



# **Supplementary Education Centers/Programs Accreditation Manual**

**Developed through the Partnership of**

**Middle States Association  
Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools**

**and**

**Accrediting Commission for Schools,  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges**



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**2013 EDITION**





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# Introduction

Welcome to the accreditation process for Supplementary Education Centers/Programs. This manual has been developed to guide centers through the accreditation process by a regional accreditation agency. This manual outlines the accrediting process which includes self-study evaluation, peer-review by a Visiting Committee of educators, and a Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan<sup>\*</sup>) that guides center improvement activities. A *Self-Study Report* template is provided that identifies the Seven Standards that must be met for a center to earn accreditation status.

The accreditation process is designed to accredit centers, not individual courses. All centers will be evaluated as a complete learning environment that includes all programs and courses. Accreditation is not granted before a center is fully operational for at least one semester or six-month period.

## Regional Accrediting Commissions Partnership

There are six regional accrediting agencies across the United States. Two of these, the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS) and the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC) have partnered to develop an accreditation protocol that can be used nationwide. Currently, MSA-CESS provides accreditation services to Supplementary Education Centers/Programs in the eastern region of the U.S. and WASC provides accreditation services to Supplementary Education Centers/Programs in the west.<sup>†</sup>

The regional agencies are non-governmental, non-profit, and peer-administered organizations. Accreditation rests on the dual concepts of self-regulation and quality improvement. Accreditation has been defined as a conformity assessment process that requires educational institutions to meet defined standards of acceptable operation and performance. Thus, accreditation refers to both a standard setting process and a review process.

Each regional commission is autonomous and has its own governing body charged with setting policy and making accreditation status determinations. These commissions oversee accreditation for K-12 schools, colleges, universities, junior colleges, postsecondary institutions, and supplementary education centers/programs.

## Purpose of Accreditation

The accreditation process assures public trust as it reviews centers to ensure they meet rigorous, research-based education standards. The process is not a compliance-based activity but is an ongoing process of center improvement within a six-year cycle. The process is an engaged systemic, continuous improvement cycle that meets the expectations of parents and students by delivering all that is promised. Accreditation means that educational programs, services, staff, and facilities meet or exceed essential standards of educational quality. Accreditation provides a

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<sup>\*</sup> WASC uses the term “Action Plan.”

<sup>†</sup> For WASC purposes, the Mississippi River is the dividing line for the eastern and western regions.

process for a Supplementary Education Center/Program to manage ongoing change in a way designed to consistently improve educational quality in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

The accreditation process focuses on center improvement rather than a compliance checklist. The process is designed to evaluate educational growth, instructional practices, assessment, professional growth for teachers, and an educational Strategic Improvement Plan. The accreditation process does not focus on business models, profit goals, or marketing plans.

Supplementary Education Centers/Programs should contact their regional accreditation organization and request accreditation materials. (Some corporate centers may need to get permission from their governing body before pursuing accreditation). Regional accrediting agencies will provide materials and information regarding eligibility requirements, fees, visit schedules, accreditation status, etc. Centers must be in operation for a least one semester or 6 months before pursuing accreditation; in addition, a center must have at least 15 regularly attending students to qualify for accreditation.

### **Full Accreditation Site Visit**

Once a Supplementary Education Center/Program has been accepted into the accreditation process, a full self-study visit once every six years becomes the focus. There is a fee for this visit and the center will be responsible for all the hospitality, travel, and accommodation costs. Visits typically take one day for a one or two-person Visiting Committee. The main assignment for each center is the completion of the *Self-Study Report* and the revision of the center's Strategic Improvement Plan.

The regional accrediting offices will work with each center to establish the date of the visit, the schedule of activities for the visit, and the due date for mailing the *Self-Study Report* to each Visiting Committee member (4–5 weeks in advance of the visit). The Visiting Committee will spend one day (approximately 4–5 hours) evaluating the program, meeting with center leaders, and interviewing students and parents. The Visiting Committee will go over the *Self-Study Report* in detail and collaborate in the identification of critical areas for follow-up for the center's Strategic Improvement Plan.

### **Accreditation Status**

Within three weeks of the site visit, the Visiting Committee chair will file a written report with the regional accreditation office. Regional commissions will act on the Visiting Committee's recommendation at their next commission meeting. Accreditation status or terms of accreditation are determined by each regional commission. Centers may grant six years of accreditation status with a mid-cycle report during the third year of the six-year cycle. If serious deficiencies are found, a mid-cycle visit by a regional staff member may be required or accreditation may be withheld.

### **Ongoing Accreditation Process**

Once a center has been granted accreditation status, it operates on a six-year cycle of improvement tasks and activities:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Year 1 | Update the center profile, analyze student learning results, and revise the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) as needed. |
|--------|---|

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Year 2	Update the center profile, analyze student learning results, and revise the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) as needed.
Year 3	Update the center profile, analyze student learning results, and submit a Mid-cycle Progress Report to the regional accrediting office.
Year 4	Update the center profile, analyze student learning results, and revise the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) as needed.
Year 5	Update center profile, analyze student learning results, and revise the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) as needed.
Year 6	Prepare for the next full self-study site visit. Complete the <i>Self-Study Report</i> , update the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan), and host the full self-study site visit.

### **After the Site Visit**

The Visiting Committee will complete its site visit report and send it to the regional accrediting agency office. The regional commission will review the report and make the decision on accreditation status. Centers will be notified in writing of the decision of the Commission regarding accreditation status.

### **Substantive Change Visits**

It is the regional accreditation agency's responsibility to monitor major changes that occur in Supplementary Education Program/Centers to ensure that accreditation criteria is continually being met. In order to maintain their integrity, centers must guarantee the quality of their programs and services even as they make changes. When a substantive change occurs at a center, MSA-CESS or WASC may send one or two members to the school for a half-day visit to ensure that the changes have had a positive impact on the center. Centers are responsible to report substantive changes to the regional accreditation office within one month of the change.

Below is a list of the conditions which typically require substantive change approval and a visit:

1. Change in mission, scope, or name of the center
2. Change in the location or geographical area served or addition of a new site
3. Change in the control of the institution (legal status, governance, ownership, or if a merge/split has occurred)
4. Change in courses/programs that represent a significant departure from the current practice (new curriculum, a major change in the faculty, a change of facilities, the use of distance learning, etc.).

Centers that require a substantive change visit should notify its regional accreditation agency within one month and set a date for a substantive change visit. A fee is assessed for substantive change visits.



# Accreditation Self-Study Report

## Self-Study Report Overview

The internal review and writing of the *Self-Study Report* is the critical component of the accreditation process. The writing of the *Self-Study Report* should be a collaborative effort by all stakeholders (administration, faculty, students, and parents).

The *Self-Study Report* consists of five sections:

Section One: Seven Standards of Accreditation

Section Two: Description of the Center

Section Three: Progress Report on Previously Identified Critical Areas for Follow-up

Section Four: Academic Program

Section Five: Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) for Future Center Improvement

Regional offices are prepared to assist each center in the completion of the *Self-Study Report*. At the conclusion of the self-study process, centers will be evaluated on how well they meet or exceed the following overarching expectations of accreditation:

- To what extent did the center clarify the center's purpose and student learner outcomes?
- To what extent did the center involve the entire learning community in the self-study process?
- To what extent did the center analyze learning data and use results to drive the academic program and school improvement decisions?
- To what extent did the center accept the Visiting Committee's input during the site visit?
- To what extent did the center use its Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) to govern its future growth and development?

## Self-Study Report Format

Supplementary Education Centers/Programs should complete all five sections of the *Self-Study Report* and have evidence on hand during the site visit to back up the contents and claims of the *Self-Study Report*. The pages that follow identify the information necessary to complete the *Self-Study Report*. (An electronic template for this report is available on each agency's website).

Centers may present the *Self-Study Report* in notebook format, spiral bound format, or in another format that is user-friendly. Once the *Self-Study Report* is completed, a hard copy and electronic copy should be sent to the regional accrediting office **4–5 weeks** in advance of the site visit.



## Section One: Supplementary Education Center/Program Standards Checklist

Section One consists of a checklist to ensure that the Supplementary Education Center/Program standards are being met. The standards are defined as follows:

### 1. Legal Status

The center must confirm its legal status and its authority to operate.

### 2. Governance and Leadership

The center must have an organizational structure that includes clear lines of authority and identified methods to maintain accountability to the governing body.

### 3. Educational Services

The educational mission of the center must be clearly documented and supported by the staff and administration with appropriate educational services.

### 4. Using Performance Results

Student performance results must be used to drive the academic program and center improvement planning.

### 5. Resources

The resources available to the centers must be adequate to provide for the needs of this student population.

- **Finances:** The center must be adequately financed.
- **Facilities:** Educational space, equipment, and materials must be adequate for the programs offered.
- **Technology:** The technology available to staff and student must support educational objectives.
- **Health and Safety:** The center must provide a safe and healthy environment for teaching and learning.

### 6. Organizational Climate

The center's teaching and learning culture must support the implementation of its educational programs and services.

### 7. Improvement Planning

The center must maintain long-range/strategic planning activities that support continuous educational improvement.

On the pages that follow, please complete the checklist that addresses specific indicators that affirm that each standard is being met. The checklist identifies if the standards are "fully met" or "not met." Narrative explanations should be provided for any indicators that are marked "not met."

## Standard One: Legal Status

The legal status of the center is clearly defined. There are no legal or proprietary ambiguities in ownership, control or responsibility. Corporate linkages are expressed as enforceable agreements and the center is approved for its operations by the civil authority within whose jurisdiction it is located.

- 1.1 All legal documents that define and describe the legal status of the center are readily available. These include, for example, articles of incorporation, franchise agreements, proprietary registration, and partnership agreement.

Fully met                       Not met

- 1.2 There is a charter, license, or permit issued by the appropriate civil jurisdiction that testifies the center has the authority to operate within that jurisdiction.

Fully met                       Not met

- 1.3 There is access to a legal authority or counsel qualified to advise the center in its legal status, rights, and responsibilities, and in regard to other proprietary or corporate entities with which the center is in a contractual relationship.

Fully met                       Not met

- 1.4 Documents that define and describe any legal proceedings pending or underway are available for examination.

Fully met                       Not met

- 1.5 The center conducts no regular business activity that is outside the corporate or civil sanctions established by its legal status.

Fully met                       Not met

Provide further information on any indicators that are marked “Not met”:

## Standard Two: Governance and Leadership

There is an organizational governance chart with defined lines of authority, relationships, and methods of accountability. Job descriptions and work schedules are regularly reviewed. There is a plan for staff development. An up-to-date policies and procedures manual is printed and regularly reviewed.

2.1 The center has an organizational chart or is able to effectively describe it in discussions.

Fully met                       Not met

2.2 Members of the staff can describe their duties with understanding, they know what is expected of them, and they know to whom they are accountable.

Fully met                       Not met

2.3 The head of the center is able to identify goals for the center's improvement and describe strategies for their attainment.

Fully met                       Not met

2.4 The activities of the center are structured, scheduled, and administered in ways that assure stability and continuity.

Fully met                       Not met

2.5 The governance and leadership appropriately recognize the accomplishments of staff and students.

Fully met                       Not met

2.6 All advertising and promotional literature is truthful and ethical and is not offensive or negative against other centers, schools, or educational agencies.

Fully met                       Not met

Provide further information on any indicators that are marked "Not met":

### Standard Three: Educational Services

The educational mission of the center is clearly documented and supported by the staff and administration. School curriculum is developed, organized, and based on research and best practices. Methods and materials are professionally sanctioned and instruction is offered in appropriate group sizes that encourage and permit effective instruction. Educational operations reflect no evidence of bias or prejudice.

- 3.1 There is a written statement of mission, philosophy, or goals which has been developed by the corporation or governing body that is known and supported by the staff and made available to the public.

Fully met                       Not met

- 3.2 Each area of learning is defined by a scope and sequence plan. Developmental increments are identified and positive methods of motivation are defined and in use.

Fully met                       Not met

- 3.3 Group size allows for accommodation of individual differences and differences in learning styles and abilities.

Fully met                       Not met

- 3.4 Materials and methods of instruction are consistent with the mission, philosophy, and goals of the center.

Fully met                       Not met

- 3.5 There is evidence that no form of bias or prejudice is practiced or sanctioned by the center.

Fully met                       Not met

Provide further information on any indicators that are marked "Not met":

## Standard Four: Using Performance Results

Student performance results reflect the mission and vision of the center. The center and/or its parent corporation systematically collect and analyzes quantifiable and observable evidence of individual learning and growth from multiple valid and reliable sources. Evidence of student learning is used to evaluate and improve curriculum effectiveness, professional development, and the ability of the center to meet goals and expectations. Progress in student learning and performance is expected and is systematically reported to parents and other center stakeholders (parents, students, faculty members) as appropriate.

4.1 The leadership and staff commit to, participate in, and share in accountability for student learning.

Fully met                       Not met

4.2 Assessment results are analyzed with appropriate frequency and rigor for individual students as they move through the program.

Fully met                       Not met

4.3 Assessment results are analyzed with appropriate frequency and rigor for comparable national programs.

Fully met                       Not met

4.4 Records of student's learning and performance are maintained. General standards for transcript control and use, including those related to confidentiality, are known and observed.

Fully met                       Not met

Provide further information on any indicators that are marked "Not met":

## Standard Five: Resources

The resources available to the center are adequate to provide for the needs of the student population. The center has adequate resources in the areas of finance, facilities, technology, and health and safety to meet its goals and expectations.

**Finances:** The center is adequately financed. Finances are sufficient to ensure continued stability in the operation of the center.

5.1 The center implements written financial policies and procedures that are in accordance with accepted business practices.

Fully met                       Not met

5.2 Levels of income and expenditures are in balance. Assets are sufficient to meet current and future liabilities.

Fully met                       Not met

5.3 Prior to enrolling, students and their families are informed of all financial obligations.

Fully met                       Not met

**Facilities:** Educational and administrative areas are adequate for the student program. The facilities are safe, clean, and well maintained.

5.4 The center's facilities and equipment are safe and well maintained.

Fully met                       Not met

5.5 All physical spaces are sufficient in size to accommodate the activities conducted in the center.

Fully met                       Not met

**Technology:** The technology available to staff and students promotes the accomplishment of educational objectives and support the educational programs offered.

5.6 Information resources, materials and technology are accessible and of adequate scope, quantity and quality to facilitate the center's pursuit of its total educational program.

Fully met                       Not met

5.7 The center implements written policies and procedures for acceptable use of technology.

Fully met                       Not met

**Health and Safety:** A safe and healthy environment for teaching and learning is provided. The center staff is aware of the health needs of the students and is prepared to address these needs.

5.8 The center has satisfactory written procedures and equipment with which to deal with emergencies, and to evacuate the center’s facilities if necessary.

Fully met                       Not met

5.9 Appropriate training is provided to staff members on how to implement emergency and crisis plans, handle accidents and illness, and prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

Fully met                       Not met

5.10 Policies regarding the use/possession of tobacco, alcohol, weapons, and illegal drugs are in place.

Fully met                       Not met

Provide further information on any indicators for all of Standard Five that are marked “Not met”:

## Standard Six: Organizational Climate

The center's culture supports implementation of appropriate educational programs and services. The center's organizational structure and culture facilitate achievement of its core values as expressed in its philosophy and mission. The center's culture supports successful implementation of age and developmentally appropriate educational programs and services. Administrative and instructional staff is qualified, competent, and sufficient in number to effectively provide quality educational experiences. Relationships among the staff and leadership are collegial and collaborative.

6.1 Administrative and instructional staff are qualified, competent, and sufficient in number to meet the needs of the educational program.

Fully met                       Not met

6.2 Staff members are assigned to work based on their education, preparation, experience, expertise, and commitment to the center's success.

Fully met                       Not met

6.3 The center implements written policies and procedures for evaluating staff performance. Performance appraisals are conducted with the knowledge of staff members and reported in writing.

Fully met                       Not met

6.4 The center makes provisions for orienting and mentoring new staff members.

Fully met                       Not met

6.5 Professional satisfaction and good general morale characterize the center's staff.

Fully met                       Not met

6.6 A clearly defined, written code of student conduct supports an environment that is conducive to learning and is understood by students, staff, and families.

Fully met                       Not met

Provide further information on any indicators that are marked "Not met":

## Standard Seven: Improvement Planning

The center maintains long-range/strategic planning activities which reveal how it will maintain continuous educational improvement. The center maintains knowledge of its future with projections of income, expense, enrollment, special populations, and trends in the business environment within which the center operates. The center maintains long-range planning/strategic planning activities which reveal how its Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) will maintain continuous improvement.

7.1 The center maintains projections that reveal trends that are underway that will affect the future of the center.

Fully met                       Not met

7.2 The center has a plan for its future that identifies goals, needed resources, interim steps, and those responsible for accomplishment of same.

Fully met                       Not met

Provide further information on any indicators that are marked "Not met":

## Summary

Having completed the checklist on the previous pages regarding the standards addressed in Section One, what do you consider to be your center's most notable strengths and critical areas for follow-up? Please identify at least three of each below:

### Strengths:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### Critical Areas for Follow-up:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



11. What percentage of your students are:

\_\_\_\_\_ Special Education Services

\_\_\_\_\_ ESL students

12. What percentage of those enrolling in the center completes their course of study?

13. To what extent does the center display financial stability and future sustainability?

14. Create a table to indicate by program areas the number of students enrolled over the past five years, including the current year. If the center has been operating less than five years, list only those years:

**Enrollment Trends: Total Number of Students Enrolled in a 12-Month Period**

<b>Program/Course Title</b>	<b>July 1–June 30 4 Years Ago</b>	<b>July 1–June 30 3 Years Ago</b>	<b>July 1–June 30 2 Years Ago</b>	<b>July 1–June 30 1 Year Ago</b>	<b>July 1–June 30 Current Year</b>

15. If you offer **online programs or courses**, please answer the following:

- a. Provide a succinct summary of all types of online instruction and specialized programs offered, such as IB Diploma Program, college/career readiness programs (CTE, academies, Pathways), school/college partnerships, AVID, GATE, independent study, and other alternative education programs.
  
- b. For each program listed, provide data that demonstrates the impact on student learning. Incorporate the disaggregation of selected data based on the separate program provided: enrollment, achievement completion rate, etc. NOTE: Some of this data may be referenced as part of schoolwide data.
  
- c. Describe the types of online instruction provided.

- d. Identify the learning management system(s) used.
- e. List the hardware and software requirements for students.
- f. Identify what teacher and support staff qualifications are in place for online instruction.
- g. Identify what center personnel are involved in the online instructional process.
- h. Describe where online curriculum is offered both on-site or is outsourced. List specific vendors/providers that support the center's online programs/courses.
- i. List what types of instruction is offered, either synchronous or asynchronous
- j. Describe methods and processes used to ensure that all students have access to the instructional programs necessary for learning success.
- k. Describe the types of assessment and assessment processes used.
- l. Describe how the center includes online students in its culture, including types of center and community activities, including opportunities for student involvement.
- m. Identify the orientation process provided for incoming students and parents to understand expectations for the online learning environment.
- n. Describe the student/teacher interaction on a typical day.
- o. Identify what student support services, including response to intervention (RTI), academic counseling and support for equal access, personal counseling, college/career preparation support, and health services are provided to online students.

## **Summary of Student Learning Data**

1. Describe what assessment instruments are used to analyze student learning levels.
2. Describe who is involved in the analysis of student learning outcomes and how conclusions are drawn and how recommendations are created to address specific issues?
3. List as many different kinds of learning data that the center uses (i.e., achievement tests, AP exams, SAT/ACT results, pre-tests/post-tests, portfolio assessments, grade point averages, etc.). List the overall learning results for students for the past three years (charts are helpful).
4. To what extent does the center use the results of learning data analysis to improve instruction, plan for professional growth, and plan for future center improvement?
5. Describe the results of learning data analysis as it relates to student growth rates, pre-test/post-test results, and the average amount of learning growth seen in students at the center.
6. To what extent does the center ask parents to share information regarding their child's learning success while at the center or continued success after the child has finished at the center?

## **Teaching Staff Profile**

1. Create a table according to the following headings and provide information about all staff members. (Full-time equals 100%, i.e., 30–40 hours/week)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Positions</b>	<b>% of Employment</b>	<b>Certification//Credential</b>	<b>Degree/Major</b>	<b>Subject Area Taught at Center</b>

2. Is there a criminal background check (or verification of same) on file in the center for each employee?
3. Describe the training provided to the staff that applies specifically to the center's operation.

## **Community Connections**

1. If the center is a franchise of a national corporation, describe what services the corporate office provides.

2. List the educational institutions in the center's territory with which the center has a productive working relationship. Briefly describe the relationship.

School or Business

Relationship

3. Does the center follow-up on the students who have completed its programs? If so, how is this done, what are the results, and how is this information utilized?

4. Does the center offer its facilities or resources to community groups? Please describe.

5. Does this center use a representative group of its stakeholders (parents, students, faculty members) in an advisory basis (informally or formally)? Briefly describe.

After analyzing your responses above relating to Section 2 (Description of Center), please identify areas of strength and critical areas for follow-up.

### **Strengths:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### **Critical Areas for Follow-up:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



## Section Three Progress Report on Previously Identified Critical Areas for Follow-up

**[Section Three Can Be Skipped by First-Time Applicants]**

1. In the chart below, list the critical areas for follow-up that were identified by the previous accreditation Visiting Committee and briefly describe how the center has responded to each.

Critical Areas for Follow-up	Specific Responses by the Center

2. Describe the center's procedures for implementing the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) and monitoring results.
3. Describe how the use of the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) has impacted the quality of instruction and student learning outcomes at the center.
4. Identify any significant developments or events that have had a major impact on the center since the last accreditation visit.



## **Section Four Academic Program**

### **Educational Services**

1. List the educational services/programs provided by the center.
2. How does the center monitor and report learning progress?
3. How does the center communicate and connect to the schools that students attend regularly?
4. What methods are used to ensure that all instructional staff has full understanding and competence in the philosophy and methods of the center?
5. Briefly describe the age and condition of the instructional materials used?
6. Accreditation standards require that a complete set of records be kept on each student from admission to program completion. Cite evidence that files on each student are organized, complete, and handled with appropriate levels of confidentiality.
7. Cite evidence that a written guide of conduct and dress code is written and made available to students and their families.
8. Briefly describe the availability of technology for staff and students attending this center.

### **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

1. To what extent does the center provide a challenging, coherent, and relevant curriculum for each student?
2. Describe what standards are used to drive curriculum development, how the curriculum is aligned, and how the academic needs of current students are used to modify the curriculum.

3. To what extent does the professional staff use research-based knowledge about teaching and learning evidenced by the use of varied instructional strategies?
4. Describe the process to assess student learning and how learning data is used to drive center decisions and curricular planning?
5. How is learning data analyzed so that conclusions can be drawn and decisions for change made? How does the center use analysis results to improve instruction?

### **Organization for Student Learning**

1. To what extent does the center have a clear statement of purpose that reflects the philosophy of the center?
2. To what extent does the governing authority adopt policies that are consistent with the center's purpose and that result in student achievement? Can the center demonstrate academic "value added" for participating students?
3. To what extent does the center leadership focus its energies on student learning, empowering the staff, and developing commitment of all stakeholders (parents, students, and faculty members)?
4. To what extent does the center provide a qualified staff that is committed to student learning and the center's philosophy and mission?
5. What professional development opportunities are provided to the teachers?
6. To what extent does the center have a safe, healthy, and nurturing learning environment?
7. How does the center provide counseling and/or academic advising to students and parents?

After analyzing your responses above relating to Section 4 (Academic Program), please identify areas of strength and critical areas for follow-up:

**Strengths:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Critical Areas for Follow-up:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



## Section Five

### Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) for Future School Improvement

Supplementary Education Centers/Programs must develop a Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) that becomes the blueprint for future center growth and improvement. The accreditation process focuses on the self-study and the identification of specific critical areas for follow-up in all parts of the center's program.

The chief purpose of the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) is to address the academic growth of the instructional program. Financial goals, enrollment benchmarks, procedural changes, etc. are not appropriate for the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plans). An effective Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) looks at least three years ahead and identifies realistic, achievable, and measurable goals that directly impact student learning.

To develop an effective Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) based on the findings of the self-study process, each center must first summarize the findings of their *Self-Study Report*. The center should gather all strengths and critical areas for follow-up throughout their Self-Study Report and then prioritize what is most important to be included in the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan).

- Step 1: Copy all the "Strengths" from the entire *Self-Study Report* and make a cumulative list
- Step 2: Synthesize this list of "Strengths." (combine/blend those that are similar in concept)
- Step 3: Copy all the "Critical Areas for Follow-up" from the entire *Self-Study Report* and make a cumulative list
- Step 4: Synthesize and prioritize the list of "Critical Areas for Follow-up."

Once the strengths and critical areas for follow-up have been reduced/synthesized, identify the top three to five critical areas for follow-up; these will form the foundation of the center's Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are the anticipated impediments to achieving the center's Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Attach a copy of the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) to the *Self-Study Report*.**

## **Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) Development**

Many educational institutions fail to make significant progress because they do not have a purposeful plan for growth and improvement. The Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) is a critical part of the accreditation process.

All centers that seek accreditation must create a Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) as part of the self-study process. The plan is initially based on the findings that grow out of the self-study process conducted by the center staff. The Visiting Committee then reviews the plan, and may offer suggestions and counsel, based on its findings and/or recommendations.

The following information explains the purpose of planning and provides specific directions on how to complete the plan. Regional accrediting staff members are available to help providers develop goals and prepare the Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan).

### **Strategic Planning is:**

- A process for creating an organization's preferred future
- A process which produces a results-based, action-oriented plan for self-improvement
- A process which helps an organization change in predetermined ways
- A systems approach to maneuvering over time through the uncertain waters of a changing environment, to achieve prescribed aims.

### **Strategic Planning Focuses on:**

- Inventing the future
- Proactive leadership rather than reactive response
- Stretching for the ideal conditions rather than the settling for easily obtained everyday goals
- Optimism, creativity, group participation, management, top-down and bottom-up decision-making, relevancy, and results-based, measurable plans
- A timeline of three to five years
- Creating a written document which specifies the predetermined courses of action.

### **Strategic Planning Results in:**

- Common purpose
- Common sense of direction
- Priorities for change
- Protection against overextending
- Goal-orientation
- Longer-term effort.

## **Key Elements in a Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan):**

### **Key Element One: Goals**

- Set appropriate goals that will result in significant changes in the center, specifically as it relates to student learning.
- Goals must deal with student performance.
- The goals should be measurable.
- Internal and external assessments should be identified.
- The goals should evolve from the self-study process.
- The goals should reflect the entity's mission, vision, and beliefs.

### **Key Element Two: Activities**

- Clearly define major events that will occur as the goal is implemented.
- The sequence of activities should provide a logical implementation structure.

### **Key Element Three: Timelines**

- It is important to develop a realistic timeline for each goal and its associated activities.
- Timelines can be structured as appropriate for the goal such as by month, by quarter, or by semester (fall, spring, or summer).

### **Key Element Four: Responsibility**

- It is important to specifically identify (often by title or job responsibility as opposed to name) the individual or group responsible for goal implementation.
- Using title or job responsibility for identification assists continuance of the plan in the face of personnel changes.

### **Key Element Five: Resources**

- Identify resources (time, personnel, equipment, funds, etc.) necessary to implement the goals. It is important to be specific regarding the sources of the resources.

### **Key Element Six: Monitoring/Evaluation Structures**

- Identify who will monitor the progress of implementation; also identify how and when such monitoring will take place.
- Identify the assessment tool(s) to be used to monitor and specify the benchmarks expected along the way as the goal is implemented.

### **Suggested Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan) Format — SAMPLE**

**First, state the major area of needed improvement in full, including who, what, and why in the format. For example:**

#### **Area of Needed Improvement #1:**

The administration and faculty should develop the center's assessment process so that it includes gathering learning data from multiple sources, disaggregating the data, drawing conclusions, writing recommendations to address issues identified, and connecting them to the center's *Strategic Improvement Plan (Action Plan)* so that the analysis of learning data will drive the center's instructional program.

#### **Rationale:**

This major area of needed improvement is critical to the center because student learning is the most important aspect of the center's learning program. Analyzing student learning data should impact center planning, teacher evaluation, professional development activities, and resource allocation. Ongoing center improvement should be driven by the analysis of student learning data.

<b>Steps to Address Key Issue</b>	<b>Person(s) Responsible</b>	<b>Timeline for Completion</b>	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Methods to Assess, Monitor, and Report Progress</b>
Identify and gather multiple sources of learning data	Administration Faculty Appointed leader	Fall – this year	Time provided for this activity	Collected learning data; report to Leadership Team and Board
Disaggregate and analyze learning data	Administration Faculty Appointed leader	Fall – this year	Time provided for this activity	Update provided to Board
Complete written report of conclusions from analysis	Administration Faculty Appointed leader	Spring – next year	None	Written conclusions submitted to Leadership Team and Board
Prepare recommendations to respond to issues raised through the analysis of data	Administration Appointed leader	Spring – next year	None	Recommendations submitted to Leadership Team and Board
Connect recommendations to the schoolwide <i>Strategic Improvement Plan</i>	Administration	Summer – next year	None	Revised <i>Strategic Improvement Plan</i> presented to the Board for approval
Report findings to all stakeholder groups	Administration	Fall – next year	None	Written report provided to students, faculty, and community at large