



Consultant's Manual

2011-2012 EDITION

For Lutheran Elementary
and High Schools
Using the NLSA Standards Based or
Ongoing Improvement Process



National Lutheran School Accreditation

Mission Statement

National Lutheran School Accreditation encourages, assists, and recognizes schools that provide quality Christian education and engage in continuous improvement.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF A CONSULTANT

You have been selected to provide assistance to a school going through the process of National Lutheran School Accreditation. As the school's assigned consultant, you play a critical role in its accreditation process. Your primary task is to help the school improve. To accomplish that task, you are to help the applicant school successfully complete its self-study process and prepare for a visit of a team of outside educators representing NLSA. This helping process involves a variety of skills. From the time of application, the consultant must inform, assist, direct, encourage, and oversee the applicant school.

The NLSA Director, in consultation with the District Education Executive, has appointed you to this important task. You have been selected on the basis of your previous NLSA experience, communication skills, and leadership ability. Being selected as a consultant is a responsibility that comes with great honor and holds great responsibilities.

Your mission as a consultant is to inform, encourage and assist school leadership so the accreditation process will be successful. Your primary role is that of an advocate. You speak for NLSA to make sure that the school, with good integrity, completes the appropriate process. Your role is also to advocate the school's readiness for a site visit and accreditation to the team captain when that time comes. Thus it is important that you become well acquainted with the school personnel so that you might communicate effectively with them and communicate accurately on their behalf.

Perhaps your greatest concern for their process is "acceptability." As the school steering committee and subcommittees prepare their reports, they typically ask, "Is this acceptable?" As you review materials prepared by the school, look through the eyes of the visiting team, who is the primary audience for the self-study report. You will advise the school whether or not what they have planned, what they are doing, and what they have accomplished is and will be acceptable to those visiting team members, so that they can recommend that the school be accredited by NLSA. **A school should not be visited if success is not expected.** Thus, it is vital that the consultant alert the school to potential problems and ensure that the school will be ready for not only consideration, but especially successful completion of the accreditation process. It is far better for the school to slow down the process or stop the process than to put all the effort, resources, and emotions into the process only to result in failure. If the school is not accredited, the consultant has not accomplished his or her job effectively.

NLSA has its most dynamic effect on schools that use the process to affect changes that result in school improvement. The process does not end with the team visit and awarding of the certificate. Plans that result from an NLSA process become the blueprint for changes in the school that help make it become a School of Choice in its community. An effective NLSA consultant helps the school understand and accept the challenges associated with an ongoing process.

I commend you for sharing your skills and experience with a school seeking accreditation through NLSA. Ultimately you are making an impact for eternity in your service to the school. May God bless you as you complete this important ministry of helping a school succeed through the National Lutheran School Accreditation process.

Terry Schmidt, Director
National Lutheran School Accreditation

NLSA MISSION, PURPOSE AND VALUES

The Consultant and NLSA

Any organization that excels is guided by an articulated mission statement that clearly defines the purpose for its existence. Organizational leaders have the responsibility of articulating the mission so that every stakeholder understands his or her individual responsibilities in regard to accomplishment of the stated mission. When the mission, purpose and values are strategically aligned with the actions of each stakeholder, the organization is assured of implementing and living its mission.

A consultant is a critical stakeholder in the NLSA process. The consultant's roles and responsibilities are directly aligned with the first three purposes of our organization. Consultants are committed to helping their assigned school improve. They help the school conduct a thorough and objective self-study process based on the school's unique purpose and national standards. They assure that the school's information is accurate and truthful in preparation for the team visit. Within their role of assuring the success of the assigned school with its self-study process, the consultant has an essential responsibility within our organization. The success of our organization is directly aligned with the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of every NLSA consultant. Therefore it is critical that the consultant become familiar with the mission, purpose, and values of NLSA and internalize them within their work with schools.

NLSA Mission

NLSA encourages and recognizes schools that provide quality Christian education and engage in continuous improvement.

NLSA Purpose

1. Help Lutheran schools improve.
2. Help Lutheran schools evaluate themselves based upon their unique purpose and on national standards.
3. Assure a standard of quality for accredited Lutheran schools.
4. Provide appropriate recognition to those schools successfully completing the process.

NLSA Core Values

1. Christian culture in every Lutheran school.
2. Educational excellence.
3. Innovation that results in improved student learning.
4. Ongoing improvement.

The Role of the Consultant

Mission:

Inform, encourage and assist school leaders so the accreditation process will be successful.

Advocacy:

Serves as the NLSA representative to the school. Represents the school to the team captain and district accreditation officials.

Focus:

Process: Assist the school so that it may successfully complete its self-study process.

Key Concern:

Acceptability: Determine if the school's materials and documentation will be acceptable to the visiting team and fulfills requirements for accredited schools.

The Consultant's Job Description:

A. Qualifications:

Unless the district requests an exception, the NLSA Director will appoint as consultant only a person who:

1. Has received NLSA consultant training and is recognized as a trained NLSA consultant.
2. Is currently or has retired recently from serving as a teacher or administrator in a Lutheran (LCMS) school (childcare, early childhood, elementary, middle, and/or secondary).
3. Has successfully led a Lutheran school through an NLSA process.
4. Is committed to the success of the assigned school.

B. Selection:

1. The school may request a specific consultant, but the consultant is recommended by the district education executive on the school's NLSA application form. On the basis of that recommendation, the consultant is appointed by the NLSA Director when the school's application is processed by the NLSA office.
2. It is expected that the consultant should have experience at the same level of school (early childhood, elementary, secondary) as the school to be consulted.
3. The prospective consultant is contacted by the district and/or the school administrator before appointment to determine the consultant's willingness to serve that school. A copy of the letter informing the applying school of their appointed consultant is sent to the consultant.
4. As soon as it is notified of the status of its consultant, the school sends a copy of its last cumulative annual report form to the consultant.

C. Responsibilities:

1. The role of the consultant is to assure the success of the school in its NLSA self-study process.
2. Telephone the school administrator immediately upon being informed of appointment as consultant, to become acquainted and to offer assistance.
3. Telephone the school at least once every two months during the school's self-study process.
4. Visit the school at least once, preferably twice, at the school's expense, during the first four months of the self-study process. During the visit the consultant should:
 - a. Meet with the school administrator.
 - b. Meet with the faculty and the pastor.
 - c. Meet with the NLSA Steering Committee.
 - d. Observe the school in action for several hours.
5. Review the tentative timeline for the process, with deadline dates, working backward from the tentative date of the site visit listed on the application form.

6. Review and react to all preliminary versions of the self-study document. Each document should be sent to the consultant as soon as a draft becomes available.
7. Answer specific questions, make suggestions and encourage the school's progress.
8. Maintain contact with the District Education Executive and the District Accreditation Commission.
9. Help the school select a Visiting Team Captain from among the district's list of trained and approved team captains. Final appointment is made by the NLSA Director.
10. Consult with the school administrator about other members of the visiting team.
11. Remind the school to request that their suggested team members are appointed by the NLSA Director. This can be accomplished via e-mail.
12. The consultant in an Ongoing Improvement process will serve on the NLSA visiting team (not as captain). The consultant for a school using the Standards Based process shall not serve on the school's visiting team.
13. Based on observed documentation, suggest the site visit be delayed or grant approval of the school's readiness for a successful site visit. This decision should be communicated to the district accreditation commission and the team captain. Reschedule the visit if the status of the school is uncertain. This step ends the formal involvement of the consultant for schools using the Standards Based Process. The consultant serves as a member of the visiting team for schools using an Ongoing Improvement Process.
14. Remind the school of its responsibilities to forward copies of the self-study report to the NLSA office and to the district office as soon as it is completed. In the case of schools seeking accreditation from another agency, schools should also forward a copy of the self-study report to that agency.

Characteristics of an Effective NLSA Consultant

An effective consultant is:

1. **Positive:** The consultant should reflect a positive outlook and an optimistic view of the future. The focus should be on what can be done and what is possible, rather than on negatives or obstacles.
2. **Humble:** A humble spirit must be evident; arrogance or a condescending nature negates the effectiveness of an NLSA consultant.
3. **A Leader:** An effective consultant provides leadership without being the decision-maker.
4. **A Model:** Model what you advise. If you advise the school to be accurate in written materials, be sure the written materials you produce are flawless. The credibility of the consultant's recommendations are enhanced by demonstrating what is recommended.
5. **A Good Listener:** Listening is necessary to ensure that accurate and complete information is received. School leaders will often be more receptive to advice when they are sure that the consultant has listened to and understood their information and concerns.
6. **A Catalyst:** Effective consultations result in school improvement. The successful consultant will maximize involvement, validate decisions and serve to initiate people's assistance in support and completion of plans for improvement.
7. **A Planner:** Skills are necessary to help schools develop plans that will have a dynamic impact on school improvement and student learning.
8. **Future-Oriented:** The consultant's view should always direct the school toward the future. Although a study of the past and present is an essential element of a self-study or needs assessment process, the consultant's focus should always be, "Where do we go from here?", "What goals should be established?" and "What plans are essential to our success?"
9. **Time-Oriented:** The accreditation school improvement process must be planned so the school can become accredited within its chosen time frame. Since the National Accreditation Commission meets only once each year, the process must be planned so it is completed in time for the school to be ready to comply with district and national deadlines.
10. **Enthusiastic:** When appropriate, it is the consultant's task to bring an atmosphere of enthusiasm for the blessings received from the accreditation process, even when the events involved with the self-study become cumbersome. An effective consultant's leadership and enthusiasm will be contagious.
11. **Affirming:** The consultant affirms the ministry of each member of the school staff and the captain of the visiting team.
12. **Realistic:** The consultant provides a realistic assessment of the likelihood of success for the school. Assessment is based upon a thorough examination of written materials and documentation provided by the school.
13. **Prayer Warrior:** The consultant upholds the school, staff, children, families, congregation, pastor, and lay leaders in prayer.

NLSA Consultant Timeline and Checklist

The checklist of consultant duties is listed below as a sample timeline for a 12-month accreditation process. It provides approximate times for the completion of various parts of the process.

Experienced NLSA consultants must remember that no two schools are exactly the same; schools may take two years or longer to complete the process. It is your responsibility to help the school determine how much time is necessary to assure success. Schools are allowed one to three years to complete the process. The average completion time for a self-study is 12 months.

The steps below will guide your work as a consultant. They are intended to be completed sequentially. Some of them are simple tasks; others take several months and will take a great deal of effort. Some of the tasks overlap. Each one, however, should be completed by the consultant and checked off on this list when completed. It would be good if a copy of the completed checklist was submitted to the visiting team captain so that both captain and consultant are aware of the efforts of the other. This checklist is not intended to be comprehensive.

Month 1

- ___ 1. As soon as appointed, contact the school administrator in person or by telephone to offer your assistance. Review the Getting Ready for Accreditation checklist (see Addendum C, page 26) with the school administrator.
- ___ 2. Determine if the school will use the Standards Based (SB) process, or the Ongoing Improvement (OI) process.
- ___ 3. Help the school establish its steering committee and subcommittees.
- ___ 4. Establish an early date for an orientation visit with the faculty, pastor(s) and the school board. Make sure the school is using the appropriate material.

Month 2

- ___ 5. Help the school form a tentative timeline, with deadline dates, working backward from the tentative date of the visit listed on the application form.
- ___ 6. Visit the school.
- ___ 7. Consult with the administrator about organizing for the accreditation process, including the role of the consultant. Stress the importance of the school's full compliance with all Required Standards and Indicators of Success.
- ___ 8. Advise the administrator which exhibits require advance planning and considerable time to complete, especially curriculum and school manuals.

Months 3-6

- ___ 9. Advise the school of its responsibility to share drafts of all material with you as soon as they have been prepared. Monitor school progress using regular telephone calls, e-mail, and/or personal visits (at least once a month).
- ___ 10. Review the first draft of **Section I: Mission and Vision**. Assure the school's success by tallying the results of the completion of the Lichert Scale associated with the section's Indicators of Compliance. React in writing within one week. Offer to share appropriate samples.
- ___ 11. Obtain a list of trained team captains from the district office.

Month 7

- ___ 12. Periodically report school progress to the district accreditation commission.
- ___ 13. Suggest appropriate team captains to the school administrator and submit to the District Commission for selection.

Month 8

- ___ 14. Briefly review and comment on every section of the self-study report as soon as it is completed. Encourage and make suggestions.
- ___ 15. Meet with the steering committee and pastor to discuss progress and quality of the process. Make sure the self-study is being prepared by a variety of school constituents. Remind everyone that the school must comply (using the Lichert scale associated with each section's Indicators of Success) with all Required Standards and Indicators of Success before a team visit can take place.

Months 9-10

- ___ 16. Advise the administrator about the selection of visiting team members.
- ___ 17. Remind the administrator that the self-study report must be in the hands of all visiting team members no later than one month before the visit.
- ___ 18. Alert the administrator to any concerns you have about the quality and progress of the self-study report. Speak about success, not failure.

Month 11

- ___ 19. Review a final copy of the self-study report with narratives before it is copied for distribution. Ensure that all Required Standards and Indicators of Success have been met by the school. Be sure all exhibits are attached.
- ___ 20. Inform the school of readiness for a site visit or postpone or reschedule the site visit if success is uncertain.

Month 12

- ___ 21. Remind the administrator to send copies of the self-study report to visiting team members, the district NLSA commission, and the NLSA national office. At the appropriate time, verify that copies were received.
- ___ 22. Contact the team captain, announce your approval of the school's readiness for a visit, share information, and wish the team God's blessings. Serve on the visiting team if the school has used the OI process. Announce the completion of your responsibilities to the school administrator and offer ongoing assistance as needed.

NLSA Consultant Dos and Don'ts

DO

- Communicate verbally.
- Communicate in writing.
- Know NLSA materials.
- Set time deadlines.
- Be open and honest.
- Become acquainted with the campus.
- Become acquainted with school leadership.
- Respect the school's unique nature.
- Share examples from a variety of sources.
- Be their advocate.
- Give "hard" advice when needed.
- Respond promptly to questions and materials.
- Assist the steering committee.
- Assist the school's improvement.
- Encourage school progress.
- Be specific in writing.

DON'T

- Rely solely on verbal communication.
- Write only generalities.
- Use outdated materials.
- Rigidly require deadlines.
- Say one thing and mean another.
- Judge only on appearances.
- Rely on input from only one person.
- Try to make the school like yours.
- Just tell them how you did it.
- Be their taskmaster.
- Try to be liked at all costs.
- Be the reason for delays.
- Become identified with a minority of the committee.
- Tell them how to improve.
- Accept the unacceptable.
- Give detractors ammunition.

Consultant and Captain Roles Clarification

The school consultant and the visiting team captain play significant and distinctive roles in the school's pursuit of accreditation. Both play a part in evaluating the school's processes related to compliance with required standards and indicators of success and improvement for the benefit of students and families. The roles of consultant and team captain must be complementary rather than competitive. Thus, each has a unique and distinctive responsibility to help the school: It is their primary motivation and expectation. The consultant helps the school achieve success with its self-study process. The captain helps the school by directing the activities of the visiting team.

In consultation with the district executive, the consultant helps select a team captain for the school. The team captain helps the school select its visiting team members. The consultant helps the school schedule the self-study, scheduling the date for the visiting team, and sets deadlines for various committees and various materials to be produced. The captain, on the other hand, helps schedule the visiting team meetings and must be consulted related to the dates of the team visit. The consultant's responsibility is to educate the faculty, the steering committee, the school board, and other constituents at the school in what NLSA is and how the NLSA process is to be conducted. The captain's responsibility is to educate the visiting team. Many members of the visiting team will not have any experience in accreditation (and specifically, National Lutheran School Accreditation) and need to be informed about the process. The consultant helps to determine whether or not the school is ready for a successful team visit. The team captain provides an unbiased evaluation of the school's accreditation status and determines whether or not the school is ready for a recommendation for accreditation to the district and national commissions.

The chart below indicates differences in and relationships between the roles of these two important positions:

CONSULTANT		TEAM CAPTAIN
	HELPS SCHOOL THROUGH	
Self-Study Process		Site Visit
	HELPS SELECT	
Team Captain		Team Members
	HELPS SCHEDULE	
Self-Study Process		Visiting Team Meetings
	HELPS EDUCATE	
Faculty and Constituents		Visiting Team Members
	HELPS DETERMINE	
Readiness for the Visit		Readiness for Accreditation

Sample Initial Consultant Visit

One of the earliest tasks of the school consultant is to schedule an orientation visit with the faculty and school board and follow through to make that visit. The schedule below suggests approximate times for the visit along with potential ideas to communicate.

Sample Initial Consultant Visit Schedule

Arrive 12:30 p.m.

- Walk through school (30 min.)

- Meet pastor and other church staff (15 min.)

- Meet with administrator (2 hours)

 - Costs

 - Organization—Committees

 - Review exhibits

 - Make sure materials are current

 - Review NLSA process and your role

- Meet with faculty briefly (15 min.)

 - Encourage, offer help, get acquainted, assure of benefits

 - Review process and their role

- Meet with board (30 min.)

 - Commend

 - Assure your help

 - Review benefits, process

 - Review your role and their role

 - Review costs and other plans made with administrator

Getting Started with Mission and Vision

Every accredited Lutheran school must be able to present a scriptural rationale for its existence, define the reason it exists, and state the preferred future condition of its organization. The documents that define the school's rationale and purpose must be presented clearly and concisely and must not conflict with the mission statement of the sponsoring congregation or organization. For our purposes we define these essential elements as the school's mission and vision.

The Mission Statement

The mission statement is a brief purpose statement that reflects the reasons for the school's existence. It is developed by the leadership team after receiving input from those invested in the future of the organization.

A mission statement should:

1. Be brief (20 words or less).
2. Be clear, concise and memorable.
3. Be separate but compatible with the congregational or supporting organization's mission.
4. Clearly define the operation of the school.
5. Balance law and Gospel when applicable.
6. State how it positively impacts children, families, and the communities it serves.

The School Vision

Vision is the stated preferred future condition of the school. It states what the school will become in the next five years, 10 years, 20 years. The vision becomes the mission that is accomplished over time. The School Improvement Plan (OI process) outlines the school's vision for its preferred future condition and illustrates its plan for accomplishing the vision. When vision and actions are properly aligned, a school is assured of implementing and living its mission.

In evaluating the relevance of a school's mission and vision, the consultant must determine how the statements are reflected in the overall operation of the school, including administration, instruction, co-curricular activities, and learner outcomes. Since these concepts guide and direct all of the programs and activities in place at the school they must be well defined and clearly understood by everyone.

Reacting to a Self-Study Report Draft

A key concern of a consultant is the acceptability of all written reports and documentation related to the self-study process. It is critical that the consultant review drafts of all written materials prepared by the school. A site visit cannot be scheduled until the self-study and accompanying documentation materials have been reviewed and approved as ready by the consultant.

Many consultants prefer receiving drafts of self-study documents electronically. Others desire to review materials prepared using a paper format. Agree upon a way to share materials during the first consultant's visit to the school. After the documentation is received, the consultant must evaluate if the materials are clear, accurate and truthful. The consultant must also determine if the school has complied with required indicators and standards.

Reviewing the drafts can be summarized into four tasks: Review, React, Suggest, and Approve.

Review It

- Read each section from the viewpoint of a site visitor.
- Mark it up like an editor (partially).
- Make sure it has:
 - Responses to "Respond To:" for each section
 - Required exhibits attached.
 - Comments for each standard not "met in full."
 - Answers to the three summary questions at the end of each section. Each concern listed should have an associated plan for correction. This should be a part of the School Improvement Plan (OI).
- Check for:
 - Accuracy.
 - Logic.
 - Clarity.
 - Completeness.
 - Exhibits prepared recently.
- Look for:
 - Grammatical and spelling accuracy.
 - School improvement related to identified concerns, documented and planned.
 - Clarity of information for team members.

React to It

- Be positive and encouraging.
- Be specific.
- Suggest helpful alternatives.
- Be honest.
- Use tact.
- Point out successes as well as problems.
- Keep the process moving with few delays.
- Return drafts with inserted comments, readable scribbles or post-it notes and accompanying correspondence.
- Keep a copy of your work for future reference.
- Speak with the administrator or steering committee (in addition to your written response).

Make Suggestions to Improve It:

- Provide suggestions for rewording.
- Suggest editorial assistance.
- Expand the number of people involved in planning and writing.
- Delay the timeline to improve chance of success.
- Suggest they write specifically for the visiting team.
- Emphasize school improvement, not just report writing.

Approve It

- Approve each section of the report individually but consider how the individual reports reflect the single self-study document that will be presented to visiting team members.

Steps in School Curriculum Development

Awritten curriculum is a Required Indicator of Success for schools accredited by NLSA. Typically this is one of the most difficult parts of the accreditation process for many schools. Leaders frequently ask for assistance in this area. It is therefore critical that NLSA consultants be prepared to offer assistance in the development of curriculum so the accreditation process will be successful. Samples of acceptable curriculum work may be viewed on the NLSA page of the Lutheran School Portal. Concordia Publishing House has also developed extensive curriculum guides for every subject area that integrate the faith, are easy to use, and include instructions.

You may also wish to use the following **10 Steps to School Curriculum Development** as you help the school. These steps are designed to provide an acceptable response to NLSA standards related to curriculum. It is not a comprehensive curriculum study document.

** Indicates individual teacher activities*

1. Review the school philosophy/purpose statement.
2. Put legs on it (extract main points of emphasis).
3. Select one academic area (subject or theme).
- *4. Identify key learning (outcomes) for each grade/age in that area.
5. Agree on sequence.
- *6. Assemble sources for objectives: (what students will know and be able to do)
 - Teachers
 - Teacher materials
 - Texts
 - Curriculum guides
 - National standards
 - Lists of objectives
 - State and local requirements for licensing (i.e. childcare)
- *7. Select (write) 20-30 objectives for each age/grade level.
8. Review to ensure:
 - * agreement across levels (sequence, needed repetition across levels, consistency of direction)
 - * adequate depth (scope)
 - * consistency with philosophy
 - * religious nature of the school (integration of faith across the curriculum)
 - * age appropriateness
9. Select exit outcomes.
("By the time a child leaves our school's highest level/grade, he or she will . . .")
Some schools may choose to select exit outcomes before Step 4 in this sequence.
10. Select another academic area and repeat steps 4-9.

Other Consultant Provided Assistance

The NLSA materials provide a variety of resources that may be used to successfully complete the NLSA process. As consultant, it is vital that you are familiar with all the materials and resources available through NLSA. Make certain that you have reviewed the folders that are found on the NLSA CD. Those materials provide a great deal of assistance, but only if they are used. A school must complete its NLSA process using the CD that was sent at the time of its application. The CDs are updated annually and include changes and resources that are prescribed by the national accreditation commission. In order to be effective, consultants must know what's on the newest CD that might be able to assist their school in its process.

Conducting the NLSA Self-Study Process

Being accredited by NLSA means something. NLSA is a voluntary process for schools that involves a significant commitment of time and resources. Schools choosing to become involved must demonstrate that they have a commitment to high standards of quality. Lutheran schools that are committed to quality and ongoing improvement receive national recognition by NLSA as a result of their efforts.

NLSA has defined standards for quality Lutheran schools. Schools complying with the standards demonstrate that they are committed to quality. For many years the decision regarding whether a school was worthy of accreditation was based upon the question, "How do we *feel* about this school?" In 2006, the National Accreditation Commission made a decision to move away from the subjectivity that question implies. We have implemented a new system involving quantitative measurement of standard compliance to determine if a school qualifies to become accredited by NLSA. This raises the bar of expectation for accredited schools and those that wish to become accredited. It adds credibility to our process. It helps schools determine their eligibility for accreditation. It provides a means for an NLSA consultant to assure the success of candidate schools. It provides an objective means for visiting teams, district accreditation commissions, and the national accreditation commission to make decisions about a school's worthiness for accreditation.

It is important that faculty, pastor, board members, parents, and students understand that the purpose of this process is to improve the quality of the school program through the process of planning, self-evaluation, introspection, and comprehensive examination of what is happening to children in the school environment by comparing it to national standards for Lutheran schools.

During the NLSA process, it may become obvious that some facets of the school should be changed. Those desirable changes that can be done quickly should be done as part of the process, not just planned for the future. School improvement should occur, not just be discussed, as part of the NLSA process.

Faculty Involvement

In most organizations the front line produces the bottom line. Teachers in Lutheran schools serve on the front line. Faculty involvement in the accreditation process is critical to the school's success. The faculty should be in agreement with the school's decision to apply for accreditation, fully aware of the process and requirements, and invested in the self-study process and ongoing improvement efforts.

The Steering Committee

Once the decision has been reached to seek National Lutheran School Accreditation, five to eight people, representing various members of the school community should be appointed to the steering committee. The steering committee plans, guides and coordinates the self-study process. The steering committee is responsible to: appoint subcommittees, approve all elements of the self-study report, review the report of the visiting team, and make recommendations for continued improvement. In many schools the steering committee becomes responsible for all of the elements of the accreditation process, including ongoing improvement after the school has become accredited.

Work of Subcommittees

Every staff member should serve on at least one subcommittee. In small schools or because of special interests, some faculty members may need to serve on more than one subcommittee. Consideration should also be given to the role that the pastor(s), board members, parents, and students can take throughout the study. The school administrator and members of the steering committee should determine how the interests of the school community can best be served as it selects subcommittee members. The names of each subcommittee member should be listed with each report.

The Self-Study Process

■ Standards Based Process

In order to qualify for NLSA accreditation, schools must demonstrate that they comply with 11 required standards. The self-study report form is the tool used by schools to demonstrate quality through standards compliance and develop the school's plan for continuing improvement. Each of the 11 standards is to be considered as a separate section. Each section of the report requires that the school:

- 1. Responds to selected questions and statements ("Respond to . . .").**
Each "Please respond to" section serves as a starting point for evaluation, discussion and study. The statements and questions were developed to encourage reflection, self-evaluation, clarification and explanation.
- 2. Provides specific required exhibits (identified by an asterisk).**
Supporting data and information should be categorically labeled and attached to the self-study report. Required exhibits marked with an asterisk (*) should be appended to the self-study report whenever possible.
- 3. Indicates compliance with REQUIRED Indicators of Success.**
Following each "Respond to" section, a list of Indicators of Success will help you determine your school's compliance with the required standard. Required Indicators of Success marked with an asterisk (*) are non-negotiable. They must be answered either as YES or NO. These are required elements for accreditation. If the school does not comply fully with a REQUIRED Indicator of Success, the school should take action to meet that Indicator before completing the self-study. Evidence that the indicator is met must be attached to the self-study or available to the team members at the time of the site visit. It is critical that the school's consultant is made aware of compliance with all REQUIRED Indicators of Success in order to approve the school as ready for the site visit.
- 4. Rates its implementation for each GENERAL Indicator of Success.**
All GENERAL Indicators of Success are to be evaluated as to the degree to which the standard is actually being met using the scale provided. After the school has determined its level of implementation of the GENERAL Indicators of Success, the school must explain why any are not being fully met. If all the REQUIRED Indicators of Success are answered YES and GENERAL Indicators of Success average the score of two, the school will have met the minimum standards for accreditation.
- 5. Comments about strengths, needs for improvement, and plans for improvement related to each standard ("comment on . . .").**
The expectations for the long term are that the school would seek to exceed minimum standards. Therefore, for each Standards section, the school is asked to identify specific strengths, list determined needs for improvement, and identify a plan for improvement for that section. Plans for improvement address the areas that were not "fully met." Each determined need must have a corresponding plan for improvement.

■ Ongoing Improvement Process

The Ongoing Improvement Process of accreditation provides an accredited school with a self-study process that assures ongoing compliance with required NLSA Standards. The self-study also provides for the school's continuing improvement through the development of a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that includes between two and five broadly defined goals. Based on a formal needs assessment process conducted by the school, these improvement goals reflect the school's plans for meeting the greatest needs of the students.

In order to qualify for NLSA accreditation, schools must not only validate that they comply with 11 required standards, but also, based on a variety of needs assessments, that they develop a formal School

Improvement Plan. The self-study report form is the tool used by schools to demonstrate quality through standards compliance and develop the school's plan for ongoing school improvement.

Developing a school's Ongoing School Improvement Plan (SIP):

1. Assure that faculty, staff, parents, other school constituents, and outside resource people are involved in the process.
2. Assure that the school has fully completed the School Profile.
3. Assure that the school has provided all the required exhibits.
4. Review thoroughly the school's
 - Mission Statement
 - Vision Statement
5. Review the school's Standards Checklist responses.

For each of the Standards section, the school is expected to:

- Comment on any significant changes that have been made by the school in the area during the previous accreditation cycle.
- Indicate whether the school meets the REQUIRED Indicators of Success for each Standard.
- Evaluate the level of implementation for each of the GENERAL Indicators of Success according to the following scale.
- Provide an explanation or proposed improvement actions for any of the GENERAL Indicators of Success that are not "met in full."
- Meet a minimum average of two for the GENERAL Indicators of Success for each Standard.

GENERAL Indicators of Success help the school quantify its compliance with the Standard. Evaluate the school's compliance with each GENERAL Indicator of Success using the criterion defined below. In the "Comments" section related to that indicator, specify how your school falls short of full compliance for any indicator marked less than "Met in Full." Include the proposed improvement plans or actions to bring the school in compliance with the indicator.

Met in Full – The indicator of success has been completely accomplished by the school. It is verifiable through evidence and documentation.

Mostly Met – The indicator of success has been partially accomplished by the school. Documentation and evidence regularly indicate that the school is well on the way toward full accomplishment of the indicator.

Rarely Met – Infrequent implementation of an indicator of success. This indicator rarely occurs in the school and evidence and documentation for compliance are minimally present.

Not Presently Met – There has been no progress by the school toward the accomplishment of this indicator of success.

6. Ensure that the school uses a variety of quality needs assessments in gathering significant data to help determine short- and long-term improvement goals. Needs assessment is a process of using objective and subjective means to identify needs that, when filled, will benefit students at your school. A needs assessment answers the question, "What needs improvement at the school for students?"
7. Review that the school prioritized identified needs or areas for potential improvement in two to five goals. Goals are statements of desired future conditions consistent with the school's mission and NLSA standards based on the identified needs of the students. Short-range goals are accomplished in two years or less. Long-range goals are accomplished in three or more years. Goals are written in the present tense to describe a preferred future condition. Make sure that:
 - Justification is provided for each goal, indicating how meeting the goal will help achieve your mission and enhance student learning.
 - Each goal correlates with the NLSA standards to which it relates.
8. Once school goals have been identified, ensure:
 - Write specific objectives for each goal. Objectives are necessary achievements or prerequisites for accomplishing a goal. Objectives require strategies which must be listed so that the SIP describes fully how each goal is to be achieved. Objectives are "organizers" or major headings for each goal's SIP. Objectives are measurable.
 - Objectives impact/improve as many aspects of student development and learning as possible.
 - Depending on the complexity, cost or difficulty of reaching these objectives, you may wish to suggest limiting their number.

9. Once the objectives for each goal have been determined, make sure:
 - Strategies necessary to accomplish each objective in meeting the goal are written.
 - Strategies are ideas, plans, action steps that lead to reaching the stated goals by stated deadlines.
 - Strategies are specific enough to be measurable.
 - Once the method of accomplishing each objective has been outlined in detail, identify the materials, resources and timetables you expect to follow to accomplish each objective. It may be helpful when doing this to outline each goal, its objectives, and strategies according to projected timetables.
10. Review the goals to evaluate the effect of their demands on resources to ensure that overall school performance is helped, not harmed.
11. Assure the organization of the school's SIP into a logical narrative with an accompanying flow chart.
12. Approve the self-study and recommend a visit.
13. Serve on the visitation team.

■ Needs Assessment

The purpose of a needs assessment is to identify needs and goals for the school's community. The assessment helps answer the question, "What needs improvement at the school for the benefit of students?" The needs assessment process and the NLSA standards will be used to identify school improvement goals. The needs assessment process begins with a review of the school's mission statement and the school's vision for education. The school profile provides further base-line information for a variety of need assessment areas. Look for more than one source of information to support the identification of a particular need. Data about the school and/or student performance must be clearly documented. Final selection of needs is based on data specific to that need.

Instruments used to collect data may include, but are not restricted to:

- Standardized tests (norm referenced)
- Criterion referenced tests
- Surveys (i.e. NLSA or locally developed)
- Teacher interviews/opinions
- Schedules
- Effective teaching strategies
- Portfolios
- Projects/displays
- Developmental assets

Collected data is ordinarily tabled and/or graphed with an accompanying interpretation and explanation of the data. After needs, goals, objectives, and strategies are identified, suggest that the school use the same or similar instruments as tools to determine if goals have been met.

Suggested steps to follow in a needs assessment process:

- Listen to parents, educators, students, members of the community.
- Interpret and evaluate standardized test data to determine curricular needs.
- Gather and analyze data from surveys: students, parents, educators, staff members.
- Carefully review GENERAL Indicators of Success that are not "met in full" in the Standards Checklist.
- Lead the Steering Committee through a prioritization process of the needs.
- Help the school select three to 10 needs that have the highest priority and are possible to accomplish.
- Have the school rewrite the needs as goals and select two to five goals for your School Improvement Plan.

What if the School is Not Ready for a Team Visit?

After careful examination of all self-study documentation, the NLSA consultant determines the school's readiness for the site visit. The consultant shall provide formal approval of school readiness for a team visit when the school has successfully completed its self-study process and the consultant has verified that the school is ready for a site visit. The consultant should notify the team captain and the district accreditation that the school is ready at least 30 days before the team visit.

If the school has not completed the self-study process within 30 days of the scheduled visit, the consultant shall notify the team captain and district accreditation commission that the visit must be postponed. A school visit may be postponed for any or all of the following reasons:

- The school has refused to participate in activities requested by the consultant. (The consultant has not reviewed the materials.)
- Point values indicate that the school does not comply with Required Standards or Indicators of Success.
- The school has ignored the suggestions of its consultant.
- The self-study materials do not reflect the quality expected by NLSA.

The consultant will announce this decision to the school, the team captain, and district accreditation commission. The school and consultant will work together to reschedule a tentative visit based on the school readiness projections. The consultant shall continue to monitor progress until the visit can be successfully undertaken. Schools have three years from the date of their application to complete the process (including self-study and team visit).

How to Select Goals for a School Improvement Plan

- Review thoroughly your school (and congregation) mission statement and philosophy statement.
- Identify and review parents' informal comments about school needs.
- Review your standards checklist to identify any responses that are less than "fully met." Whenever possible address those indicators in your School Improvement Plan.
- Review standardized test (such as achievement) results to identify achievement and/or curricular weaknesses.
- Review accreditation visiting team reports and the school Self-Study Report or last Ongoing Improvement Report to identify weaknesses or recommendations that need attention.
- Conduct surveys in print or by internet to get options from various groups of your constituents.
- Get input or evaluation from a professional consultant.
- Review the list of sample school improvement goals and consider those that match your needs assessments. Adapt or create as needed.
- Create your own broad goals for school improvement, ensuring that they are consistent with the school's mission and NLSA standards and based on the identified needs of the students.

GOAL:

A five-year plan of action for Trinity Lutheran School's increased visibility in our church and community is implemented.

OB1 A Public Relations committee is established consisting of a teacher, board of education member, board of evangelism member, one parent, one member at large and the vicar. This committee is responsible for carrying out the objectives below.

OB2 The name of Trinity Lutheran Church and School is publicized in various types of media within the community. (July 2002)

Sa: A Web site for the church and school is developed (July 2002).

A1: The committee looks at other church Web sites and uses the expertise of our current vicar.

A2: Trinity Lutheran School and Church Web site is developed (July 2002).

Sb: Newspaper articles are published at least four times per year (beginning August 2002).

Sc: Church and school are advertised on radio and television (beginning 2004).

A1: The committee is checking with LCMS for advertising material.

A2: The committee is checking with other sources for material.

Sd: A format is designed for printed advertisements in such target areas as the Shopper Stopper, telephone directory, motel brochure, churches within circuit 19 (beginning March 2003).

Se: Displays are set up to promote Trinity Lutheran School during Lutheran Schools Week (beginning February 2003).

A1: Contact Charlotte Davis at the community center.

A2: Contact Pearl Obrien at the municipal building.

Sf: Investigate joining the Visitors Bureau (July 2005).

Sg: Investigate the potential for becoming a weather spotter for television station at Trinity Lutheran School and arrange a visit from a meteorologist (2005).

Sh: If funds are necessary for the above strategies, the committee will present a proposed budget to the Board of Education in November of the preceding year.

OB3 Trinity Lutheran School is promoted with Trinity Lutheran Church through written material.

Sa: Trinity Lutheran School activities are summarized in the Sunday bulletins at the end of each month (beginning September 2002).

Sb: A student of the week is highlighted each Sunday in a bulletin insert using a standardized interview form (starting November 2002).

Sc: Significant upcoming events of Trinity Lutheran School are promoted through bulletin inserts (starting Fall 2002).

OB4 Students of Trinity Lutheran School are making a prominent representation throughout the community.

Sa: Trinity Lutheran School is represented in the Memorial Day parade (starting May 2004).

A1: Trinity students march in parade.

A2: A Lutheran schools week or other banner is carried in the parade.

Sb: Students bring a friend to school when the public school has off and Trinity does not (starting 2005).

Sc: Students are more actively involved in the community nursing home (starting 2005).

A1: Contact nursing home for permission to create a monthly bulletin board.

A2: Students sing and meet their shut-in pen pals.

Sd: A career day is established to bring community members into the school facility (starting 2006).

A1: List names of various leaders in the community.

A2: Contact these leaders.

A3: Set up an in-school visit by two leaders per year.

- Se: Investigate potential community service opportunities on a yearly basis.
- Sf: If funds are necessary for the above strategies, the committee will present a proposed budget to the Board of Education in November of the preceding year.

OB5 Students of Trinity are taking a noticeable part within Trinity Lutheran Church.

- Sa: During the school year, one grade per month will be responsible for aiding in church services as assigned by the classroom teachers. Their responsibility includes but is not limited to the following: greeting members, acolyting, handing out children's bulletins, ushering and making displays telling why they go to Trinity (beginning 2002).
- Sb: A hobby or mini-course day using congregational members' interests is considered for the Trinity students (beginning 2003).
- Sc: A Student/Congregation member buddy system is established (starting 2004).
- Sd: The public relation committee will help set up a safety/health fair open house for congregation members; where students will help (starting 2005).

OB6 Accomplishments of this goal are recorded through an ongoing scrapbook containing copies of articles and pictures of activities that have been completed.

NLSA Checklist Getting Ready for Accreditation

NLSA requires the following exhibits. Use this checklist as a helpful guide in preparation for your self-study.

- Congregation Mission Statement/Philosophy Goals
- File of School Annual Statistics Report
- Job Descriptions for all Positions
- School Calendar
- School's Mission Statement/Philosophy Goals

MANUALS and PLANS

- Board of Education Policy Manual
- Crisis Management Plan
- Curriculum—Philosophy, Learner Outcomes, Scope and Sequence for all subject areas
- Faculty Handbook
- Parent/Student Handbooks
- School Floor Plan
- Staff Development Plan
- Technology Plan
- Three-Year Financial Plan
- Innovations or Change in Methodology Report

POLICIES

- Enrollment Policy
- Ethical Use Policy
- Non-Discrimination Policy
- Procedure for Dispensing Medications

FINANCIAL

- Current Salary and Benefit Scale
- Itemized School Budget
- Policy and Procedures Related to Financial Assistance
- Tuition and Fees Schedule

ORGANIZATIONAL MATERIALS

- Classroom Schedules
- Discipline Materials
- Samples of Report Cards
- Standardized Test Scores for the Last Three Years
- Sample Student Cumulative Records

INVENTORIES

- Inventory of Classroom Materials and Furnishings
- Inventory of Classroom, Technology and Library Reference Materials
- Survey Results

Benefits of Accreditation

1. Allows you to identify and celebrate your strengths.
2. Exposes weaknesses that should be corrected.
3. Provides validation for your program's existence.
4. Prepares a "blueprint" for improvement for the next seven years.
5. Removes your ability to procrastinate and postpone important things that should be done.
6. Rallies support from people who might otherwise not have been involved.
7. Builds cohesiveness among staff members.
8. Strengthens your image in the community.
9. Provides you with a PR tool for your arsenal.
10. Connects you with hundreds of other LCMS schools that have already worked through the process.
11. Provides a set of objective eyes (site evaluation team) to review your work.
12. Provides accountability to your community, constituents and congregation.
13. Compares your program to a set of objective national standards for Lutheran schools.
14. Provides the opportunity to evaluate the spiritual component of your school.
15. Helps establish an image for your program.
16. Provides motivation for staff development.
17. Validates your credibility through an objective outside agency.
18. Publicly acknowledges the quality of your institution.
19. Provides the opportunity for public acknowledgement and celebration.
20. Is something every Lutheran preschool, elementary school, and high school can and should attain.



Accreditation by National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) indicates that the school successfully completed the NLSA process of self-study, reporting, and evaluation by a visiting team and that the visiting team recommended NLSA accreditation as a result of that visit. It is determined, through this process, that the school is worthy of NLSA accreditation. Neither NLSA nor its authorizing agency, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, assumes responsibility for the schools's quality (or lack thereof) or for variations from NLSA standards either at the time of initial accreditation or at any time during NLSA accreditation.



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