

ACS WASC Guidelines for Schools Hosting a Virtual Self-Study Visit 2021-2022 School Year (California/Hawaii/Pacific Islands)

Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenging times, the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC), will be conducting virtual full self-study visits during the fall months (September – December, 2021); this may need to be extended. The expectations for all virtual visits are the following:

- Every care must be taken to ensure that the process and result will be as rigorous and thorough as an on-site visit.
- Based on the WASC research-based criteria, the virtual visit focuses on continuous school improvement and the progress related to high quality learning and well-being for all students.
- Video, audio and connectivity quality must be sufficient to allow for good communication — both recorded and live.

WASC staff members will be available to work closely with the schools and the visiting committee chair/members of these full visits. WASC will be providing guidelines for the school and chairs through personal communication, webinars and regularly scheduled “virtual office hours” to answer any questions. The visits will follow the expectations for an in-person visit; these include:

- Previsit work of the chair with the school, including establishing the virtual schedule
- Previsit work with the visiting committee members
- The visit processes such as:
 - ✓ daily meeting between the visiting committee chair and the principal/school leader
 - ✓ daily meeting between the visiting committee and the leadership team
 - ✓ meeting with the focus groups (all members)
 - ✓ meetings with parents, students, teachers, support staff, counselors, other staff members,
 - ✓ observing a stratified sample of classes (virtual and/or on-site)
 - ✓ dialogue with district or complex area leadership, if a comprehensive public school.

School Expectations for Full Visit

The school is expected to ensure the self-study and supporting evidence is available to the visiting committee at least six weeks prior to the visit. The school will be expected to share the impact of online learning for the students and other issues related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. After review of the school’s student/community profile and supporting documentation, the visiting committee chair may request additional information related to student wellness and safety standards due to the virtual visit, such as the school’s (district) Safety Plan.

In addition the school will be expected to ensure all stakeholders understand that the WASC self-study is occurring and ensures the visiting committee chair understands the parameters for contractual requirements as the schedule is established. The expectation is that all staff members serving on the various committees will participate in the meetings; this may mean key leadership and other committee members would meet at separate times. The school should arrange for a staff member to join any meeting with students and the chair will ensure there are two visiting committee members present.

Visiting Committee Size, Full Visit Schedule, Visiting Committee Report

The size of the team will follow the normal WASC guidelines but be adjusted as needed.

Enrollment 6-249:	3 visiting committee members
Enrollment 250-899	4 visiting committee members
Enrollment 900-1499	5 visiting committee members
Enrollment 1500- 2499	6 visiting committee members
Enrollment 2500 or more	7 visiting committee members

Initially, the school and chair will use the suggested in-person schedule as a reference but this will be adapted based on the context of the school. For example, some meetings may occur prior to the actual visit dates or potentially be combined. The required meetings and observations will still occur with the emphasis upon transparency. These include:

- Daily communication between the visiting committee chair and school principal/leader
- Daily meeting between the Leadership Team and the visiting committee;
- Meetings with Focus Groups/committees (some meetings may be split into two meetings in order to dialogue with all members);
- Classroom visits — stratified representative sample; and
- Separate meetings with students, parents, support staff, teachers, counselors, governing authority (e.g., district, complex area, corporate).

The visiting committee will share the report with the Leadership Team on the final day of the visit orally and only provide electronically the final list of schoolwide strengths and critical areas for follow-up (growth areas for continuous improvement). The complete report will be sent to the school within ten working days; the report should be no more than 30 pages. For CDE schools, the visiting committee chair and school leadership have the option of using a revised Visiting Committee Report format that is more succinct and includes aspects of the status worksheet. *(NOTE: See the Visiting Committee Chair Expectations with inserts related to virtual visits and the sample in-person schedule from the Focus on Learning manual.)*

Important Technology Requirements and Support

The school will need to ensure the following technology capabilities along with technology support:

- Reliable internet access to support online meetings (e.g., Zoom, Google Meetings, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Skype or similar);
- The *expectation* is that each participant in the meeting uses an individual station (laptop) so all voices can be heard; and
- Video recording devices and the wireless support necessary to stream live video of the school in action if it is in session during the virtual team evaluation visit or the ability to observe virtual classes in session.

(NOTE: The visiting committee chair/members will conduct a test of the technology with the school before the virtual evaluation visit.)

Suggested Videos Provided Prior to the Visit

The school is asked to provide the following suggested videos:

➤ **General introduction to the school and learning environment**

The purpose is to demonstrate how facilities, learning spaces and equipment are age appropriate, well-maintained and adequately support the school's purpose and sustain the well-being and learning for the students. This video should replicate the normal tour of a school and be accompanied by narration and a plan/map.

➤ **Health and Safety, Child Protection and Safeguarding**

All building and outdoor areas should be filmed; this includes additional sites. The following areas should be included:

- Science laboratories, including preparation rooms and safety equipment;
(NOTE: Please include where appropriate shower, eye wash stations, ventilation process in storage room, actual storage of acids and reactive chemicals.)
- Art/music/drama facilities, including practice rooms;
- Sports facilities – including playing surfaces, and changing areas;
- Emergency and security features; the perimeter fence, entrance and exit gates, location of security cameras, location of camera monitors/ screens and how these are monitored and used, electronic entry to buildings and rooms as appropriate; clear signage for emergency procedures, e.g., fire exits, lockdowns, earthquakes.
- Appropriate child protection and safeguarding features of all the facilities with regard to clear line ways in which the school meets the health and safety codes and regulations of local authorities;
- Social-emotional and career counseling rooms with regard to child protection and safeguarding
- Other areas based on school context.

➤ **Observations of Students engaged in Learning during Accreditation Visit**

As in any visit, please provide the master schedule of classes (virtual and/or on-site). Based on the school program and courses, the Visiting Committee chair and the school will establish a schedule for visiting committee members to observe live teaching and learning. The visiting committee chair in collaboration with the school will select a stratified random group of classes based on grade levels, subject areas, types of courses, student groups and other important issues.

Normally, all classes are visited over the 3-½ day visit; in small schools this may still be feasible. However, visiting chairs and the members will make decisions on the best number to ensure a quality stratified sample has been observed beyond the videos; these may be virtual or in-person. A suggested time frame has been 5-10 minutes per class but this may vary with the type of class and school with a total time of approximately 60-90 minutes of observation per member. The school and the visiting chair will work together on what video device or platform will be used and how it is positioned to permit observation of students engaged in the learning along with the teacher. Suggested approaches include the following:

- In-person classes can be observed by schools providing a staff member, who wears head phones or earbuds and uses an iPad, smartphone or Face Time to facilitate a class observation guided by the visiting committee member.
- If the classes are virtual, the schools can provide Zoom links for visiting committee members, if possible; also if no staff member is available even though instruction is in-person, a Zoom link can be provided.
- Videos of a stratified sample of classes can be used if no one is available to facilitate live streaming; this would include a range of different grade levels, curricular areas, specialist leaning areas and facilities.

Note: The scheduled stratified samples of class observations could occur prior to or after the visit.