
| Chapter I | ..... | D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O |
| Chapter II | ..... | --- |
| Chapter III | ..... | B, Data Library: B |
| Chapter IV | ..... | B |
| Chapter V | ..... | See Chapter IV: B |

Regarding Principle C. The Excellence of the Teaching and Learning

See the Self-Study. . . .

| | | |
|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| Chapter I | ..... | G, I, O |
| Chapter II | ..... | C |
| Chapter III | ..... | B, Data Library: C |
| Chapter IV | ..... | C |
| Chapter V | ..... | See Chapter IV: C |

Regarding Principle D. The Vitality of Support Programs for Students

See the Self-Study. . . .

| | | |
|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| Chapter I | ..... | G, O |
| Chapter II | ..... | C |
| Chapter III | ..... | B, Data Library: D |
| Chapter IV | ..... | D |
| Chapter V | ..... | See Chapter IV: D |

Regarding Principle E. The Stewardship of Material Resources

See the Self-Study. . . .

| | | |
|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| Chapter I | ..... | G, J, O |
| Chapter II | ..... | --- |
| Chapter III | ..... | B, Data Library: E |
| Chapter IV | ..... | E |
| Chapter V | ..... | See Chapter IV: E |

Regarding Principle F. The Commitment to Improvement

See the Self-Study. . . .

| | | |
|-------------|-------|--|
| Chapter I | ..... | O |
| Chapter II | ..... | --- |
| Chapter III | ..... | B |
| Chapter IV | ..... | A through E; Discerning Vital Growth Areas |
| Chapter V | ..... | All of it |

Regarding Principle G. The Integrity of the Process of the Self-Study

See the Self-Study. . . .

| | | |
|-------------|-------|---------|
| Chapter I | ..... | --- |
| Chapter II | ..... | --- |
| Chapter III | ..... | A, B, C |
| Chapter IV | ..... | --- |
| Chapter V | ..... | --- |

THE VISITING COMMITTEE PROCESS

In what follows here, the process of the WCEA visiting committee's work is described. Some of these work experiences are straightforward, requiring little if any explanation. Other experiences are amply described, especially as these experiences are new to WCEA accreditation with E3.

An example of an amply described experience is (the work of) 'discerning the school's observance of a principle.' This discernment requires a visiting committee to move from a consideration of 'the parts' (i.e., whether the school meets the standards that give shape to a principle) to a summary evaluation of 'the whole' (i.e., whether the school observes the principle itself).

Receiving Training

The committee's training is provided by the WCEA leadership, several months in advance of the committee's actual three-day visit to the school. This training begins with an overview of the self-study according to the E3 format. As there is much that is in common between E3 and what has preceded it (i.e. FOL), the training concentrates on that which is new in E3.

See "New Features in the E3 Self-Study" on page 5 of this manual.

Becoming familiar with the E3 Format

Knowing the E3 format (i.e., the self-study process that a school experiences) is requisite for the successful work of a visiting committee. The committee members ought to have in hand Ensuring Educational Excellence at the time of its training.

Pages 3-5 in this manual are helpful for becoming familiar with E3 and with what a school has accomplished in its self-study.

Reading the School's Self-Study

Upon receipt of the school's self-study approximately a month in advance of the visit, the committee member reads this document thoroughly.¹² This reading enables the member to begin to know the

¹² The visiting committee member does NOT receive the Data Library (DL) prior to the visit to the school, only the committee chairperson receives it then. The committee member accesses the DL during the visit. The member will need to access the DL during the visit in order to perceive the connection between the data of school experience and the "findings" that a school discerns and reports in Chapter IV of its self-study.

school. The thorough reading also positions the member to accomplish specific tasks in advance of the visit and to see how the member's work blends with the work of the total committee.

Completing a Pre-writing Assignment ('Pre' refers to *before-the-visit*.)

Prior to the actual visit, the committee members receive their assignments from the committee chairperson. These assignments call for some "pre-writing." Pre-writing amounts to a first draft of the committee's report, a draft that is based solely on what the school itself has written in its self-study. The value of this pre-writing is two-fold for the visiting committee: it secures an understanding of what the school has done and brings focus to what must be explored at the visit.

The need to amend the pre-writing becomes clear at the time of the visit when the committee actually experiences the school.

The pre-writing assignment signifies accreditation work in basic form. This form requires a committee member to view school experience and to evaluate it—according to the format that E3 specifies. The member accomplishes this work as follows:

1. by **understanding the accreditation principle that is at hand**¹³ in one's assignment;
2. by beginning with the first of the standards that constitutes the principle and **discerning whether or not the school's experience signifies that the school has met the standard.**¹⁴ Here, at the time of pre-writing, the committee member is only able to infer attainment of a standard from what the school has written about itself. Thus, the member makes an educated guess as to this attainment. At the visit, when the member experiences the school actually (accessing the Data Library, witnessing classroom dynamics, viewing student work and school documents, and conducting interviews), the member is able to make an informed judgment about whether (and the degree to which) the school has met the standard;
3. by **discerning the degree to which the school has met the standard**—whether *commendably* or *sufficiently*. If the discernment is "commendably" (as might be the case when the school declares a "key strength" in the area of experience that the standard covers), the key strength that is declared by the school is noted. If the committee member records this there is an improvement plan (in Chapter V) that has a bearing on the standard, the discernment that results is 'sufficiently' (not 'commendably') and the area-for-growth that is declared by the school is noted¹⁵;

¹³ See the Seven Principles of WCEA Accreditation (pages 8-13 in this manual) and the Schema (pages 14-5) in order to appreciate the principles and to connect them with the school's self-study.

¹⁴ Only in egregious cases would a member discern that a standard has not been met. Of course, this discernment is not possible at the time of pre-writing. Should such discernment occur during the visit, ample evidence would be required to buttress it.

¹⁵ By 'discerning' or 'discernment' is meant an evaluative judgment that follows from a viewing of evidence, an understanding of the standard of quality that is applicable, and a desire to 'do the truth in charity.'

4. **by recording (i.e., writing) what has been discerned** after using each standard to gauge the quality of school experience;
5. **by repeating the prior four steps for each standard** that constitutes the principle.

There is a **WCEA visiting committee form** entitled “**ATTAINMENT OF A STANDARD.**” This form is to be used for **written reporting** *about each standard* that constitutes the accreditation principle for which the visiting committee member has responsibility. **This form is for committee use and not for school viewing.**

At the time of the visit, when the visiting committee member experiences the school *actually*, the member will amend (or refine) his/her pre-writing. This amending follows from the member’s experiences of: viewing the Data Library, viewing student work, reading school documents, observing classroom dynamics, and interviewing school persons and groups. The sum of these experiences gives the member insights into *the school actually*, and these insights may conform or differ from what the member perceived from a reading of the school’s self-study prior to the visit. In any case these insights do not alter the basic form of the member’s work—which is to render a reasonable judgment concerning *whether (and the-degree-to-which) a standard has been met*. Moreover, during the visit, the basic form of accreditation work is experienced anew when, conceptually speaking, the member moves from discerning whether standards are met (or attained) to discerning whether a principle is observed.

Following a Schedule

The visiting committee chairperson and the school fashion a mutually agreeable schedule for the visit. The schedule is not radically different than the schedule that schools and chairpersons are accustomed to working out in view of the previous accreditation format (i.e., FOL). Thus, there is time for classroom visiting, document viewing, interviewing, and committee meetings. It may be the case that the *aggregate time* given to scheduled contacts with school groups/persons is *less with E3* than with FOL because of the committee’s familiarity with the school via access to the Data Library. Also, there may be a need to allot more time (than before with FOL) for committee discussion and writing during the visit.

Visiting Classrooms

Classroom visits are an important experience for the visiting committee. (These visits are no different in E3 than in FOL.) The point of these visits is to experience the teaching-and-learning, to see the educational resources and facilities, and to view student work (i.e., papers, homework, tests, etc.)

How students are engaged is a major indicator of the learning taking place in the classroom.

Viewing Students’ Work

The need to view students’ work comes as a result of the committee’s responsibility to ascertain that curriculum content standards are realized as are the integral student outcomes (ISOs) that the school

has declared. The committee may expect that criterion-based student work is to be found in the classrooms while standardized test results are to be found in the committee workroom.

Viewing School Documentation

What is meant by ‘documentation’ has to do with the Data Library and also includes all manner of school written matter: school handbooks (e.g., curriculum guide), strategic plans, reports, minutes of meetings, newsletters, recruitment literature, budgets, the school website, yearbooks, and more. This documentation ought to be readily accessible to the visiting committee.

Interviewing

Interviewing Focus Groups. The committee members conduct interviews with a minimum of seven focus groups (i.e., the school’s accreditation leadership group, one group for each of the five “A to G” areas of accreditation standards, and a group of randomly selected students). Interview questions are drawn up by committee members in view of their need to understand school experience. These questions ought not to seek information that is otherwise available in the school’s self-study (especially its Data Library). Other focus groups may be interviewed as necessary (e.g., curriculum group, parent group, governance group, or support staff group).

Interviewing Individuals. The significance of some positions within the school organization (for example, president and principal) requires that the person in the position be interviewed—especially regarding the school’s vital growth areas. Other individuals may be interviewed, as necessary, per the need of the visiting committee to understand school experience.

Informing the School’s Leadership Team

The visiting team and the leadership team meet at the outset of each day to ensure a shared understanding of the day’s schedule. In addition to this formality, the morning meeting is the occasion for the chairperson of the committee to keep the school’s leadership team apprised of the committee’s progress over the course of the visit. From a regard for transparency—the kind of transparency that the school has manifested to the visiting committee in naming its areas for vital growth, the visiting committee recognizes its responsibility to inform the school of its progress throughout the visit. This responsibility to inform the school is particularly necessary when the visiting committee has begun to discern a key (if not vital) matter for school growth that the school did not include in its self-study. Moreover, should the visiting committee discern such matter, it is not enough merely to mention it to the school, the committee chairperson must communicate the matter completely (i.e., explaining the matter and the rationale for its discernment by the committee).

The written report of the visiting committee may not include growth areas discerned by the committee that have not been declared by the committee to the school in the context of the visit.

Sharing Perceptions within the Committee

It is important for the visiting committee members to spend sufficient time together during the visit in order to share perceptions of school experience. Telling each other what one has seen/heard/read/understood of school experience is a requirement of committee work, especially since ‘sharing perceptions’ is a necessary operation along the way of ‘forming (evaluative) judgments’ concerning the quality of school experiences. There is all the more reason to share perceptions together in view of the obligation that committee members have to strive for consensus in their work.

Forming Evaluative Judgments

As was mentioned, forming evaluative judgments is the basic form of visiting committee work. These are judgments regarding whether (and the degree to which) the school has met a standard, which is a quality indicator concerning an area of school experience. This kind of judgment represents work that the visiting committee performs *in its internal forum*. There are also judgments regarding whether the school observes a principle, which is an integral rule of Catholic high school accreditation. This kind of judgment represents *external forum work*, since the judgments are manifest in the written report of the visiting committee. In either case the formation of such a judgment requires that there be material evidence in support of the judgment (rather like the requirement on the school to cite evidence from the Data Library in support of any identification of a key strength area or a key growth area). What is meant by ‘material evidence of a standard’ is explicit school experience that is inherently related to that standard. What is meant by ‘material evidence of a principle’ are judgments about the standards that are inherently related to that principle.

Knowing the Internal Forum and the External Forum

The first kind of judgment concerning standards being met (i.e., the standards that constitute a given principle) is a work that is *internal* to the visiting committee. Why internal to the committee? Why not public (i.e., external, written for the school’s viewing)? Because standards are elements or parts of principles. They lack *integral* accreditation meaning. There is no need for the committee to report to the school its findings about individual standards, since these (findings about standards) are *steps along the way* to discerning the school’s observance of comprehensive principles. The (7) principles are the bottom line in WCEA accreditation work. Whether or not the school observes them is the end or outcome of visiting committee work. Thus, what the committee discerns concerning the principles of accreditation is what is reported (in writing) to the school by the WCEA visiting committee.¹⁶

Determining whether Standards are met

Regarding its internal work (i.e., work done within the committee itself *that is for the committee itself*), the first time that a member uses the form “ATTAINMENT OF A STANDARD” is during the pre-writing phase of this work. Use thereof is as follows:¹⁷

¹⁶ The committee’s internal written work concerning standards—*a la* the form ATTAINMENT OF A STANDARD—is available to the WCEA Commission after the completion of the visiting committee’s work.

¹⁷ See “Completing a Pre-writing Assignment.” (pages 17-18 in this manual)

Identification of the standard and its overarching principle;

1. Recourse to the Schema (pages 14-15 in this manual) in order to locate the principle within school experience;
2. Viewing of Chapter IV (i.e., A, B, C, D, or E therein) of the school's self-study in order to identify any key strength or key growth that may be governed by the standard;
3. Viewing of Chapter V of the self-study in order to identify any vital growth area that is governed by the standard;
4. Preliminary¹⁸ evaluative judgment whether the standard is met and, if met, indication of the degree to which it is met (whether sufficiently or commendably) . . . with accompanying rationale that explains the reasons for the judgment.

These steps are repeated using a separate form for each of the standards that comprise the principle.

At the time of the visit the member uses a new ATTAINMENT form for each standard. Use of a new form is required because the committee member is experiencing the school actually, including (among other experiences) accessing the Data Library, visiting classrooms, and interviewing.

These (completed) ATTAINMENT forms are then at hand to the committee member when, at a later point in the visit, the committee begins the work of discerning whether an overarching principle is sufficiently observed.

All ATTAINMENT forms for each standard are retained by the committee chairperson for WCEA Commission overview, if necessary.

¹⁸ 'Preliminary' because the reference is to pre-writing, done in the time before the actual visit to the school.

Discerning the School's Observance of the Seven Principles

At a point approximately two-thirds into its visit, the visiting committee of the WCEA comes to the major task of discerning whether the overarching principles of accreditation are observed by the school in the course of school experience.

Discernment of principles implies a comprehensive evaluative judgment that is equally science and art, 'science' because of what is at hand materially by way of ATTAINMENT forms and 'art' because of the insight that is involved in grasping a whole (i.e., observance of a principle) from a viewing of the parts (i.e., the attainment of discrete standards). Indeed, the nature of this discernment as 'art' is also suggested by the ethical imperative on the committee to 'do the whole truth in charity.'

Discernment of the observance of a principle by the visiting committee is accomplished according to the following steps:

1. Completed ATTAINMENT forms (i.e., one for each standard) are at hand;
2. The seven (7) principles of WCEA accreditation are at hand. (See pg. 8-9 in this manual.);
3. The school's self-study is at hand, as are the Data Library and the E3 Process forms;
4. There is an *a priori* commitment to working consensually among the committee members;
5. The ATTAINMENT forms are gathered and grouped in relationship to the principles of WCEA accreditation. So, for example, there are eight (8) ATTAINMENT forms in relationship to 'authentic Catholic identity', five (5) such forms regarding 'Organization efficacy', four (4) regarding the 'Excellence of Teaching and Learning', etc. ;
6. *Vis a vis* each principle, a tally of the ATTAINMENT forms that constitute the principle is taken (i.e., a tally of the number of them that indicate observance of a standard), leading to a *first impression* concerning observance of the principle.¹⁹ Then a substantive viewing of each standard takes place (i.e., what is written on each ATTAINMENT form is studied);
7. The work in #6 leads a visiting committee to an evaluative discernment concerning the school's observance of a principle. This discernment is a summary moment. It is the moment when the visiting committee perceives whether, from a thorough consideration of discrete parts (i.e., standards) a whole has been achieved. What is meant by 'whole' is the school's observance of a principle. *This discernment represents the visiting committee's summary judgment concerning the school's observance of a principle, a summary judgment that forms an essential part of the committee's written report of findings.*

These steps are repeated for each of the seven (7) principles of WCEA accreditation.

¹⁹ If the tally shows that a majority of the standards that relate to the principle are attained (or met), then it can be inferred that the overarching principle is observed. If the tally reveals a tie between the number of standards that are met and the number that are not met, then it cannot be inferred *from this first impression* that the principle is observed. If the tally reveals that a majority of the standards are not met, then it can be inferred that the overarching principle is not observed by the school. *In any case, a viewing of the rationale attached to each standard is required* along the way toward a summary discernment about the school's observance of a principle.

Receiving a School's Educational Improvement Plan

In its work of discernment, the visiting committee pays particular attention to a school's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP). As *school self-improvement* is a salient feature of accreditation, the EIP of any school is presumed by a visiting committee to be honest, accurate and thorough. Standard F.3 calls the school to construct just such an EIP. Of course, the point of having a visiting committee is to view and evaluate the EIP that the school has constructed in order to ensure that this EIP is objectively *requisite*. This viewing and evaluating can lead a visiting committee to accept the EIP as is, to amend it in some of its details, or to identify some hitherto unidentified improvement as necessary for inclusion in the EIP. *Whatever it does to the school's EIP, the visiting committee is acting to ensure that the areas for vital growth of the school are being addressed by the school.*

In adding to a school's EIP (i.e., whether amending details or identifying new exigencies), the visiting committee does so with all gravity. The seriousness of such additions requires that the visiting committee go to reasonable lengths to explain what is being added and why it is being added, as well as to identify the school's capacity to accomplish what is added. It is *not sufficient* for a visiting committee simply to name some changes—especially substantive changes—and to expect a school to understand, accept, and assimilate these changes into its EIP. The visiting committee must—in its report of findings—*work with the school* in order to facilitate improvement.

To satisfy these EIP-related obligations of the visiting committee (i.e., the committee's obligations in view of F.3 "Requisite Conception of an Improvement Plan as the Major Outcome of a Self-Study"), **the committee is obliged to complete a form for each improvement plan that the school has declared in its EIP. This form is entitled "EIP Form." (See Appendix C.)** In completing this form, the visiting committee declares whether each plan is acceptable *as is* or whether each plan *needs to be changed*. Moreover, should the visiting committee discern the school's need for improvement in some area that the school itself has not identified, this discernment needs to be recorded on an EIP Form.

Writing the Report of Findings

The report of the visiting committee is organized according to an Introduction and seven sections. In the Introduction, the visiting committee reproduces pertinent matter from the school's introduction to its self-study and adds some more matter. *What is reproduced is that which identifies the school. What is added is that which identifies the visiting committee.* In the seven sections, the visiting committee reports its findings about each of the seven principles of WCEA accreditation. The following is an outline of the format for the report of the visiting committee:

Introduction

- I. School's Observance of Principle A: Authentic Catholic Identity
- II. School's Observance of Principle B: Organizational Efficacy
- III. School's Observance of Principle C: Excellence of Teaching and Learning
- IV. School's Observance of Principle D: Vitality of the Support Programs

- V. School's Observance of Principle E: Stewardship of Material Resources
- VI. School's Observance of Principle F: Commitment to Improvement
- VII. School's Observance of Principle G: Integrity of Self-Study Process.

In each of the seven sections of its report of findings, the visiting committee

1. identifies the principle at hand;
2. discerns whether the principle is observed by means of a viewing of the (completed) forms entitled "Attainment of a Standard." This discernment must be a careful one, especially when a particular principle (i.e., A – E) is involved in the Educational Improvement Plan that the school has crafted or (is involved) in what the visiting committee has added to the school's Educational Improvement Plan;
3. includes a written rationale for its discernment, providing citations from the Data Library (as pertinent) and (providing) other evidence in support of its discernment.

There is a form that is provided for communicating this discernment and corresponding rationale. The form is entitled "Observance of a Principle." Practically speaking, to complete this form is to complete a section. Completion of the entire report of the visiting committee entails completion of seven forms, one for each of the seven principles. **(See Appendix B.)** The form is basically the same for each of the seven principles. For principles F (i.e., "Commitment to Improvement") and G (i.e., "Integrity of the Self-Study Process"), *there is a part of the form that is not pertinent*. This part of the form connects the principle to the Educational Improvement Plan. This part is reserved for principles A – E, and looks as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| FOR STANDARDS THAT ARE RELATED TO PRINCIPLES A - E | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | This standard is involved in the School's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | This standard is involved in what the Visiting Committee has added to the School's EIP. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | This standard is not explicitly involved in the school's EIP in the VC's additions thereto. |

It is estimated that each of the (seven) sections of the visiting committee report will require no more than two pages of written copy. Inasmuch as this writing takes place during the visit, there is need for an allotment of sufficient time within which to do the writing. This *sufficient time* is normally scheduled in the late afternoon and/or early evening of the second full day of the visit.

Completing the Draft of the Report

Completing the draft of the report is primarily the work of the chairperson of the visiting committee. This work entails organizing the sections of the report that the members have written—each of which has to do with the school's observance of a principle of accreditation—and then checking for

consistency of content throughout the sections of the draft, with particular attention given to the connection between each section and “F.3 Requisite conception of an improvement plan as the major outcome of self-studying.”²⁰

Giving the Draft to the School

At approximately mid- or late-morning on the third full day of the visit, the chairperson gives the draft report to the school. The school reads the draft, and then meets with the committee to respond to the draft. This *school response* takes any of three forms: (the school may)

- point out to the visiting committee any factual errors in the draft
- seek a clarification regarding a matter within the draft that is not clearly written or is not sufficiently understood by the school
- request a change in substance regarding something that the committee has written (after giving reason/s for the request).

At that meeting, the first two kinds of school responses can be mutually resolved by the committee and the school (with the chairperson of the committee as spokesperson for the committee). The third kind of response (i.e., the school’s request for a particular change in the substance of what the committee has written) is a request that the committee willingly receives (hears), albeit without feeling any obligation to change the matter on the spot. The fact that the request has to do with what is substantive usually requires the visiting committee to deliberate about the matter, in an internal forum.²¹ The outcome of this deliberation could be (that) the matter stands as written. Conversely, the outcome could be that the report is changed. But in either case, there is wisdom in moving the request into the internal forum because of the freedom that is needed for responsible deliberation by the committee.

Finishing the Report

When the committee has made objective sense of the school’s responses to the written draft, the committee amends the draft as needed and thus arrives at the finished report.²²

²⁰ See page 23, “Receiving a School’s EIP.” It is critically important for the visiting committee chairperson to understand and communicate to the visiting committee the significance of the moment that is at hand with the Educational Improvement Plan, for three reasons: the EIP of the school is *charged with meaning* since it is the end (goal) of an 18 month period of intense work by the school; it is *of major significance* for the visiting committee to make *any* change to the school’s EIP; and the committee’s changes to the school’s EIP figure substantially in the accreditation recommendation that goes forward from the visiting committee to the WCEA Commission.

²¹ Moving to the internal forum for deliberation is not always a necessity. In certain matters, the school’s request may be resolved on the spot—for example, when it is immediately evident to the visiting committee that the school’s request has merit.

²² The committee will print the report and deliver it to the school leaders in the context of a final meeting with the school community.

Making a Recommendation to the WCEA Commission regarding the Accreditation of the School

Toward the end of the WCEA visiting committee's work, there is an obligation on the committee to make a recommendation to the WCEA Commission concerning the accreditation of the school. This recommendation takes one of two forms: 'accreditation with quarterly reports'²³ or 'accreditation with a mid-cycle visit/report'.²⁴ In choosing between the two recommendations, the WCEA visiting committee ought especially to weigh the nature of the changes that the committee made to the school's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP).²⁵ Once the choice of a recommendation is made—and it ought to reflect the consensus of the committee, the work of the committee at the school is complete. Finally, unlike the report that the committee prepares, this recommendation is *not* made known to the school; it is communicated to the WCEA Commission, with an accompanying rationale.

[See the ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDATION Form on the next page.]

²³ These are quarterly reports over the remainder of the accreditation cycle. They are given to the local WCEA Commissioner who shares these reports with the WCEA Commission.

²⁴ This recommendation entails a one-and-a-half day visit by a 2-person WCEA committee at the mid-point of the accreditation cycle (i.e., 36 months from the beginning of the school's self-study work). [For a description of each of these *recommendation options*, see the section on pages 28-29 of this manual entitled "The Accreditation Cycle to ensure Educational Excellence."]

²⁵ As a rule of thumb concerning this choice: 'The more the changes to the EIP, the more likelihood of a WCEA mid-cycle visit'.

WCEA ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDATION Form

☐

ACCREDITATION with Quarterly Reports

The consequences of this status for the school include implementation of its (amended) EIP over the remaining course of the cycle and completion of a (written) report at each of the remaining three quarters of the cycle. The quarterly report includes an updating of the school's Data Library, identification of significant changes in school life since the full visit, and description of the implementation of its EIP. These quarterly reports are sent to the local WCEA Commissioner who then communicates them to the WCEA Commission.

☐

ACCREDITATION with MID-CYCLE VISIT/ REPORT

The consequences of this status for the school include implementation of its (amended) EIP over the course of the second quarter and completion of a mid-cycle report in advance of a one-and-a-half day visit of a two-person committee at the outset of the third quarter (= mid-point) of the accreditation cycle. In its mid-cycle report the school is meant to include an updating of its Data Library, identification of significant changes in school life since the full visit, and description of the implementation of its (amended) EIP over the course of the second quarter.*

***The mid-cycle visit leads to one of two possible outcomes *at that point*:** (1) the school goes forward as 'accredited with quarterly reports' or (2) (the school goes forward) as 'on probationary accreditation'. *(In either case it is the WCEA Commission that authorizes the accreditation status of the school.)* The recommendation of 'probationary accreditation' by the WCEA visiting committee at mid-cycle follows from this committee's basic discernment that, over the course of the second quarter, the school has not sufficiently implemented its (amended) EIP. Should this be the case, the WCEA Commission communicates to the school the requirements that attend probation, and the school goes about meeting these requirements in the course of the third quarter of its accreditation cycle, at the end of which there is a probation visit-and-report (i.e., 2-person committee over one-and-a-half days).

The Accreditation Cycle to ensure Educational Excellence

There is an overall cycle of accreditation, according to which the WCEA exercises responsible oversight of the educational quality of each of the high schools of its member dioceses. This cycle extends over a six-year period and is marked by four quarters, at 18-month intervals. Within each of the quarters there are pertinent experiences that involve both the school and the WCEA.

First Quarter of the Accreditation Cycle (Months 1-18)

In the first quarter, the school commences work that leads to a self-study report (highlighted by an Educational Improvement Plan, EIP) by the end of the quarter. For its part, the WCEA—in the person of the local WCEA Commissioner—assists the school with its work.

Second Quarter of the Accreditation Cycle (Months 18-36)

At the outset of the second quarter, the school experiences a full visit of a committee of educators representing the WCEA. This full-visit extends over three full days, resulting in a report of the committee to the school and WCEA concerning the educational quality of the school. In light of this report, the school immediately amends its Educational Improvement Plan (EIP) and submits it to the local WCEA Commissioner.²⁶ At the conclusion of its visit, the committee of the WCEA makes a recommendation concerning the accreditation status of the school. The recommendation consists of the committee's choice of one of two basic options: 'accreditation with quarterly reports' or 'accreditation with a mid-cycle visit/report'.²⁷ The visiting committee's recommendation is sent to the WCEA Commission, whose responsibility is to authorize the school's accreditation status. In the case of the school that is 'accredited with quarterly reports', the consequences of this status for the school include implementation of its (amended) EIP over the course of the second quarter and completion of a (written) "quarterly report"—to include an updating of its Data Library, identification of significant changes in school life since the full visit, and description of the implementation of its EIP—that goes to the local WCEA Commissioner and then on to the Commission. Should the Commission authorize 'accreditation with a mid-cycle visit/report', the consequences for the school include implementation of its (amended) EIP over the course of the second quarter and completion of a mid-cycle report in advance of the visit of a two-person committee. In its mid-cycle report the school is meant to include an updating of its Data Library, identification of significant changes in school life since the full visit, and description of the implementation of its (amended) EIP over the course of the second quarter.

Third Quarter of the Accreditation Cycle (Months 36-54)

In the case of a school with a status of 'accreditation with quarterly reports', at the outset of the third quarter the quarterly report is sent to the local WCEA Commissioner who in turn communicates the report to the WCEA Commission. The school continues the implementation of its EIP throughout this quarter In the case of a school with a status of 'accreditation with a mid-cycle visit/report', at the

²⁶ What is meant by 'amends' has to do with the school's (i) making changes that the visiting committee has identified concerning details of the school's existing EIP and/or (ii) developing an additional improvement plan to address an area for vital growth that has been identified by the visiting committee.

²⁷ **There is a substantive difference between these two options.** The former option is apt for schools whose EIP is accurate and thorough, engendering recommended changes from the WCEA visiting committee that only affect the details of the existing goals of the EIP. The latter option is apt for schools whose EIP is lacking in attention to one or more major dimensions of school life, thus prompting the WCEA visiting committee's call for the school to develop an additional improvement plan that addresses what is lacking.

outset of the third quarter the school's mid-cycle report is sent to the WCEA and there follows a one-and-a-half day visit by a two-person committee of the WCEA. This committee then recommends to the WCEA Commission either that the school goes forward as 'accredited with quarterly reports' or (goes forward) as 'probationary accreditation'.²⁸ The recommendation of 'probationary accreditation' by the WCEA visiting committee at mid-cycle follows from this committee's basic discernment that, over the course of the second quarter, the school either has not sufficiently implemented its (amended) EIP or has experienced significant challenges that stymie the progress of the educational program. Should either of these be the case, the WCEA Commission communicates to the school the requirements that attend probation, and the school goes about meeting these requirements in the course of the third quarter of its accreditation cycle.

Fourth Quarter of the Accreditation Cycle (Months 54-72)

In the case of a school with a status of 'accreditation with quarterly reports', at the outset of the fourth quarter of the accreditation cycle this school has produced another quarterly report in the customary format. In addition, by this time the school may have completed the implementation of its EIP. If such is the case, the school goes forward in this quarter with the identification of at least one new area for vital growth, conceiving action steps and corresponding details by which to address this area and then implementing these steps/details. Moreover, as this quarter of the accreditation cycle draws to a close, the school fashions an overall, comprehensive report of progress concerning the EIP that it fashioned during the current accreditation cycle (including any new goals identified/implemented in the fourth quarter). *This overall, comprehensive report of progress effectively constitutes Chapter V Part A of the self-study report that commences in the accreditation cycle that follows.*

In the case of a school with a status of 'probationary accreditation', at the outset of the fourth quarter the school is expected to have completed the requirements of probation and written a report to this effect. Thus a WCEA committee visits the school at the start of this quarter in order to verify that the school has met the requirements of probation. Should the school have met these requirements (as determined by the WCEA Commission), the school goes forward in the fourth quarter making further EIP progress and fashioning an overall, comprehensive report of progress concerning the EIP that it fashioned during the current accreditation cycle. *This overall, comprehensive report of progress effectively constitutes Chapter V Part A of the self-study report that commences in the accreditation cycle that follows.*

²⁸ In either case the WCEA Commission authorizes the accreditation status of the school.

APPENDIX A

ATTAINMENT OF A STANDARD Form

[For Use internal to the Visiting Committee. Reproduce this form as needed.]

Identification Symbol of the Standard: _____

The Standard Itself:

The Principle to which the Standard is attached (abbreviated form thereof):

FOR STANDARDS THAT ARE RELATED TO PRINCIPLES A - E

☐

This standard is involved in the School's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP).

☐

This standard is involved in what the Visiting Committee has added to the School's EIP.

☐

This standard is not explicitly involved in the school's EIP or in the VC's additions thereto.

Evaluative Judgment concerning the School's Attainment of the Standard

☐

The School attains the Standard.

To this extent: ☐ Commendably

☐ Sufficiently

☐

The School does not sufficiently attain the Standard.

Rationale for this Evaluative Judgment

Directions: On the reverse side, provide a **brief rationale** for the evaluative judgment of the Visiting Committee concerning the School's attainment of this Standard. Include citations from the Data Library.

APPENDIX B

OBSERVANCE of the PRINCIPLE of *AUTHENTIC CATHOLIC IDENTITY* (p. 1 of 3)

[Completion of the forms in this Appendix comprises the essential written matter of the VC's Report.]

Principle: **AUTHENTIC CATHOLIC IDENTITY (A)**

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school's Catholic identity ought to be authentic. Here, 'authentic' means that in all its understandings and operations, the school is oriented toward God as He is worshiped and believed by the Catholic Church.

of Standards that Constitute this Principle: _____

☐ This Principle is involved in the School's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP),
via Standard/s: _____ .

☐ This Principle is involved in what the Visiting Committee has added to the School's EIP,
via Standard/s: _____ .

☐ This Principle is NOT involved in the School's EIP.

Visiting Committee's Discernment concerning the School's Observance of Principle A:

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

Degree of its Observance: _____ Commendably _____ Sufficiently

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS NOT OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

OBSERVANCE of a PRINCIPLE Form (p. 2 of 3)

Rationale for the Discernment of Principle ____:

Directions: Include a rationale for the discernment of the Visiting Committee concerning the observance of this Principle. This rationale ought to be informed by the Committee's prior discernments concerning the discrete standards that constitute this Principle. (Do not exceed two pages.)

OBSERVANCE of a PRINCIPLE Form (p. 3 of 3)

Rationale for the Discernment of Principle ____: (continued)

APPENDIX B

OBSERVANCE of the PRINCIPLE of *SCHOOL'S ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICACY* (p. 1 of 3)

Principle: ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICACY OF THE SCHOOL (B)

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a Catholic school ought to be thoughtfully organized and effectively run. Here, 'thoughtfully' has to do with systematic carefulness.

of Standards that Constitute this Principle: _____

☐ This Principle is involved in the School's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP),
via Standard/s: _____ .

☐ This Principle is involved in what the Visiting Committee has added to the School's EIP,
via Standard/s: _____ .

☐ This Principle is NOT involved in the School's EIP.

Visiting Committee's Discernment concerning the School's Observance of Principle B:

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

Degree of its Observance: _____ Commendably _____ Sufficiently

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS NOT OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

APPENDIX B

OBSERVANCE of the PRINCIPLE of *THE EXCELLENCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING* (p. 1 of 3)

Principle: EXCELLENCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (C)

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the school's teaching and learning ought to be of the highest quality. Here, 'teaching and learning' refers to the classroom context and dynamic. By 'excellence' (or 'highest quality') is meant (that) an exemplary curriculum is delivered and the maximum learning capacity of each student is realized.

of Standards that Constitute this Principle: _____

- ☐ This Principle is involved in the School's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP), via Standard/s: _____ .
- ☐ This Principle is involved in what the Visiting Committee has added to the School's EIP, via Standard/s: _____ .
- ☐ This Principle is NOT involved in the School's EIP.

Visiting Committee's Discernment concerning the School's Observance of Principle C:

- ☐ THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.
Degree of its Observance: _____ Commendably _____ Sufficiently
- ☐ THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS NOT OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.

APPENDIX B

OBSERVANCE of the PRINCIPLE of *THE VITALITY OF CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS* (p. 1 of 3)

Principle: VITALITY OF THE CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS (D)

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the co-curricular or ancillary programs (i.e., in addition to the classroom) should add vitality to the overall school program. By 'vitality' is understood that which complements the classroom education and otherwise engenders the maturation of the whole person of the student.

of Standards that Constitute this Principle: _____

- ☐ This Principle is involved in the School's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP), via Standard/s: _____ .
- ☐ This Principle is involved in what the Visiting Committee has added to the School's EIP, via Standard/s: _____ .
- ☐ This Principle is NOT involved in the School's EIP.

Visiting Committee's Discernment concerning the School's Observance of Principle D:

- ☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**
Degree of its Observance: _____ Commendably _____ Sufficiently
- ☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS NOT OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

APPENDIX B

OBSERVANCE of the PRINCIPLE of *THE STEWARDSHIP OF MATERIAL RESOURCES* (p. 1 of 3)

Principle: STEWARDSHIP OF MATERIAL RESOURCES (E)

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that the management of a school's material resources ought to be carried out responsibly, for the well-being of others (i.e., primarily students). This 'responsible management' is stewardship. In the Catholic high school context, they who manage a school's material assets (or resources) are stewards. They ought to do so in a spirit of care for these assets. 'Stewardship' also implies accountability.

of Standards that Constitute this Principle: _____

- ☐ This Principle is involved in the School's Educational Improvement Plan (EIP), via Standard/s: _____ .
- ☐ This Principle is involved in what the Visiting Committee has added to the School's EIP, via Standard/s: _____ .
- ☐ This Principle is NOT involved in the School's EIP.

Visiting Committee's Discernment concerning the School's Observance of Principle E:

- ☐ THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.
Degree of its Observance: _____ Commendably _____ Sufficiently
- ☐ THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS NOT OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.

APPENDIX B

OBSERVANCE of the PRINCIPLE of *COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT* (p. 1 of 3)

Principle: **COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT (F)**

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school ought to be committed to improvement, in whole and in parts. What is meant by 'improvement' begins in a school's humble estimation of itself and its operations. 'Improvement' obliges a school to strive for a better fulfillment of its mission.

of Standards that Constitute this Principle: _____

Visiting Committee's Discernment concerning the School's Observance of Principle F:

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

Degree of its Observance: _____ Commendably _____ Sufficiently

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS NOT OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

APPENDIX B

OBSERVANCE of the PRINCIPLE of THE INTEGRITY OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS (p. 1 of 3)

Principle: **INTEGRITY OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS (G)**

This principle of WCEA accreditation holds that a school's self-study process must manifest integrity—i.e., inclusivity, honesty, and thoroughness—throughout the whole of the process.

of Standards that Constitute this Principle: _____

Visiting Committee's Discernment concerning the School's Observance of Principle G:

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

Degree of its Observance: _____ Commendably _____ Sufficiently

☐ **THIS PRINCIPLE of WCEA ACCREDITATION IS NOT OBSERVED BY THE SCHOOL.**

APPENDIX C

EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN Form (EIP Form)

[To be completed for each improvement plan that the school conceives as part of its overall EIP
and for any plan that the visiting committee envisions as requisite . . and included in the VC Report]

☐

This EIP Form is being used for an improvement plan that the School has conceived.

☐

This EIP Form is being used for an improvement plan that the Visiting Committee has discerned.

Identification of the Improvement Plan:

(To be completed FOR AN IMPROVEMENT PLAN THAT THE SCHOOL HAS CONCEIVED)

☐

This Improvement Plan is **acceptable *as is*** to the Visiting Committee (VC).

☐

This Improvement Plan **needs to be changed:**

☐

In select details

☐

In substance

The following questions must be answered IF this Improvement Plan *needs to be changed*:

1. What is the nature of the change?
2. What is the reason for this change?
3. Does the school have the capacity to implement the change?

APPENDIX D

SUMMARY OF DIRECTIONS regarding VISITING COMMITTEE'S WRITTEN REPORT

This summary contains a digest of what goes into the writing of the visiting committee report.

Keep in mind that the format for this report includes an introduction and then seven sections [See p.7], which correspond to the seven principles of WCEA high school accreditation. [See p.8.]

-
1. The first piece of writing that a visiting committee member accomplishes is pre-writing. Pre-writing has to do with the accreditation principle that is assigned to the member by the chairperson. [See Footnote 9 on p.6; the SCHEMA on pp.14-15, in order to connect a principle with its manifestation in the self-study that the school has written. See also "Completing a Pre-Writing Assignment" on pp. 17-18.] In pre-writing, the visiting committee member uses the form "ATTAINMENT OF A STANDARD," completing a separate form for each of the standards that constitute the principle for which s/he has responsibility. This form is first drafted at the pre-writing and then is finalized at the visit after the member has accessed the Data Library, conducted an interview, and otherwise experienced the school *actually*. [See "Determining whether Standards are met" on pp. 20-21. See also ATTAINMENT OF A STANDARD Form in Appendix A.]
 2. The visiting committee writing that constitutes the Introduction basically reproduces pertinent matter from the school's introduction to its self-study and adds some more matter. What is reproduced is that which identifies the school. What is added is that which identifies the visiting committee. Of special interest is "O" (i.e., "5-7 Most Significant School Developments since the Last Self-Study").
 3. Having in hand the (completed) forms that have to do with the attainment of standards, the visiting committee uses these forms to write its report. **Essentially, writing the report consists of completing the form entitled "Observance of a Principle" for each of the seven principles of WCEA high school accreditation.** [See "Discerning the School's Observance of the Seven Principles" on p. 22. See also Appendix B.] Also contained in the written report of the visiting committee—and tucked into section VI. School's Observance of Principle F.3 (i.e., "Requisite Conception of an Educational Improvement Plan (EIP) as a Major Outcome of a Self-Study")—is **an "EIP Form" that must be completed for each improvement plan that the school has constructed and for any improvement plan the need for which has been discerned by the visiting committee** in the course of its work at the school. [See "Receiving a School's Educational Improvement Plan" on p.23. See also Appendix C.] To reiterate, the actual written report of the visiting committee consists of completing the forms that are specified in Appendix B and Appendix C.

APPENDIX E

GRAPHICS THAT DEPICT THE ACCREDITATION STATUS OF A SCHOOL

1. *ACCREDITATION with QUARTERLY REPORTS*
2. *ACCREDITATION with MID-CYCLE VISIT-and-REPORT*
3. *PROBATION (following the Mid-Cycle Visit)*