Pennsylvania Association *of* Independent Schools

STYLE GUIDE FOR THE REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE
INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE VISITING COMMITTEE

The following list includes elements of the Report of the Visiting Committee:

- Cover Page that names the school, the head of school and the on-site dates of the visit
- Table of Contents
- Full-Scale Visiting Committee members
- Completed School Information Form from the PAIS office
- School Vision, Mission and Philosophy inserted by the Chair
- Introduction and Current Issues Facing the School
- Overview of Major Commendations and Recommendations
- Nine Sections with Commendations and Recommendations in response to each section of the report in the following order: Vision, Mission and Philosophy, Governance, Administration, Fiscal Management, External Affairs, Program, Personnel, Health and Safety, and Physical Plant. (Sections on School Affiliation and Strategic Planning are being piloted by four schools in 2022-23 to be fully implemented in 2023-24)
- Conclusion summarizing the visit and thanking the school for the care extended to the visiting committee.
- Standards Ratings completed by the entire visiting committee with either a" Yes" or "No" rating.

Writing the Report
The Chair of the Visiting Committee will provide a general overview for writing the Visiting Committee Report.

Questions to consider:
- When reviewing and editing the report pay special attention to the tone of the report.
- Does the language of the report reflect the Committee's observations and findings in an honest, constructive and supportive manner?
- Do the narratives support the commendations and recommendations?
- Are the commendations well balanced with recommendations?
- Are the recommendations clear and simply stated?
- Are the recommendations too prescriptive?
- Were you careful to avoid getting a community member's or faculty member's laundry list of recommendations incorporated in the report?
- Imagine reading this report five years from now; does it make sense?

Document Guidelines
Title Page: Title: Arial 24 Bold, centered
Head of School: Normal text: Times New Roman 12, Bold, centered

Header: Normal text: Times New Roman 12, Bold, centered
Footer: Times New Roman 10, Bold, Italics, left justified
Page Numbers: Times New Roman 10, Bold, right justified

Heading 1: Times New Roman 14, Bold, centered
Heading 2: Arial 13, Bold, centered
Subheadings: Normal Text: Times New Roman 12, Bold, left justified

All Margins: 1"

Committee Responses: Times New Roman 10, Regular, left justified

As a rule:
- Do not indent paragraphs
- No space between numbered items
- Insert one space between paragraphs
- Insert one space between heading and paragraph
- Insert a page break between end of last paragraph in a section and the next heading

Be consistent in:
- Use of capital letters; (Committee and School should be capitalized.)
- Numbering of recommendations and commendations;
    - Numbers may be used as references not showing a hierarchy of importance.
- Use of references made to department, staff and administrative titles;
- Report printing, format and pagination.

Avoid:
- Using personal names or a single position;
- Using the name of any commercially produced materials;
- Endorsing any program not mandated by the government;
- Editorializing and using lengthy descriptions, recommendations, commendations;
- Using a long list of recommendations and commendations; look to combine some in this case.

Adherence to these guidelines is greatly appreciated, but the most important guideline is that the Report is edited consistently and gives the appearance of being written in one voice.

Introduction and Current Issues Facing the School
Audience – School being evaluated, currently and for the future, and the Commission For Accreditation (CFA)
Purpose – to provide historical perspective, background information about the school and the current issues facing the school at the time of the on-site visit.

Length of narrative – 5-8 paragraphs
Describe the School as it currently operates within an historical perspective
Describe the extent to which the School:

- Functions effectively
- Demonstrates their commitment to the vision, mission and philosophy

Major Commendations and Recommendations
Audience – School being evaluated, currently and for the future, and the CFA
Purpose – a list of up to 4-5 items that indicate strong features of the school and 4-5 deficits or challenges for the School

Each major commendation and recommendation should be one sentence in length. There should be a tie back to the narrative in the introduction as well as in the specific section referenced in the major commendation and recommendation.

Overview of a Section
Audience – School being evaluated, currently and for the future, and the CFA
Purpose – to provide background information regarding each of the 10 specific sections of the report

Length of narrative – 2-4 paragraphs
Describe the area of focus as it currently operates using the self-study and observations from the on-site visit. This document serves as a historical marker for a school, so the first paragraph should include commentary on the school as it is at the time of the visit.
Describe the extent to which the School:

- Functions effectively in this focus area
- Addresses challenges in this focus area
- Needs enhancement or improvement in this focus area

Section Commendations
Audience – School being evaluated, currently and for the future, and the CFA
Purpose – a list of up to 4-5 items that indicate strong features of the focus area

- Avoid any specific references to individuals
- Begin each numbered point with a verb: see list of suggestions at the end of this document
- Use the lead-in clause (provided in template) with numbered points

"The Committee commends the School for…"

Make certain that each commendation phrase grammatically completes the phrase above and that parallel construction is used.

Section Recommendations
Audience – School being evaluated, currently and for the future, and the CFA
Purpose – a list of up to 4-5 prioritized items that address perceived deficits or challenges of the focus area

***Recommendations may come from the self-study, an interview with school personnel, board members, parents, students, etc. or from an observation during the visit. Committee members should inform the Chair about the origin of the recommendation in case follow-up is necessary.

Avoid any specific references to individuals
Use the lead-in clause (provided in template) with numbered points

"The Committee recommends the School…"

- Make certain that each recommendation phrase grammatically completes the phrase above and that parallel construction is used
- Begin each numbered point with a verb: see list of suggestions at the end of this document
- Use action verbs (create, design, etc.) and avoid overuse of equivocal verbs (explore, consider, continue etc.)

- Try to keep recommendation to one sentence per item
- State the outcome desired once the recommendation has been achieved
- Recommendations should not be prescriptive or define process but serve to identify the Committee's concerns

Conclusion
Audience – School being evaluated, currently and for the future, and the CFA
Purpose - summarize the visit in 2-4 paragraphs, and thank the hosting school for the care extended to the visiting committee

Rating of the Standards
Standards Ratings should be completed by a formal vote of the entire visiting committee with either a Yes or No rating. For any "no" standards rating the visiting committee should:

1. Write a brief explanation
2. Be certain the explanation also appears in the related section of the report
3. Present the explanation as a recommendation
4. Discuss any "no" Standards Rating with the HOS.
5. Be aware that a "no" rating could result in a Conditional or Provisional Accreditation recommendation by the CFA to the PAIS Board of Directors who will make the final decision about the School's Accreditation.
6. A Visiting Committee may score a Standard a Yes*, meaning that they believe the school is in compliance but that there are significant areas that the school should consider addressing to strengthen that compliance. The (*) must be addressed in a comment from the Visiting Committee within the Report.

Submitting the Report to PAIS after the Visit

After all members of the visiting committee have proofread their section as well as participated in the editing process as directed by the Chair, the Chair of the Visiting Committee will first send a PDF of the Report to the Head of School to be reviewed for *only factual errors*. The Chair will then submit the report to PAIS. PAIS will assign members of the CFA to act as "report readers" who will read the preliminary report and comment, based on this style guide. Typographical and grammatical errors that have been identified will be communicated to the chair of the visiting committee. This is completed prior to the chair's presentation of the report to the CFA, so that the discussion of the report centers on the report's content, commendations and recommendations. After the presentation, the chair will revise the report appropriately and submit it to the PAIS office.

Once the CFA recommendation is approved by the PAIS Board of Directors, PAIS will notify the school of their accreditation status. This communication includes a letter, a bound copy of the final report and a certificate for Accreditation. At the end of the academic year, PAIS will communicate with the Pennsylvania Department of Education as to the School's accreditation tenure.

Examples of words and phrases for recommendations

Actively seek	Develop a procedure to	Integrate
Address	Direct efforts to ensure	Intensify efforts
Address the need for	Eliminate	Investigate
Assess	Encourage	Maintain
Attempt to	Enhance	Make provisions for
Attend to issues of	Ensure	Move in the direction of
Avail itself	Establish	Prioritize
Balance	Evaluate	Proceed
Clarify	Examine	Provide
Complete	Examine the process of	Pursue
Conclude	Expand	Re-evaluate
Conduct	Explore	Recognize the value of

Consider	Extend	Remain attentive
Consider developing	Focus	Resolve
Consider the implications of	Formalize	Review
Consider the need for further	Give immediate consideration to	Review policy of
Consider the possibility of	Identify ways to	Revise
Continue	Implement	Seek
Continue to develop	Improve	Study the feasibility of
Continue to pursue	Increase	Study the process of
Continue to support	Initiate	Study ways to
Convene a committee	Initiate a plan for	Study ways to provide
Correct	Institute	Take steps to
Create	Insure	Undertake a study of

Other useful verbs to consider:

Analyze	Detect	Invent
Appraise	Determine	Judge
Argue	Develop	Justify
Assess	Devise	Measure
Categorize	Dissect	Modify
Classify	Draw	Organize
Combine	Editorialize	Plan
Compare	Employ	Predict

Compile	Estimate	Produce
Compose	Evaluate	Propose
Construct	Explain	Recognize
Contrast	Generalize	Relate
Create	Generate	Role play
Debate	Hypothesize	Solve
Decide	Identify	Summarize
Deduce	Illustrate	Survey
Demonstrate	Infer	Synthesize
Design	Interpret	Transform