



2020 - A VISION FOR LEARNING

# GUIDELINES for Virtual Visiting Teams

for Public Elementary, Middle and High Schools seeking Accreditation in 2020 and beyond

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Commission on Public Schools

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## Introduction

The Commission on Public Schools (CPS) is employing a virtual Accreditation protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic. The distinguishing feature of virtual Accreditation visits is that observations, conversations, interviews, and group meetings are conducted, using an online platform. A virtual visit requires the school and the visiting team to prepare and practice with the necessary technology prior to the scheduled visit. If conditions warrant, some elements of the visits may be accomplished by the chair and assistant chair in person.

Virtual Accreditation visits follow the CPS Standards and visit protocols. Visiting team members recognize the school’s developmental path, celebrate strengths, and help the school validate its understanding of opportunities for growth and next steps. Depending on the type of visit, there may be targeted conversations with key operational leaders about specific areas and more general, open-ended conversations with key stakeholders about learning. Visiting team members will want to explore how the school adapted to conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, including learning in-person and remote learning, health and safety, and what lessons have been learned. The visiting team will explore how learning looks and feels when the school is physically in session. The tone of conversations will be supportive of the school as they work through this unique and challenging time. NEASC/CPS team members understand that remote learning may not fully or accurately represent the typical learning environment provided by the school.

The virtual visit process will result in similar findings to an on-site visit, provided that the school and the visiting team understand the parameters and are flexible about the visit’s implementation. Visiting team members will be provided with training before the visit, and the visit will be supported by the school’s CPS staff liaison.

## Visit Types and Length

Visit type	Duration*	Number of visitors
<b>Decennial/Initial Accreditation</b>	3½ days plus some pre-visit work (team orientation on Sunday or another agreed upon time)	6-8 CPEMHS 8-12 CTCI
<b>Collaborative Conference</b>	2-3 days plus some pre-visit work	3-4
<b>Directed</b>	1 partial day	1-2
<b>Focused (CTCI)</b>	2.5 days	3

Note: The final day of each visit is mostly reserved for the team to work together, finalize the report draft, and debrief with the leadership team.

\*The number of visit days may be adjusted based upon need.

## Key Considerations

Key criteria will help to determine if a virtual visit is appropriate and beneficial for a school and will be discussed with school administrators before any decision is made. The criteria include:

- the health and safety of students, staff, and visiting team members
- the current status of school operations: remote learning, in-person/on-site learning, or a combination of in-person and remote learning
- the availability of reliable Wi-Fi, bandwidth, technology, and IT support
- the observation of learning as a critical component of the visit, as visiting team members must be able to see learning taking place either remotely or in-person
- the school's current Accreditation status and a determination that the school is one in which improvement can be easily discerned
- the determination that the elements of the protocol can be accomplished virtually
- the school's willingness to engage in a virtual visit

## Expectations for a School Hosting a Virtual Visit

- The school completes the required documents prior to any type of visit in accordance with the CPS Accreditation visit protocol.
- The school and the chair create a thorough and detailed schedule.
- The necessary technology and IT support are provided, including a platform to hold virtual meetings. NEASC strongly prefers Zoom.
- Faculty and staff members, administrators, and, as appropriate, students, parents, and other members of the school community will set aside uninterrupted time to speak with the visiting team in secure and appropriate settings.
- The school should anticipate that some unscheduled conversations, observations, and interviews may be requested by visiting team members.
- The school should provide at least two devices, or more if required by the visiting team, with cameras and mics to either record or allow visitors to view classes and other school activities from at least two or more separate vantage points. For example, one camera might be focused on the teacher and the second on the class or activity.
- The school provides the visiting team with a virtual tour by walking through facilities and describing what is seen including:
  - typical learning spaces
  - science laboratories, including preparation rooms and safety equipment, such as shower, eye wash stations, ventilation, storage of chemicals, etc.
  - makerspaces or design technology workshops with safety measures
  - art/music/drama facilities
  - library/information services
  - gymnasium/sports facilities and outdoor recreational facilities
  - career/counseling space(s)
  - special needs facilities
  - health services facilities

- front entrance and perimeter security features, security cameras, etc.
- emergency evacuation route signage
- cafeteria and other common areas
- appropriate safeguarding features, such as hand sanitizer, signage, etc.
- other pertinent areas of the building and grounds
- There will be no recordings of interviews, observations, or meetings.
- There are no one-to-one interviews or observations between students and members of the visiting team.
- Appropriate permissions for student participation should be obtained from parents or guardians prior to the visit.

## **Expectations for Virtual Visiting Teams**

- The virtual visiting team should prepare for the visit as they would for a physical visit. All team members should study the Standards and thoroughly familiarize themselves with the evidence submitted by the school.
- Visiting team members will be required to attend or view a webinar training from NEASC to prepare for their virtual visit.
- The team should be informed about the length and general schedule for the visit well in advance and should reserve the time to work uninterrupted. Meetings with the school will be about 3-4 hours each day. Time will be built into the schedule for follow-up conversations as necessary during the visit. Team members will be expected to spend time writing each day.
- The team members should expect to spend about the same amount of time as an in-person visit, prioritize the visit, and agree to complete the necessary work within the agreed-upon time frames and schedule.
- The chair and assistant chair will work out a detailed schedule for the visit with the school prior to the visit. The visiting team will meet virtually in the evening or at other times scheduled by the chair.
- Virtual visits will be completed with the specified timeframe of the type of visit but may, if circumstances warrant and if sufficient advance notice has been given, be extended.
- Members of the virtual visiting team must have access to a laptop or desktop computer or a tablet with a camera and an audio system sufficient to manage Zoom and ensure an appropriate internet connection and bandwidth to support the connection.
- Team members are expected to use a secure, quiet, and appropriate space during the visit. Specifically, individuals who are not part of the visiting team should not be present during interviews, discussions, and observations to provide confidentiality of the physical space.

## **Visitor Digital Code of Conduct and Online Etiquette**

While NEASC engages with schools and their communities online, safety, privacy, and adherence to guidelines on child protection need to be ensured.

- The school should never create or allow one-to-one interviews or observations between a student and a visiting team member.
- Adequate lighting is necessary for all sessions. Backgrounds should be uncluttered and not show beds, pets, or other inappropriate distractions.
- If a visiting team member feels uncomfortable, for example, if a child appears alone in the home, ask the student to bring an adult to the device for help or to say hello.
- Appropriate attire is required for students and visiting team members (business casual).
- Any evidence provided by the school must be deleted when the visit is completed.
- Visiting team members will abide by the school's guidelines for safe interactions online and sign the school's code of conduct if required.
- Appropriate permissions from parents should be obtained by the school prior to the visit.

## **Video Call/Zoom Guidelines**

- The school sets up the Zoom meeting links, and the assigned visiting team members join the meetings.
- Individual computers, laptops, or tablets tend to work better than large groups in the same room, and groups should be limited to 4-6.
- A visiting team member or school staff member should immediately end a Zoom session if anyone suspects that an uninvited person is present.
- Tablets and computers are updated to the latest versions of operating systems and the latest version of Zoom.
- The meeting host uses Zoom security protocols, such as passcodes and waiting rooms and sets the default for screen sharing to Host Only for security.
- Students use only their first names as screen names, using names that are recognizable to their teachers and the other participants in the meeting. Visiting team members set their names to their professional name and be identified as a visitor such as "Mr. John Doe, NEASC visitor."
- When observing live classroom sessions, visiting team members mute their mics and turn off their video after entry. The visiting team members could acknowledge presence to the teacher via the private chat feature.

## FAQs

*What are the days/times involved in a virtual visit?*

- The number of visit days involved in a virtual visit depends on the specific type of visit and the size of the school. See the *Visit Types Chart*.

*Can I still work at my school/job while conducting a remote visit?*

- No. Like on-site visits, when committing to a virtual visit, the visit takes priority, whether you conduct the visit from your workplace, home, or elsewhere. Scheduling will be difficult, unless the visit schedule is a priority.

*What technology equipment and know-how are required by visiting team members?*

- Reliable internet and adequate bandwidth for video conferencing platforms, including a computer with camera and an audio system sufficient to manage Zoom. A phone will not be sufficient but can serve as a helpful backup. A school IT person will be able to assist, but team members will need basic proficiency in managing online meetings. A trial of your system with fellow team members will be conducted by the chair of the visiting team in advance of the visit start date.

*What is the assistant chair's role?*

- Assistant chairs are trained and experienced visiting team members who will:
  - provide support and advice to the chair to ensure a smooth and successful visit
  - be available to answer questions about how to prepare for the visit, conduct the visit, and access the available support resources
  - assist team members with writing or setting up any additional meetings
  - check in on the progress of the visit and be available to assist with any questions that arise before, during, and after the visit
  - review, edit, and provide feedback on the final report as appropriate

*Do visiting team members still use the usual templates and protocols?*

- Yes. Visiting team members will receive detailed instruction from the chair of the team and complete their work in the Accreditation portal.

*Does the team conduct classroom observations on a virtual visit?*

- Yes. The school will provide one or more cameras with audio to be placed in classrooms, and the camera should show the teacher and learners. If the school is using remote/distance learning at the time of the visit, the school may include recorded videos of lessons in classrooms or have visitors attend remote/distance classes.

*Does the visiting team shadow students or review student work?*

- There is no shadowing. However, visiting team members may have meetings with small groups of 2-3 students to discuss the learners' work, projects, and experiences. Visiting team members may meet with individual teachers to discuss student work. Alternately, some schools may choose a student-teacher or student-led conference format.

*What if the school shifts from in session to online just before the scheduled visit? Will the visit be cancelled/postponed?*

- Ideally, a virtual visit can flex to meet the school's circumstances at that time; however, it may depend upon circumstances.

*Should we judge the quality of teaching and learning differently since schools may not be at their best if working remotely?*

- Students' learning needs should be viewed through the lens of the Standards of Accreditation. The report can reflect how the school has faced challenges and/or opportunities created by the COVID 19 disruptions.

*How do we learn about the culture of a school or get a sense of the intangibles that you gain during an on-site in-person visit?*

- Make connections and communicate in smaller groups, so that each person can engage, and trust is built.
  - Team members can make explicit efforts to build trust and put the staff/students at ease by starting with statements of appreciation, empathy, and discussion of growth vs. judgment.
  - Use groups of 4 to 6 for interviews to allow the visiting team members to connect to individuals. If it's a large group, it may be necessary to split the group into two smaller groups.
  - Meet with groups of 4-6 students from various grades.

*Is additional training available?*

- Yes. All visiting team members committing to virtual visits will be offered training. Invitations for training will be sent out in August of 2020 for fall 2020 visits.

*When will CPS resume on-site in-person visits?*

- When conditions warrant. It is possible, under certain conditions, that the chair and assistant chair may be on-site for parts of a virtual visit.

*What if I have other questions or suggestions?*

- Contact the chair of the visiting team or Deputy Director Alyson Geary at [ageary@neasc.org](mailto:ageary@neasc.org).

## Sample Virtual Collaborative Conference Visit Schedule

### Day 1

7:45-7:55 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:00-8:40 a.m.	Pre-recorded tour of the building and grounds video or Zoom virtual tour
8:50-9:20 a.m.	Self-Reflection Committee
9:30-11:00 a.m.	Classroom observations
11:15 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Concurrent meetings <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Parents</li><li>2. Support staff</li></ol>
12:00-1:00 p.m.	Break/lunch/writing
1:00 p.m.-1:45 p.m.	Students (two groups of 4-6 students)
2:00 p.m.	Daily debrief with principal (Chair)
3:00-5:00 p.m.	Team debrief, begin developing findings and writing

### Day 2

8:00-8:30 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:30-9:15 a.m.	Central office administrators
9:30-10:30 a.m.	Representative groups of teachers (two groups of 4-6)
10:45-11:30 a.m.	Department heads/other school leaders (could be in two groups)
11:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.	Break/lunch/writing
1:45 p.m.	Daily debrief with principal (Chair)
2:00-2:45 p.m.	Building administrators
2:40-3:15 p.m.	Team debrief and check-in/plan for evening meeting
6:00-9:00 p.m.	Team debrief, findings, writing

### Day 3 (Chair and assistant chair only)

12:30-2:00 p.m.	Prepare for debrief
2:00-2:45 p.m.	Debrief with principal and any others

#### Note:

We recommend limiting the number of participants in Zoom meetings to no more than 6, not including visiting team members, so that everyone has a chance to participate.

## Sample Virtual Decennial Accreditation Visit Schedule



**Sunday afternoon, evening, or another day prior to the visit**

3:00-5:00 p.m.	Team orientation
5:00-5:45 p.m.	Meeting with the board of education/superintendent (could be scheduled for Monday or Tuesday afternoon)

**Monday**

7:30-8:00 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:00-8:40 a.m.	School tour (pre-recorded)
8:50-9:20 a.m.	Overview presentation by the Steering Committee
9:30-10:30 a.m.	Priority Area meetings and classroom observations
10:30-10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45-11:45 a.m.	Priority Area meetings and classroom observations
11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Lunch
12:30-3:30 p.m.	Team debrief and discussion (could be scheduled late afternoon or in the evening)

**Tuesday**

7:30-8:00 a.m.	Team organizational meeting
8:00-10:00 a.m.	Priority Area meetings, classroom observations, student meetings
10:15-10:30 a.m.	Break
10:30-11:30 a.m.	Priority Area meetings, looking at student work session
11:30-12:00 p.m.	Lunch
12:00-12:45 p.m.	Meeting with superintendent (chair, asst)
12:45-3:30 p.m.	Team discussion and writing time or any other meetings
6:30 p.m.	Team discussion and writing time

**Wednesday**

8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Team discussion and writing time Finish/review report Prepare for debrief
12:00-12:30 p.m.	Lunch
12:30-1:30 p.m.	Debrief with the principal and leadership team
2:15 p.m.	Closing remarks to the faculty (could be another day depending upon what works for the school)

Notes: NEASC recommends limiting the number of participants in Zoom meetings to no more than 6, not including visiting team members, so that everyone has a chance to participate.

The majority of meetings and activities with the school will take place before noon on Monday and Tuesday. The intent is to limit Zoom fatigue and give the visiting team time in the afternoon and evening for discussion, group meetings, and individual writing time. The afternoon and evening meeting times are at the discretion of the chair and the team. The chair should work with the team to determine the best time to hold these meetings.