Initial Visit Procedures Manual

ACS WASC Initial Visit Procedures for:

- **California Public Schools**
- **California Charter Schools**

WASC
ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS

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Preface

If educational organizations are to concentrate all their energies and resources on successful student learning, a holistic, honest examination of the actual program for students is required. Through the use of empowering criteria, new communication patterns, evidence gathering techniques, and insight from fellow educators, the appropriate accreditation process can serve as a vehicle to move school community members into meaningful schoolwide improvement and accountability. The Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC), utilizes a protocol for accrediting schools entitled *Focus on Learning*.

The *Focus on Learning* process has been widely accepted throughout the ACS WASC region as integral to the "heart" of education-successful student learning. This has been demonstrated through a variety of *Focus on Learning* adaptations as ACS WASC works jointly with numerous educational associations. Public, independent, church-related, and private K-12 and adult schools value the "basic components" of *Focus on Learning* that can be "institutionalized" as the schools address growth areas that impact student learning. These include: (1) the defining of quality achievement of schoolwide learner outcomes for every student by all stakeholders; (2) schoolwide interdisciplinary dialogue based on evidence gathering and analysis about what students are doing and producing; and (3) the development, implementation, and accomplishment of a schoolwide action plan.

This document, *ACS WASC Initial Visit Procedures Manual for California Public Schools*, provides information on the accreditation process and explains the initial steps toward ACS WASC affiliation. This manual parallels the criteria and standards that were collaboratively developed with ACS WASC and the California Department of Education (CDE), and that are listed in the most recent edition of the full accreditation manual for ACS WASC/CDE public schools. All criteria and standards for California public schools, along with two additional criteria, apply to California charter schools.

ACS WASC Philosophy

The Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC) believes that the goal of any school should be to provide for successful student learning. Programs encompassing both the cognitive and affective components of learning should foster human growth and development and enable students to become responsible, productive members of the school community and our democratic society. Each school should develop a school purpose to reflect its beliefs. For ongoing program improvement, each school should engage in objective and subjective internal and external evaluations to assess progress in achieving its purpose.

The primary goals of accreditation are:

- *Certification to the public that the school is a trustworthy institution of learning*
- *The improvement of the school's programs and operations to support student learning.*

The school's self-study and the visiting committee report provide compelling evidence that:

- *The school is substantially accomplishing its stated purposes and functions identified as appropriate for an institution of its type.*
- *The school is meeting an acceptable level of quality in accordance with the criteria adopted by the Accrediting Commission for Schools.*

ACS WASC Mission

ACS WASC advances and validates quality ongoing school improvement by supporting its private and public elementary, secondary, and postsecondary member institutions to engage in a rigorous and relevant self-evaluation and peer review process that focuses on student learning.

ACS WASC Territory

ACS WASC extends its services worldwide to public, private, independent, church-related, and proprietary pre-K–12 and adult schools. ACS WASC provides assistance to schools located in California, Hawaii, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Asia, and other parts of the world.

Affiliation Categories

After a school completes the necessary documentation in their application for affiliation with ACS WASC and an on-site visit is conducted, one of three possible accreditation status outcomes will be made to the Accrediting Commission for Schools:

1. **Initial accreditation** is granted to schools that meet the ACS WASC criteria for full accreditation and have a history and support system indicating a high-quality program that can be sustained into the foreseeable future. Initial accreditation is a three-year status.

2. **Candidacy** is a status of affiliation indicating that an institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward, but has not yet achieved, accreditation. The candidate for accreditation classification is designed for institutions that are not yet ready for the full evaluation based on the ACS WASC criteria for accreditation. The institution must provide evidence of sound planning with sufficient resources to implement these plans, and must appear to have the potential for attaining its goals within a reasonable time. Candidate schools are required to submit a written report to the Commission during the spring of the school year following the initial visit, indicating the progress being made in meeting the recommendations of the initial visiting committee and noting any substantial changes in the organization or operation of the school. Candidacy is a three-year status. Schools are expected to conduct a self-study and participate in an accreditation visit for full accreditation by the third year of candidacy.

3. **Accreditation status may be withheld** if it is determined that the school does not fully meet ACS WASC criteria for affiliation with the Accrediting Commission for Schools. A school may reapply after deficiencies have been remedied.

Application Guidelines

Both public and private schools must meet the legal requirements of the jurisdiction in which they are located in order for their application for ACS WASC affiliation to be considered. California private schools must list with the California Department of Education by submitting an affidavit indicating compliance with Education Code Section 33190. Likewise, Hawaii private schools must be licensed by the Hawaii Council of Private Schools, or certified by the Western Catholic Educational Association and accredited in association with ACS WASC, under the authority of Act 188, Session Laws of Hawaii, 1995.

Conditions of Eligibility

To be considered for ACS WASC affiliation, the applicant school must be a school meeting the following conditions:

1. Schools must meet the legal requirements of the jurisdiction in which they are located in order for their application for ACS WASC affiliation to be considered.

2. School must be in at least the second semester of operation, with students, teachers, and administration in place.

3. School enrollment must reach a minimum of 6 full-time students.

4. The school's program must include at least two grade levels. One exception would involve a new high school that opts to begin only with grade 9.

5. Have developed and published a clear statement of purposes together with plans for a curriculum to carry out those purposes.

6. Have a management system that provides appropriate direction and oversight for the overall program.

7. Have employed a chief administration officer who is qualified for the position.

8. Have an organization, facilities, course offerings, and staffing acceptable for the school's stage of development.

9. Have an overall plan including objectives for student achievement and assessment plans to measure progress toward those objectives.

10. Have an admissions policy compatible with the school's stated objectives.

11. Have a written curriculum appropriate to the organization's purpose.

12. Have a qualified instructional staff.

13. Have plans to provide access to appropriate extracurricular and enrichment activities, if appropriate.

14. Have developed an adequate financial base to give reasonable assurance of continuing financial stability.

Procedures

- A school seeking affiliation will complete an "ACS WASC Application" and submit it to ACS WASC with a nonrefundable application fee. Schools that reschedule or postpone the initial visit to a different school year will be required to pay an **additional** application fee to restart the application process.

- After the "ACS WASC Application" is processed, the school will be provided with initial visit materials and a school description report template to complete and submit to ACS WASC. The information provided to the ACS WASC office in this report should describe the purposes and operation of the school and gives evidence of the school's status in relation to the conditions of eligibility. In addition to the evidence provided in the report, the school should make available other supporting documentation during the initial visit.

- Upon receipt of the forms, ACS WASC will arrange for a two-member, one-day visit to the school. Newly established schools may host the initial visit as early as the second semester of operation. Following the visit, the committee will prepare a report to present to the Accrediting Commission for Schools for action. This will include recommendations regarding the school's ongoing improvement and assess the school's readiness for initial affiliation. The school will be notified by the executive director of the Commission's action.

- If the Commission's action is unfavorable and the institution is not granted affiliation, the school may reapply when, in its judgment, it meets the conditions of eligibility. The school may reapply as early as the following semester.

- If the Commission's action is favorable, the school will be granted either initial accreditation or candidacy for a period not to exceed three years. It is expected that the school will conduct a self-study and participate in an accreditation visit during the third year.

- Schools that are granted candidacy status are to submit a first-year progress report indicating the progress being made in meeting the recommendations of the initial visiting committee and noting any substantial changes in the organization or operation of the school.

Detailed ACS WASC fee schedules can be found on the ACS WASC website at www.acswasc.org/wasc/acs-wasc-fees/.

Schools that have been approved for initial accreditation may use the following phrase in advertising and/or on student transcripts.

Accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Schools,
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Schools that are approved as <u>candidates</u> for accreditation may use the following phrase in advertising and/or on student transcripts.

Candidate for Accreditation. Approved by the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Candidate schools are NOT authorized to use the word "accredited" or "accredited by" until full accreditation has been granted by the Commission. Candidate schools MAY NOT use the ACS WASC logo or ACS WASC accreditation stamp on transcripts or school advertising.

ACS WASC/CDE Criteria for Initial Affiliation

The ACS WASC/CDE criteria for initial affiliation can be found on the following pages. The criteria are organized into five categories:

1. Organization

2. Curriculum

3. Learning and Teaching

4. Assessment and Accountability

5. School Culture and Support for Student Personal, Social-Emotional, and Academic Growth

The criteria and indicators organized by categories are provided on the following pages. Schools respond to questions regarding the criteria and provide supporting information. A school description form is sent to the school for completion.

The visiting committee will write a report after the visit that will include recommendations regarding the school's ongoing improvement and assess the school's readiness for initial affiliation.

Category A: Organization

A1. Vision and Purpose Criterion

The school has a clearly stated vision and mission (purpose) based on its student needs, current educational research, the district Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and the belief that all students can achieve at high academic levels. Supported by the governing board and the district LCAP, the school's purpose is defined further by schoolwide learner outcomes and academic standards.

Indicators

A1.1. Vision – Mission – Schoolwide Learner Outcomes – Profile: The school has established a clear, coherent vision and mission (purpose) of what students should know and demonstrate; it is based upon high-quality standards and is congruent with research, practices, the student/community profile data, a belief that all students can learn and be college and career ready, and aligned with district goals for students.

A1.2. Development/Refinement of Vision, Mission, Schoolwide Learner Outcomes: There are effective processes in place to ensure involvement of all stakeholders in the development and periodic refinement of the vision, mission, and schoolwide learner outcomes.

A1.3. Understanding of Vision, Mission, Schoolwide Learner Outcomes, District LCAP: Students, parents, and other members of the school and business community demonstrate understanding of and commitment to the vision, mission, the schoolwide learner outcomes, and the district LCAP.

Category A: Organization

A2. Governance Criterion

The governing board (a) has policies and bylaws and the school's purpose is aligned with them to support the achievement of the schoolwide learner outcomes, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness standards based on data-driven instructional decisions for the school; (b) delegates implementation of these policies to the professional staff; and (c) monitors results regularly and approves the single schoolwide action plan/SPSA and its relationship to the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Indicators

A2.1. Understanding the Role of the Governing Board and District Administration: The school community understands the governing authority's role, including how stakeholders can be involved.

A2.2. Relationship between Governing Board and School: The school's stakeholders understand the relationship between the governing board's decisions, expectations, and initiatives that guide the work of the school.

A2.3. Uniform Complaint Procedures: The school leadership understands and utilizes the Uniform Complaint Procedures from the district.

Category A: Organization

A3. Leadership: Data-Informed Decision-Making and Continuous School Improvement Criterion

Based on multiple sources of data, the school leadership, parent/community, and staff make decisions and initiate activities that focus on all students achieving the schoolwide learner outcomes, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness standards. The school leadership and staff annually monitor and refine the schoolwide action plan/SPSA and make recommendations to modify the LCAP as needed.

Indicators

A3.1. Broad-Based and Collaborative: The school's broad-based, collaborative planning process is a continuous improvement cycle that a) assesses data to determine student needs, b) collaboratively determines and implements strategies and actions and c) monitors results and impact on student success.

A3.2. School Action Plan/SPSA Correlated to Student Learning: The school's action plan/SPSA is directly correlated to and driven by the analysis of student achievement data and other data and aligned with district LCAP.

A3.3. Collective Accountability to Support Learning: The school leadership and staff demonstrate shared decision-making, responsibility, and self-reflection on actions and accountability for implementing practices, programs, actions, and services that support student learning.

A3.4. Internal Communication and Planning: The school has effective existing structures for internal communication, planning, and resolving differences.

Category A: Organization

A4. Staff: Qualified and Professional Development Criterion

Qualified staff and leadership facilitate achievement of the student academic standards and the schoolwide learner outcomes through a system of preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development. There is a systematic approach to continuous improvement through professional development based on student performance data, student needs, and research.

Indicators

A4.1. Qualifications and Preparation of Staff: The school has confidence in district and school procedures to ensure that leadership and staff are qualified based on staff background, training, and preparation. The processes to assign staff members and provide appropriate orientation for all assignments maximizes the expertise of the staff members in relation to impact on quality student learning.

A4.2. Professional Development and Learning: The school effectively supports professional development/learning with time, personnel, material, and fiscal resources to facilitate all students achieving the academic, college- and career-readiness standards, and the schoolwide learner outcomes.

A4.3. Measurable Effect of Professional Development on Student Learning: There are effective processes in place to assess the measurable effect of professional development on teacher practice and the impact it has on student performance.

A4.4. Supervision and Evaluation: The school implements effective supervision and evaluation procedures in order to promote professional growth of staff.

A4.5. Communication and Understanding of School Policies and Procedures: The school implements a clear system to communicate administrator and faculty written policies, procedures, and handbooks that define responsibilities, operational practices, decision-making processes, and relationships of leadership and staff.

Category A: Organization

A5. Resources Criterion

The human, material, physical, and financial resources are sufficient and utilized effectively and appropriately in accordance with the legal intent of the program(s) and LCAP to support students in accomplishing the schoolwide learner outcomes, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness standards.

Indicators

A5.1. Resource Allocation Decisions: The school leadership and staff are involved in the resource allocation decisions. There is a relationship between the decisions about resource allocations, the district's LCAP and the school action plan/SPSA, the school's vision, mission, the schoolwide learner outcomes, major student learner needs, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness standards.

A5.2. Practices: There are district processes and practices in place for developing an annual budget, conducting an annual audit, and at all times conducting quality business and accounting practices.

A5.3. Facilities Conducive to Learning: The school's facilities are safe, functional, well-maintained, and adequate to meet the students' learning needs and support the educational program (i.e., accomplish the vision, mission, and the schoolwide learner outcomes).

A5.4. Instructional Materials and Equipment: The policies and procedures for acquiring and maintaining adequate instructional materials and equipment, such as textbooks, other printed materials, instructional technology, manipulatives, and laboratory materials are effective.

A5.5. Resources for Personnel: Resources are available and used to enable the hiring, nurturing, and ongoing professional development of a well-qualified personnel for all programs.

Category A: Organization

A6. Resources Criterion

The governing authority and the school leadership execute responsible resource planning for the future. The school has developed policies, procedures, and internal controls for managing the financial operations that meet state laws, generally accepted practices, and ethical standards. The school is fiscally solvent and uses sound and ethical accounting practices (budgeting/monitoring, internal controls, audits, fiscal health, and reporting).

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[FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS ONLY]

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Indicators

A6.1. Long-range Financial (and Other Resources) Plan and Stakeholder Involvement: The school regularly involves stakeholders in the review of its long-range plan/capital needs (and other resources) in relation to the school's vision, mission, and schoolwide learner outcomes. Decisions about resource allocation are directly related to the school's vision, mission, and schoolwide learner outcomes.

A6.2. Regular Accounting and External Audit Procedures: The school has written policy that defines internal controls, contracts, regular accounting, and external audit procedures.

A6.3. Processes for Implementation of Financial Practices: The school employs accountability measures to assure that personnel follow fiscal policies and procedures.

A6.4. Budgeting Process — Transparency: The school develops and monitors its annual budgeting process to ensure transparency and stakeholder involvement.

A6.5. Adequate Compensation, Staffing, Reserves: The school governing body provides adequate compensation to faculty, administrators, and staff; adequate staffing for the school's program; and reasonable accumulation of reserves.

A6.6. Marketing Strategies: The school has marketing strategies to support the implementation of the developmental program, including research and information to help develop future planning.

A6.7. Informing the Public and Appropriate Authorities: The governing authorities and school leaders inform the public and appropriate governmental authorities about the financial needs of the organization.

Category B: Curriculum

B1. Rigorous and Relevant Standards-based Curriculum Criterion

All students participate in a rigorous, relevant, and coherent standards-based curriculum that supports the achievement of the schoolwide learner outcomes, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness standards in order to meet graduation requirements.

Indicators

B1.1. Current Educational Research and Thinking: The school provides an effective, rigorous, relevant and coherent curriculum based on current educational research and thinking that supports the academic standards.

B1.2. Academic and College- and Career-Readiness Standards: The school has defined academic standards and college- and career-readiness indicators or standards for each subject area, course, and/or program that meet or exceed graduation requirements.

B1.3. Congruence with Student Learner Outcomes and Standards: There is congruence between the actual concepts and skills taught, the schoolwide learner outcomes, academic standards, and the college- and career-readiness indicators or standards.

B1.4. Integration Among Disciplines: There is integration and alignment among academic and career technical disciplines at the school.

B1.5. Community Resources and Articulation and Follow-up Studies: The school engages with community partners and resources, articulates regularly with feeder schools, local colleges and universities, and technical schools. The school uses follow-up studies of graduates and others to learn about the effectiveness of the curricular program.

Category B: Curriculum

B2. Equity and Access to Curriculum Criterion

All students have equal access to the school's entire program and are provided assistance with a personal learning plan to meet the requirements of graduation and are prepared for the pursuit of their academic, personal, and career goals.

Indicators

B2.1. Variety of Programs — **Full Range of Choices**: All students are able to make appropriate choices and pursue a full range of realistic college and career and/or other educational options. The school provides for career exploration, preparation for postsecondary education, and career technical options for all students.

B2.2. Accessibility of All Students to Curriculum, including Real World Experiences: A rigorous, relevant, and coherent curriculum that includes real world applications is accessible to all students through all courses/programs offered.

B2.3. Student-Parent-Staff Collaboration: Parents, students, and staff collaborate in developing and monitoring a student's personal learning plan, including college and career and/or other educational goals.

B2.4. Post High School Transitions: The school implements strategies and programs to facilitate transitions to college, career, and other postsecondary high school options and regularly evaluates their effectiveness.

Category C: Learning and Teaching

C1. Student Engagement in Challenging and Relevant Learning Experiences Criterion

To achieve the schoolwide learner outcomes, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness standards, all students are involved in challenging and relevant learning experiences.

Indicators

C1.1. Results of Student Observations and Examining Work: The students are involved in challenging and relevant work as evidenced by observations of students working and the examination of student work.

C1.2. Student Understanding of Learning Expectations: The students understand the standards/expected performance levels for each area of study in order to demonstrate learning and college and career readiness.

Category C: Learning and Teaching

C2. Student Engagement Through a Variety of Strategies and Resources Criterion

All teachers use a variety of strategies and resources, including technology and experiences beyond the textbook and the classroom, to actively engage students and emphasize creative and critical thinking skills and applications.

Indicators

C2.1. Teachers as Facilitators of Learning: Teachers facilitate learning as coaches and are current in the instructional content taught and research-based instructional methodologies including differentiation and the integrated use of technology.

C2.2. Creative and Critical Thinking: Students demonstrate creative and critical thinking within a variety of instructional settings, using a variety of materials, resources, and technology beyond the textbook.

C2.3. Application of Learning: Students demonstrate that they can apply acquired knowledge and skills at higher levels and depths of knowledge to extend learning opportunities.

C2.4. Career Preparedness and Real World Experiences: All students have access to and are engaged in career preparation activities.

Category D: Assessment and Accountability

D1. Reporting and Accountability Process Criterion

The school leadership and instructional staff use effective assessment processes to collect, disaggregate, analyze, and report schoolwide student performance data to the school staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders. The analysis of data guides the school's programs and processes, the allocation and usage of resources, and forms the basis for the development of the schoolwide action plan/SPSA aligned with the LCAP.

Indicators

D1.1. Professionally Acceptable Assessment Process: The school leadership and instructional staff use effective assessment processes to collect, disaggregate, analyze, and report student performance data to all stakeholders.

D1.2. Basis for Determination of Performance Level: The school leadership and instructional staff have agreed upon the basis for students' grades, growth, and performance levels to ensure consistency across and within grade levels and content areas.

D1.3. Monitoring of Student Growth: The school has an effective system to determine and monitor all students' growth and progress toward meeting the schoolwide learner outcomes/graduate profile, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness indicators or standards.

D1.4. Assessment of Program Areas: In partnership with district leadership, the school leadership, and instructional staff periodically assess programs and expectations, including graduation requirements, credits, course completion, and homework and grading policies, to ensure student needs are met through a challenging, coherent, and relevant curriculum.

D1.5. Schoolwide Modifications Based on Assessment Results: The school uses assessment results to make changes in the school program, professional development activities, and resource allocations demonstrating a results-driven continuous school improvement process.

Category D: Assessment and Accountability

D2. Using Student Assessment Strategies to Monitor and Modify Learning in the Classroom Criterion

Teachers employ a variety of appropriate formative and summative assessment strategies to evaluate student learning. Students and teachers use these findings to modify the learning/teaching practices to improve student learning.

Indicators

D2.1. Demonstration of Student Achievement: Teachers use the analysis of formative and summative assessments to guide, modify, and adjust curricular and instructional approaches.

D2.2. Teacher and Student Feedback: Teachers provide timely, specific and descriptive feedback in order to support students in achieving learning goals, academic standards, college- and career-readiness standards, and schoolwide learner outcomes. Teachers also use student feedback and dialogue to monitor progress and learn about the degree to which learning experiences are understood and relevant in preparing students for college, career, and life.

Category E: School Culture and Support for Student Personal, Social-Emotional, and Academic Growth

E1. Parental and Community Engagement Criterion

The school leadership employs a wide range of strategies to encourage family and community involvement, especially with the learning/teaching process.

Indicators

E1.1. Parent Engagement: The school implements strategies and processes for the regular involvement of all stakeholder support groups in the learning and teaching process for all students.

Category E: School Culture and Support for Student Personal, Social-Emotional, and Academic Growth

E2. School Culture and Environment Criterion

The school leadership focuses on continuous school improvement by providing a safe, clean, and orderly place that nurtures learning and developing a culture that is characterized by trust, professionalism, and high expectations for all students.

Indicators

E2.1. Safe, Clean, and Orderly Environment: The school has existing policies and regulations and uses its resources to ensure a safe, clean, and orderly place that nurtures learning, including internet safety and Uniform Complaint Procedures.

E2.2. High Expectations/Concern for Students: The school culture demonstrates caring, concern, and high expectations for students in an environment that honors individual differences, social emotional needs, and is conducive to learning.

E2.3. Atmosphere of Trust, Respect, and Professionalism: The entire school community has an atmosphere of trust, respect, and professionalism.

Category E: School Culture and Support for Student Personal, Social-Emotional, and Academic Growth

E3. Personal, Social-Emotional, and Academic Student Support Criterion

All students receive appropriate academic, social-emotional and multi-tiered supports to help ensure student learning, college and career readiness and success. Students with special talents and/or needs have access to a system of personal support services, activities, and opportunities at the school and in the community.

Indicators

E3.1. Academic Support Strategies for Students: School leadership develop and implement strategies and personalized, multi-tiered support approaches to meet academic student needs.

E3.2. Multi-Tiered Support Strategies for Students: School leadership develop and implement alternative instructional options and personalized, multi-tiered approaches to student support focused on learning and social emotional needs of students.

E3.3. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and Impact on Student Learning and Well-Being: The school leadership and staff asses the effectiveness of the multi-tiered support system and its impact on student success and achievement.

E3.4. Co-Curricular Activities: The school ensures that there is a high level of student involvement in curricular and co-curricular activities that link to schoolwide learner outcomes, academic standards, and college- and career-readiness standards.

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