

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.**

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**COMMISSION ON TECHNICAL AND CAREER INSTITUTIONS**

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**LETTER TO DECENNIAL VISITING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Dear Visiting Committee Member:

May I express the thanks of the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions for your willingness to accept the assignment as a member of a visiting committee. Perhaps a few comments will help clarify the role of the individual visiting committee member in the Commission's assessment of the school's program.

Prior to your arrival, the host school will have spent considerable time in a comprehensive self-appraisal of all its vocational, academic, and extracurricular programs. As representatives of the Association, the visiting committee will spend three and one-half days at the school reviewing the findings of the self-study, identifying programs which are commendable, and indicating areas which need improvement.

The visiting committee report and other supportive documents are reviewed by the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions as a basis for recommending initial or voting continued accreditation with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Clearly, the report of the visiting committee is vital in Commission deliberations.

In the evaluation of the school, the Commission urges you to assess the degree to which the school meets the needs of students enrolled as reflected in their School and Community Relations report and their statement of the School Philosophy and Goals. As a visiting committee member, we trust you will be neither a relentless critic nor an innocuous observer. Neither posture will be of service to your hosts.

Because you will see much of the procedures and group dynamics of the school, it is important to keep all of your observations confidential. Be professional, constructive, and objective in your relationship with the school's staff.

Remember that we are not in the business of evaluating individual instructors or administrators; we are examining and setting forth in the clearest possible terms how well the institution implements its stated philosophy and its vocational programs.

Committee findings should be delivered to the staff by the chair during the oral report, not by individual committee members.

## **BEFORE THE VISIT**

- I. Review the material you received in this packet and that sent by the host director. This information will help you learn about the community and the school and its philosophy. You will find out how this school is unique.
- II. Review the Commission's **Standards of Membership**, which are included in this packet.

## **DURING THE VISIT**

### **I. Classroom Visits**

Teachers recognize the need for classroom and shop visits during the evaluation, but there are points to remember.

- A. Be as unobtrusive as possible. Do not take notes or make unsolicited comments.
- B. If you have questions or desire more information, spend a few minutes with the teacher at the close of class.
- C. Save your comments on likes and dislikes for team subcommittee meetings.

### **II. Conferences with Instructors and Students**

Such sessions are an integral part of the evaluation process.

- A. If possible, arrange the sessions after school.
- B. Do not conduct an inquisition, rather strive for a relaxed, informal meeting to clarify issues.
- C. Try to arrange a circular grouping with interspersed committee members and host school representatives.
- D. Avoid saying, "In my school ..."; you are evaluating another school, not your place of employment.
- E. Get the local representative to talk about their individual and collective concerns.
- F. Do not change self-evaluation ratings during the conference.
- G. Remain friendly and retain a positive outlook.

### **III. Subcommittee Work**

You will probably serve on at least two subcommittees of the visiting committee to examine in-depth some aspects of the self-study. These responsibilities will require you to budget your time carefully in order to complete your assignments successfully. If you

serve as chair of a subcommittee, you will present the subcommittee findings to the full visiting committee.

- A. In preparation for your subcommittee report, review carefully the self-evaluation report in your areas with emphasis on the recommendations.
- B. Commend those programs and procedures which deserve commendation. Do not praise what should be routinely offered.
- C. Do not rubber stamp school recommendations unless you believe they will improve the quality of the educational program.
- D. Time will not permit you to explore all alternative solutions to a problem. State what needs to be done leaving the method of resolution a local option.
- E. Be sure that each statement is grammatically correct.
- F. Avoid tactless or reactionary recommendations which might embarrass the committee, school officials or the New England Association.
- G. Do not identify individual teachers by name or position.
- H. Write statements clearly and concisely.
- I. Since the report will probably be released to the public and will receive extensive visibility, educational jargon makes the report difficult to understand.

#### IV. Committee as a Whole

Subcommittees have directed attention to the specific concerns of various segments of the school. Now in the full committee you will consider other subcommittee recommendations in light of the needs of the total school. You may hear recommendations that have validity in an individual department but have low priority in terms of the needs of the entire school. Inordinate requests in one area may take funds which could be used more advantageously in another. You have the obligation to question these recommendations in light of the total needs of the school.

Remember that "more" is not always the answer. The resolution of many school problems may lie in alternatives other than a larger staff, more books, more equipment, more classrooms and the like.

Sometimes it is appropriate to be a devil's advocate as you listen to recommendations. Statements must be sound, educationally defensible and economically feasible. Remember that all subcommittee reports must be approved by the full committee before they appear in the written report.

## **AFTER THE VISIT**

When you leave the school, please respect the confidentiality of your findings. You became privy to the workings of the school by virtue of your assignment as a visiting committee member. Do not divulge your observations or committee judgments following the visit.

Do not become concerned or anxious about commendations, recommendations or evaluations. School officials will get the opportunity to correct inaccuracies which appear in the visiting committee report.

We are sure that the task of a visiting committee member must seem enormous to you and it is. It is difficult for any professional to visit a school, become involved enough to capture its essence, yet remain apart enough to make objective, pertinent recommendations to improve its quality.

That is the ultimate goal of an evaluation--school improvement. Your recommendations may be consonant with the staff and administration's or they may not; but, if you sincerely believe that your recommendation, if implemented, will improve the school, you have done your job well.

We wish you the best in your assignment and thank you for the time and energy you will devote to the task.

Sincerely,

Paul Bento  
Director of the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions

Enclosures