

# **THE MEANING AND VALUE OF ACCREDITATION**

Although public education is within the jurisdiction of some federal agencies such as the Department of Education and its Office of Education, this country has no centralized, national control over educational institutions. Within recent years state and local governments have increased their levels of supervision over education, but, in general, schools continue to operate with considerable independence. Professional educators, however, have recognized and addressed the need to measure school programs against mutually held standards of excellence. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is one of six private, non-profit regional accrediting associations that offer programs and services which monitor school performance and school improvement efforts. The mission of the Commission on Public Secondary Schools, one of five Commissions within the Association, is to maximize student learning and the Standards articulate best practices about student learning and the support of learning.

## **THE MEANING OF ACCREDITATION**

Accreditation of public secondary schools by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges indicates that the educational institution has conducted a self-evaluation of all of its programs and hosted a visiting committee to evaluate the institution in terms of its own stated educational goals and the seven Standards for Accreditation of the Commission on Public Secondary Schools.

The Standards for Accreditation are a research-based set of practices and concepts that provide guidance to schools on all aspects of the education, academic, civic, and social, of the young people under their care. The Standards which are considered to be living documents are reviewed and revised, as necessary, every five years. The process of review includes surveys of all member schools, specific consideration of feedback provided by schools that have recently undergone an accreditation visit, an appraisal of recent, relevant educational literature, and in-depth discussions at the Commission level. As needed, third parties, including consultants, are contracted to conduct relevant research to inform the revision of the Standards. The Standards tend to be reflective of current trends in research on public education without espousing one particular mode of thought.

The awarding of accreditation signifies that the school has met Commission Standards at an acceptable level and is willing to both maintain those Standards and to improve its educational program by implementing the recommendations of the visiting committee and the Commission. Continued accreditation is dependent upon a school demonstrating ongoing, reflective progress to improve teaching and learning and the support of teaching and learning.

Membership in and accreditation by the NEASC is similar to membership in professional organizations such as the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association. In each case, a commitment toward continual self-evaluation, a pledge to self-improvement, and a desire to maintain the Standards for Accreditation are necessary.

## **THE VALUE OF ACCREDITATION THROUGH DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES**

### **Value to the Local Citizen and Taxpayer**

Accreditation of a local public school by the New England Association assures that tax money is supporting a school facility and programs that have been judged worthwhile by an outside team of evaluators, both in terms of the school's stated mission and expectations and in terms of the school's adherence to the seven Standards for Accreditation. Through the process of evaluation, the citizen is advised of the strengths,

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