

# SAIS Accreditation Sample Visit Report



## VISITING TEAM REPORT

### Sample Academy

0000 School Rd  
City, ST 00000, United States

#### NAME

*Head of School*

#### NAME

*School Title*  
*Accreditation Coordinator*

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#### NAME

*School Title*  
*Chair*

Chair's School  
0000 Academy Ave  
City, ST 00000, United States

**Month 00, 2021 - Month 00, 2021**

# A History of SAIS Accreditation

SAIS member schools are part of a remarkable history of quality assurance in education.

SAIS began its organizational life in 1903 as the "Mid-South Association of Independent Schools," providing training for teachers in private schools and some early public schools in the southeastern states. In 1953, another organization began as the Southern Association of Independent Schools, providing a forum for independent school administrators to work with public schools through SACS and to contribute to the larger interest in accreditation in the southeast. MAIS and SAIS merged in 1986 to form the present SAIS, with an emphasis on accreditations through SACS for independent schools and professional development for administrators, trustees, and teachers. Today, SAIS works to help both established and emerging schools approach these issues with creativity and innovation. Working at the state, regional, and national levels, SAIS serves and strengthens member schools through the promotion of the highest quality educational standards and ethical conduct.

The mission of SAIS is to provide leadership, accreditation services, and professional development resources that will strengthen member schools as they fulfill their missions. The focus of SAIS's interest when it began in 1953 was to develop and maintain relationships with the expanding organization of SACS in order to ensure significant input from independent schools into the exploding world of public school accreditation. The post-WWII years of baby booming, facility planning, teacher training, and legislative entitlement funding eclipsed the scope and role of private education in America close to the current level of service. Part of this history of negotiating standards in a predominantly public-school oriented world of education caused SAIS to embark on its own method of accreditation in the late '90s. The efforts resulted in the SAIS method of accreditation available to member schools.

SAIS has designed and implemented a significant program of accreditation to assist member schools as they develop and promote high quality education in this region. This method is based on a school's stated mission and its own unique approach to thorough and vigorous self-examination.

In today's world of accountability in schooling, accreditation serves as a critical component of a school's demonstrated effectiveness and ability to provide successful schooling for children. A school that is able to achieve accreditation demonstrates a commitment to a process that requires the school to meet a set of rigorous standards; to engage in a program of continuous school improvement; and to demonstrate quality assurance to its stakeholders through self-evaluation and peer-review. SAIS accreditation provides schools access to an integrated network of services and technical assistance that supports every school's ability to identify and meet its goals for improving student performance and the teaching and learning process.

SAIS accredited member schools are part of an international network of accredited schools that have demonstrated success in educating children. As such, SAIS accreditation is recognized throughout the world as a symbol of quality in education for students and teachers. To earn accreditation, schools must meet quality standards, be evaluated by an outside group of peer professionals, and implement a school plan focused on strategic improvement and student performance. Accreditation is voluntary and must be renewed each year.

# The Review

A team representing SAIS conducted an on-site visit to review this school's self-study and standards compliance. The team was comprised of team members whose diverse independent school backgrounds provided an array of expertise. The visiting team sought the answers to these four critical questions within the framework of the school's self-study. The following pages contain the findings.

In conducting the on-site reviews, the visiting team was responsible for:

1. Assessing the adequacy of the self-study process;
2. Identifying strengths of the school deserving commendation;
3. Developing recommendations that may help to strengthen the programs of the school;
4. Assessing compliance with the standards of SAIS;
5. Developing a written report of the findings.

To fulfill the team's responsibilities, team members:

1. Reviewed documentation provided by the school;
2. Conducted interviews with board members, parents, school personnel, students, and community members;
3. Applied the standards for accreditation;
4. Developed a draft of commendations and recommendations;
5. Contributed to the content and focus of the written report;
6. Provided input as to the determination of accreditation.

The primary focus of the self-study process is to demonstrate the capacity of a school to meet the requirements for accreditation. A typical self-study consists of:

1. Analysis and response to accreditation standards;
2. Identification and demonstration of a continuous process of improvement;
3. Implementation of methods that provide for quality assurance.

The study addresses four critical questions relative to each of the school's stated goals for improvement and mission fulfillment:

- **PROFILE:** Where is the school today? The PROFILE should include clear, comprehensive information reflecting current student performance data, stakeholder perspectives, community characteristics, and analysis of strengths and limitations in the areas of student learning and school performance.
- **VISION:** Where does the school want to go? The VISION is a clear, compelling purpose communicated through the school's vision and mission statements, beliefs, and core values.

- **PLAN:** What is the plan to get there? The PLAN should be based on an analysis of pertinent data, research of the best practices, and alignment with generally-accepted expectations for student learning at schools with similar missions.
- **RESULTS:** How will the school know when it has accomplished its plan? The RESULTS are documented evidence demonstrating successful implementation of strategies that resulted in accomplishment of the school's mission and student achievement gains related to the school's mission.

## SAIS Accreditation Policies

- **Accreditation Committee**

The SAIS Board of Trustees has established the SAIS Accreditation Committee to oversee the accreditation services offered by SAIS. The Accreditation Committee establishes and maintains review boards whose members review and act upon visiting team recommendations. The Board of Trustees reviews and officially approves the schools recommended for accreditation by the Accreditation Committee.

- **Accreditation Appeal Process**

If the visiting team recommendation to offer accreditation or re-accreditation is rejected, specific reasons will be given and the school may be given a timeframe and assistance to address deficiencies. The decision of a review board may be appealed in writing by the head of school, referencing specific area(s) in which the school was found deficient. A subsequent review board will review the original findings and the appeal materials. If the decision is upheld by the subsequent review board, the decision may be appealed in writing by the head of school to the SAIS Board of Trustees. The school's accreditation status will remain unchanged during an appeals process. The judgment of the SAIS Board of Trustees is final.

- **Interim Report Requirements**

Accredited schools must submit a two-year interim report to SAIS after the team visit. This report ensures continued compliance with standards/indicators and documents efforts made in addressing the visiting team's recommendations and the school's self-study goals.

- **Member in good standing:** Schools must remain a member in good standing, with all annual membership dues paid in full and abiding by policies and procedures.

- **Notification of substantive change / head of school change:** Accredited schools must notify SAIS in a timely manner of a substantive change using the form at <http://sais.org/accreditation/change/>. Changes may include: head of school change, other leadership changes, adding or contracting grade levels, merger, name change, mission change, major construction, crisis situation, litigation, school closure, other changes. In the event of a substantive change, SAIS may request additional information or conduct a visit to the school.

- **Terms of accreditation and re-accreditation:** Terms of accreditation are generally for five years commencing on July 1 and concluding on June 30. Schools must host a visiting team prior to the expiration of their term of accreditation and during the same semester of their previous accreditation if a re-accreditation visit and within three years of

becoming a candidate for accreditation if an initial accreditation. Any variance to an accreditation timeline must be approved by SAIS. A new self-study is required for each five-year period reflecting evidence of continuous improvement.

- **Non-compliance:** Stakeholders may file a non-compliance complaint against a school. Upon receipt and verification of a non-compliance report, the school will be given an opportunity to respond to the inquiry. The inquiry, response, and any subsequent written correspondence on the matter may be made available to the accreditation visiting team chair on the next accreditation visit. However, an immediate investigative visit to the school may be undertaken if the response by the school is unsatisfactory or an accumulation of complaints indicates that a school's response is inconsistent with a preponderance of evidence. As is frequently the case, if a school's practices are bordering on non-compliance, a discussion that is triggered by a non-compliance complaint is often a catalyst to remedy such practices. In the event that a school is not compliant, a series of actions will be undertaken with the school such as but not limited to: a request to remedy the non-compliance issue, placing the school on warned status or probation, and an ultimate action of dropping accreditation.

## Roster of Team Members

### Chair(s)

**Chair: Name**

*School Title*

Chair's School

0000 Academy Ave

City, ST 00000, United States

(000) 000-0000

email@school

### Team Members

**Name 1**

*School Title*

Team Members's School

0000 School Street

City, ST 00000, United States

(000) 000-0000

email@school



## Brief History

History of the school. History of the school.

## Leadership

Leadership leadership leadership. Leadership leadership leadership. Leadership leadership leadership. Leadership leadership leadership. Leadership leadership leadership. Leadership leadership leadership. Leadership leadership leadership. Leadership leadership leadership.

## Self Study

The School Improvement Committee (SIC) includes teachers, administrators, Board representatives, students and parents. During the 2020-2021 school year, this committee was charged with the responsibility of leading our on-going school improvement process by developing a three-year strategic plan consistent with our mission and essential to meeting the ever-changing needs of our students. While a framework for defining the school we want to be was created in 2018-2019, this school improvement plan provided further definition by prioritizing goals, identifying action steps, establishing timelines, and outlining processes for monitoring, documenting, and ensuring accountability at all levels. This plan provided leadership clear direction and created substantive opportunities to work collaboratively in the process of continuous improvement. The School Improvement Committee meets monthly during each school year to review progress and develop additional recommendations.

## Improvement

Our strategic vision process ultimately led us to three key areas of innovation for the next 3 years:

Goal 1: Balance preparation for college and preparation for life by incorporating real-world problem-solving, designing passion and purpose-driven classrooms, attending to wellness and pace of life, and building leadership skills.

Goal 2: Empower faculty to meet the needs of a full range of learners.

Goal 3: Adopt a more agile mindset, allowing the school to innovate more boldly, especially in the rapidly changing environment of the next two to three years.

*Your response to the school's stated improvement goals will occupy the bulk of your visit report.*

# Introduction

## Introduction and Overview of the Visit

*This is your introduction and overview of the visit - no need to report what the school has already said in their snapshot. Length is however long you want it to be and a page or two is sufficient. The chair usually writes this section.*

Apple Academy is a PK through 12 day school located in City, ST, served by four divisions: preschool, grades PK and K; lower school, grades 1 through 4; middle school, grades 5-8; and upper school, grades 9-12. Founded in 1956, and drawing from the city community, the school has emerged as the leading independent school in the region. By every metric, the school excels. Enrollment stands at 897, the largest ever. Test scores of students are strong. Faculty serve long tenures, and college placement results are enviable. Forty percent of the school's students identify as persons of color.

The SAIS visiting team arrived at Apple Academy full of anticipation, given the school's comprehensive planning process. Throughout our conversations, formal and informal, with trustees, students, faculty, alumni, and parents, we witnessed dedication and devotion to both the school and the plan. We noticed particular appreciation for the close-knit community at Apple Academy and the trust of all constituents in the care for all members of the community.

While we believe reframing the strategic plan merits consideration, we agree that the three goals comprising the plan embodied a thoughtful process, meaningful reflection, and a clear purpose in moving forward. Simultaneous initiatives focused on preparing its learners and faculty for the meaningful growth of the school. Each of these goals relates symbiotically to students and faculty. First, prepare our students for college and life beyond by incorporating more real-world problem-solving, designing more self-authored and purpose-driven learning experiences, attending more actively to student wellness, and building leadership skills in and beyond our classrooms. Next, empower Apple Academy faculty to meet the needs of a full range of learners. Lastly, adopt a more agile mindset, allowing Apple Academy to innovate more boldly, especially in the rapidly changing environment of the next two to three years.

As we heard faculty members serving on the goal committees were passionate about the work they are undertaking, we also understood that the elements of the goals were known widely and even underway in executing with action steps. As our visit progressed, the accreditation team felt the school's own sense of confidence that the community could handle the challenges set before them. The leadership team is focused and collaborative. This enthusiasm has spread throughout the constituencies we encountered, thanks to a thorough communication plan executed by the head of school and his chief administrators.

On the whole, the visit provided insight into what we expected to find: an active and committed school community, ready to embark on an effort that will surely move what is already a top-tier independent school farther along the path to sustained and consistent excellence.



*You are provided with six areas to use - if the school has less than six main goals, just leave the additional sections blank. The Portal will NOT print a blank section. You also have an "Additional Commendations and Recommendations" section you can use (but do not have to use).*

# Area 1

## Title

Prepare our students for college and life beyond

## Description

Since its founding in 1956, Apple Academy has provided each student an education that will enable its graduates to live a moral, happy, and productive life. Not only has this included the development of a strong intellectual foundation (acquisition of knowledge; development of skills, critical judgment, and intellectual curiosity; and an increased understanding), but has also specifically included character development (empathy, kindness, integrity, responsibility, courage, curiosity, engagement, authenticity, joy, balance, creativity, drive, resilience, generosity, and wisdom). With keen insight, the school and its stakeholders have recognized the importance of preparing students not only for college but also for life beyond. To do this, the school seeks to modify its programming and practices to do the following: incorporate real-world problem solving, design more self-authored and purpose-driven learning experiences, attend more actively to student wellness and build leadership skills in and beyond the Apple Academy campus.

## Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for the following:

- Designing more meaningful and purposeful assignments felt by the MS and US students and faculty, such as real-world connections and pace of homework adding to the healthy life-school balance;
- Developing the practices within the PS and LS that build independent learners with voice and choice, such as the Responsive Classroom practices (preschool and lower school) and the Passion Power Hour in 2nd grade;
- Offering the practices within the middle school for the purposeful addition of passion-focused electives that have increased student choice within their schedules;
- Developing and resourcing within the upper school an independent study program that integrates real-world problem solving and purpose-driven learning experiences;
- Identifying multiple areas of wellness not limited to but including substance abuse, sexual misconduct, and diversity and inclusion;

- Revisiting the development of the administrative wellness committee to be a more centralized team along with a Parents Association liaison;

## Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider the following:

- Implementing professional development related to the transition to longer classes and focusing on the best practices in neuroscience for learners and project-based learning as support for the new MS/US schedule and pacing of the curricula;
- Researching possible schedule modifications within the LS schedule to best support independent learning with increased student voice and choice;
- Researching and developing furthering the expansion of the independent study and capstone programs. Thought should be given as to whether these should become a graduation requirement;
- Dividing objectives of goal 1 into separate goals (real-world problem solving, learning experiences, student wellness, leadership skills) to not lose sight of the richness in each objective and for greater clarity.

## Area 2

### Title

Empower Apple Academy faculty to meet the needs of a full range of learners

### Description

Apple Academy has traditionally challenged its "most capable students through providing advanced courses." While this is effective curricula for most students, they recognize that not all students learn in the same ways. They see the need to help teachers develop the tools to differentiate their instruction for all learners. Apple Academy is collecting information that the "number of students in need of learning support services has increased." While they employ two full-time learning specialists, there is a need to add additional support and expand their faculty professional development opportunities. The school understands that meeting the needs of all students is about working with students who are challenged by learning and those that want to be challenged more. Finally, meeting the needs of all students means that all students need to see themselves mirrored in the curriculum. Therefore, the school is challenging itself to build on the progress it has already made in areas of diversity, equity, and engagement.

### Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for the following:

- Listening to community feedback and adding additional learning support specialists, clarifying the learning support program, and articulating the process for how to seek support;
- Embracing school-wide faculty professional development in identified areas of need. For example, taking on Understanding by Design as a framework for lesson planning was a courageous move that has generated productive outcomes;
- Being receptive to new ways of scheduling the school day so that students have more opportunities to explore learning experiences beyond the required curriculum, as well as reflect on their learning;
- Taking on the question of whether the advanced placement program is the ideal vehicle for creating meaningful, relevant, and student-centered learning experiences that challenge them. Creating the Beyond AP Task Force is a first and bold step;
- Supporting faculty as they look to create student-centered, real-world, and problem-based learning experiences. For example, the support for the design and development of Passion Power Hour in second grade and the Independent Study Program in the upper school. These opportunities expand opportunities for challenge and choice;
- Recognizing the importance of supporting efforts to engage with the complex issues around diversity, equity, and engagement. This commitment is illustrated through the board's diversity, equity, and engagement committee, the inclusion of a DEE director on the school's leadership team, and the investment in nine faculty DEE coordinator positions;
- Investing in a DEE curricular audit to study ways to include diverse voices and perspectives into the school's curricula.

## Recommendations

The visiting team recommends that the school consider:

- Evaluating its leadership structure, at the senior or divisional level, to give learning support educators a “seat at the table” so their voices and those of the students they serve are part of the system-wide conversation;

- Rethinking its approach to learning support and while adding staff is important, building a holistic, comprehensive program to more effectively meet the needs of students with learning differences is essential. Within goal 2, the school might consider developing an action plan that supports the design of the program it needs, part of which is staffing;
- Formulating a professional learning plan to support its philosophy that every student is a unique learner;
- Supporting the new director of DEE to complete the design and implementation of the DEE strategic plan;
- Shaping its DEE strategic plan to pay close attention to evaluating data from the curricular audit and implementing a process for encouraging the integration of diverse voices and perspectives into curricula throughout the school;
- Creating a separate goal devoted to its future DEE initiatives.

## Area 3

### Title

Adopt a more agile mindset allowing the school to innovate more boldly

### Description

Apple Academy already recognized the need to adopt a more agile institutional mindset, allowing faculty, staff, and students to innovate more boldly and learn more quickly from success and failure, but the pandemic of 2020 served as an additional catalyst to accelerate the school's work to grow, innovate, and be more agile in a rapidly changing world. The goal and vision already rest upon a foundation of an established school that successfully produces students who are moral, happy, and productive global citizens and have been inspired and challenged by a faculty who actively strives to be productive, innovative, and compassionate life changers. Apple Academy, as evidenced in every division, has already planted the seeds to grow even more boldly in this regard from the implementation of project-based as well as inquiry-based methodologies in the lower school to the development of real-world, problem-based learning experiences in the middle and upper schools. There is a clear vision to move these innovations into the greater curricular experience as demonstrated by changes to the daily schedule, the plan to redesign certain science courses into completely project-based experiences, the move toward a competency-based approach to learning in the middle school, and the desire to develop a common, school-wide philosophy of learning. The school demonstrates boldness as well by not only thinking about how to innovate pedagogically but also incorporating innovative changes from the lens of diversity, equity, and engagement. The faculty knows that the school values this endeavor to become more agile innovators because they have the support and resources in the form of grants and opportunities for professional development.

### Commendations

The visiting team commends the school for the following:

- Demonstrating agility and innovative foresight when responding to the disruptive changes caused by the pandemic and for having the desire and vision to continue to cultivate these mindsets by creating divisional innovation teams and developing a common philosophy of learning;
- Demonstrating an agile and innovative mindset when it comes to rethinking the daily schedule in each division and how those schedules could serve the school's vision for innovating teaching and learning practices;
- Unwavering support for faculty who desire to grow, innovate, and take risks by celebrating their efforts, providing grant funds, and making professional development opportunities clearly available for those seeking resources and ideas;
- Creating and mapping a common set of transfer goals for each academic discipline;
- Moving towards competency-based learning and its intentional efforts to provide more student choice and to rethink scheduling and assessment practices within a CBE framework;
- Reforming grading practices in the World Language department and for investigating and adopting a proficiency-based approach to student assessment.

## Recommendations

The visiting team recommends the school consider the following:

- Unpacking and establishing a common definition and understanding of innovation and agility, much like the school has done with its definition of a graduate;
- Encouraging faculty who need more training or who could benefit from more research to investigate best practices related to lesson planning and instructional design specifically in regard to changes in the length of class periods;
- Considering the expansion of the school's transfer goals beyond academic competencies and developing transfer goals related to mindsets and work habits. In the context of middle school, this could help with measuring and tracking the development of competencies;

- Reviewing and researching best practices related to grading and assessment to build off of the work with Understanding by Design. This could complement the work already being done in the World Language department and in the middle school with its shift towards competency-based learning.

# Additional Commendations and Recommendations

## Additional Commendations

The team commends the school for the following:

- Examining the daily schedules and redesigning them to better meet the needs of faculty and students;
- Orchestrating steady growth over the past ten years such that the 2020-2021 enrollment was the highest in the school's history;
- Building and supporting a strong faculty community that believes in the mission of the school, trusts the administration, and feels supported in their professional learning;
- Designing a comprehensive strategic visioning process from 2019 until today that included all voices;
- Engaging in strong, consistent, and transparent communication, which has been key in developing trust and respect from the parent community.

## Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

### Summary

Apple Academy used the challenges presented by the pandemic to advance long considered changes in the daily schedule, amount of homework, and use of technology in the delivery of education, all of which have been universally embraced by the community. The strategic plan now charts a course for the school to deepen its commitment to the student experience and to prepare for college and life. We hope our recommendations help the school refine its thinking on the plan so that the impact in the years to come will have maximum benefit for everyone associated with Apple Academy.

### Conclusion

The team expresses appreciation for the great effort expended by the school to take the re-accreditation process seriously, even in the face of significant distractions they experienced throughout this most trying year. The school responded to our every request for information and people to interview.

## **Standards Compliance**

The school is in compliance with all standards of the SAIS accreditation process as verified by documentation, observations, and interviews.

## **Self-Study Quality**

The self-study conducted by the school meets the standard of quality and thoroughness required by the SAIS accreditation process and answers the four critical questions as outlined in the Guidebook.

## **Recommendation**

The school is unanimously recommended for accreditation.