



Independent Schools  
Association of the Southwest

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# SELF STUDY II

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By promoting the highest standards of educational excellence and a spirit of continuous growth, ISAS challenges and inspires our member schools as they prepare students for purposeful and constructive lives.

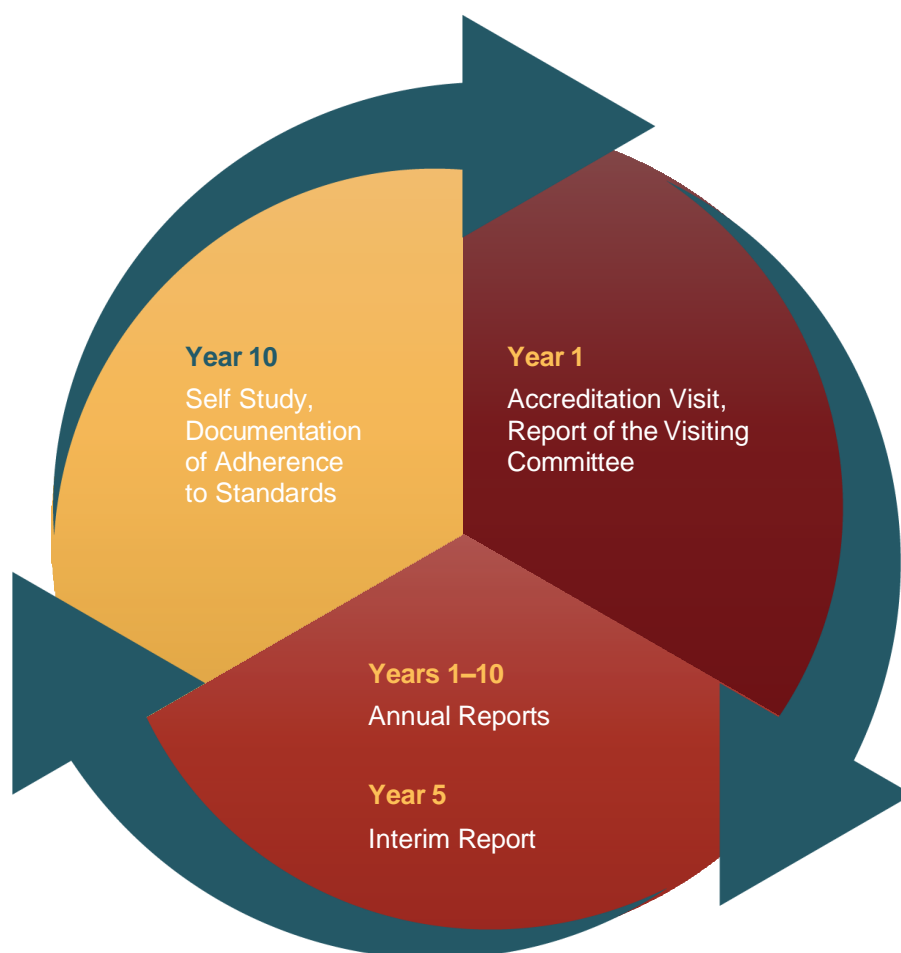
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## OVERVIEW

The ISAS accreditation process challenges and inspires member schools to give students the best possible educational experiences. Through a collaborative, thoughtful, and professionally invigorating peer-driven process, ISAS schools commit to the highest professional and ethical standards while fulfilling the twofold purpose of accreditation: accountability and improvement.

ISAS accreditation cycles take place over ten years and include five elements:



1. During the **Accreditation Visit**, the Visiting Committee reviews and validates the school's Self Study through observation, interviews, and review of documentation.
2. The **Report of the Visiting Committee** follows the Accreditation Visit and provides the school with important feedback.
3. The **Interim Report** documents the school's response to the Summary Commendations and Recommendations in the Report of the Visiting Committee.
4. The **Self Study Report** and **Documentation of Adherence to Standards (DAS)** are the results of a school's year-long commitment to self-assessment and improvement. The Self Study Report is a growth-oriented, analytical document that charts the school's mission-aligned strengths, challenges, and opportunities. By involving a broad cross-section of the school's constituents, the

## OVERVIEW, *continued*

Self Study process leads the entire community to clearer knowledge of what constitutes maximum success in fulfilling its mission. The DAS demonstrates a school's compliance with the Standards for Membership. It is an objective report that includes narrative responses and explanations; school data and statistics; and copies of documentation, school policies, handbooks, and publications.

5. Submitted at the beginning of every school year, the **Annual Report** provides a snapshot of school data, major changes, improvement initiatives, and future planning.

## ELIGIBILITY

Self Study II is available only to schools applying for reaccreditation. To be considered the Head of School should submit a one-page request via email to ISAS staff by June 1 of the year preceding Self Study. The request will address the following questions:

- How does Self Study II fit with the aspirations of the School for the Self Study process? This answer should evidence a detailed understanding of the process.
- How would the Steering Committee maintain a collaborative, community-wide approach to the process?

In addition to the request's clarity and cogency, the Steering Committee will consider (1) the duration of the Head of School's tenure, recommending though not requiring that the Head of School should have served at least three years in her/his present capacity, as well as (2) the School's history of compliance with Association Standards.

Schools will be notified of their acceptance by mid-June.

## TIMELINE

### Sample for an October Accreditation Visit

<b>Spring</b>	Appoint Self Study Coordinator Appoint Documentation of Adherence to Standards (DAS) Coordinator ISAS Self Study Orientation	Head of School (HOS) HOS Self Study Coordinator
<b>Summer</b>	Select Steering Committee Plan school-specific timeline, due dates and opening, school-wide engagement activity Determine optional survey questions Decide survey timing	HOS and Self Study Coordinator Steering Committee Steering Committee Steering Committee
<b>Opening Meeting</b>	Present Self Study process overview and describe opening, school-wide engagement activity	Self Study Coordinator
<b>September</b>	Distribute activity worksheet and directions Conduct school-wide engagement activity Coordinate surveys with ISAS	Self Study Coordinator Steering Committee Self Study Coordinator
<b>October</b>	Administer Parent and Faculty Surveys Categorize and analyze quantitative and qualitative data for themes Communicate DAS responsibilities Coordinate with Board of Trustees on DAS Governance responses timeline	Self Study Coordinator / ISAS Steering Committee DAS Coordinator HOS
<b>Late Nov/ Early Dec</b>	Report to community on themes Equitable selection of 3-5 themes for Focus Areas	Steering Committee HOS and Steering Committee
<b>January</b>	Communicate themes and Focus Areas to ISAS Assemble Research Groups, one per Focus Area Appoint Visit Coordinator Begin visit planning (cf. ISAS Guidelines for Host School) Begin work on Focus Area Reports	Self Study Coordinator HOS and Steering Committee HOS Visit Coordinator Research Groups
<b>March / April</b>	Present draft Focus Area Reports Report Editing DAS submissions ISAS Accreditation Visit Orientation	Research Groups and Steering Committee Steering Committee DAS Coordinator and responsible parties Visit Coordinator
<b>May</b>	Present Focus Area Reports to school community Report editing	Steering Committee Steering Committee
<b>Summer</b>	Assembly, review, editing of Self Study Continue compilation of DAS Accreditation Visit Planning	Steering Committee DAS Coordinator Steering Committee and Visit Coordinator
<b>August</b>	Final data compiled for DAS Self Study Report printed and bound	DAS Coordinator Self Study Coordinator
<b>September</b>	Report to the Visiting Committee	Self Study Coordinator

## METHOD

The Self Study requires a community-wide commitment from all stakeholders: personnel, students, trustees, parents, alumni/ae, and others who are actively involved in the life of the school. Self Study II consists of four stages in which schools engage constituencies, identify themes, conduct research, and propose courses of action.

### 1. Organize to Energize

The Head of School identifies a Self Study Coordinator who is mission-exemplary, detail-oriented, enthusiastic, and eager to share her/his enthusiasm in productive ways. Next, a Steering Committee is formed, drawing from the school's diverse stakeholders. Since the Self Study process is growth-oriented and open-minded, Steering Committee members should exemplify these mindsets too. The Steering Committee plans a school-specific timeline and an opening, school-wide engagement activity.

### 2. Engage and Analyze

Using a variety of activities and techniques, the Steering Committee gathers substantial qualitative and quantitative data from the school's constituents. These ongoing inquiries inform both aspirational and generative modes of thinking. At the same time, schools may leverage these activities to strengthen the bonds within their communities, promoting dialogue and understanding between different constituencies.

Qualitative and quantitative inquiry begin with large-scale tools which include:

#### **SWOT Activity (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)**

Early in the process, schools conduct a SWOT analysis with mixed groups of administrators, faculty, and staff, who share stories and thoughts from their involvement in the school (Cf. Toolkit 1).

#### **Constituent Surveys**

ISAS requires three surveys:

- Parents (required in ISAS format via Survey Monkey)
- Faculty (required in ISAS format via Survey Monkey)
- Trustee annual self-evaluation (available in ISAS format via Survey Monkey)

Additionally, in the early stages of large-scale data collection, schools may benefit from surveys of students, alumni/ae, and other constituent groups.

Because feedback from the constituent surveys is valuable to the work of many Self Study Committees, it is recommended that surveys be conducted as early as possible in the year of Self Study. Consistent communication in advance about the importance of the feedback provided by these surveys is key to increasing the level and quality of participation.

- Survey questions are available on the ISAS website ([www.isasw.org](http://www.isasw.org)) under Accreditation Services > Accreditation Resources.
- A school may submit up to 10 school-specific questions to each survey. Core survey questions and the format of the surveys cannot be changed.
- After the questions have been added, the school representative is given a link to each survey, and the surveys are reviewed and approved by the school.
- The school approves the surveys, schedules the dates the surveys will be open (usually 17 days, beginning on a Friday), and publicizes the links and the dates to the appropriate constituents.

## METHOD, *continued*

- The communication publicizing the surveys should include the school's mission statement.
- ISAS opens and closes the surveys on the dates requested and sends the school representative a link to survey results after the surveys are closed.
- The fee for administration of the Self Study surveys is \$250 plus \$1 per completed survey, invoiced after the surveys are closed.

The Steering Committee collects all data from the SWOT activity and surveys. Data is categorized into five Domains of Inquiry.

Domains of Inquiry	Description
<b>Organization and Governance</b>	Mission; Equity & Justice; Board/Governing Body
<b>Program</b>	Learning Environment; Program Development, Review, Support, Requirements; Technology; Homestay/Residential Life; E-Learning and/ or Distance Programs
<b>Administration, Faculty, Staff</b>	Supervision and Evaluation; Professional Growth and Development; Administrative Structure; Procedural Fairness
<b>Ethical Conduct and Disclosure</b>	Full disclosure in print/online materials of the School's mission, policies, programs, and practices; Records Management
<b>Financial and Facilities Management</b>	Procedures; Controls; Personnel Policies; Summer Programs; Physical Plant/Facilities; Safety/Security

The Steering Committee analyzes the data for emergent themes. Themes are repeated words, phrases, or ideas that express strengths, challenges, and opportunities within the community. The Steering Committee discusses these themes with respect to their own professional experiences and expertise. As themes crystallize, it is important to revisit the data to ensure that all themes have sufficient support. Equally important, the Steering Committee asks *What are we missing?* or *What hasn't emerged from the data that we expected?* The Steering Committee creates a comprehensive list of clear and specific themes, minimizing overlap and combining where appropriate.

Next, the Steering Committee determines an equitable way to prioritize 3-5 themes into Focus Areas for further study and development (Cf. Toolkit 2). Ideally, the Steering Committee shares the themes with all school personnel before the selection process or includes them in the selection process itself.

Afterward, the school sends a list of every theme generated and the 3-5 Focus Areas to ISAS so that an appropriate Visiting Committee can be assembled. Committees include a Chair, Assistant Chair, ISAS staff member, and 2-3 knowledgeable representatives from member schools per Focus Area. Even if financial management is not identified as a Focus Area, a business officer will be assigned to the Visiting Committee.

## **METHOD, *continued***

### **3. Research**

Following the selection of 3-5 Focus Areas, the Steering Committee creates one Research Group per Focus Area. Additional administrators, faculty, and members of the community, such as parents, students, and alumni/ae, may be added to the Research Groups to broaden knowledge and perspectives, share the workload, and remain inclusive.

The purpose of the Research Group is to explore deeply and refine a Focus Area while defining pathways forward. Research Groups utilize qualitative tools, such as interviews, focus groups, and constituent shadow days (Cf. Toolkit 3). These additional measures build each group's understanding of practices, behaviors, and lived experiences. They also review relevant literature and conduct due diligence both within education and, if applicable, in other industries. Ultimately, each Research Group produces a Focus Area Report that addresses four questions:

- (a) Where are we?
- (b) Where do we want to be?
- (c) How might we get there?
- (d) How will we measure the success of our efforts?

### **4. Ponder and Publish**

Toward the end of the process, Research Groups workshop their Focus Area Reports with the Steering Committee and each other. Then, the Reports are presented to the school community, including the Board of Trustees. After taking into consideration feedback from the community and making any necessary revisions, the Steering Committee finalizes the Self Study II Report.

The Self Study II Report includes:

- (a) An introduction written by the Steering Committee which lists the names and titles of its members and provides a brief history of the School; describes the methods for data collection; every theme generated; and the equitable selection of 3-5 Focus Areas.
- (b) All Focus Area Reports from Research Groups, including the names and titles of their members.
- (c) A conclusion written by the Steering Committee that reflects on the process and the major findings of the Focus Area Reports.

After careful review and one month prior to the Accreditation Visit, the final draft of the Self Study II Report should be mailed in hard copy to members of the Visiting Committee and ISAS staff.