



Early Childhood Accreditation Consultant's Manual

2011-2012 EDITION



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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The Purpose of Early Childhood Accreditation

The purpose of NLSA Early Childhood Accreditation is to:

1. Lead Lutheran early childhood centers to provide a high-quality program whose staff provides Christian love, care, and education;
2. Assist each early childhood center to evaluate its program based upon unique purpose and ministry;
3. Assist each early childhood center to improve itself for the benefit of its children, families, and congregation; and
4. Provide appropriate public recognition for those centers that complete the process successfully.

Introduction to the Role of a Consultant

You have been selected to provide assistance to an early childhood center going through the process of National Lutheran School Accreditation. As a consultant, you play a critical role in that process. Your primary task is to serve as the center's facilitator and guide. To accomplish that task, you are to help the applicant center through the self-study process and preparation for a visit of a team of outside educators representing NLSA. This helping process involves a variety of skills. From the very beginning of the process for the school, the consultant must inform, assist, direct, encourage and oversee the applicant school. As a result of your actions the center will improve.

The National Lutheran School Accreditation Director, in consultation with your district education executive, has appointed you to this important task. You have been selected for this position on the basis of your previous NLSA experience, communication skills, and leadership ability. Being selected as a consultant is a responsibility that comes with honor and holds great challenges.

The consultant must establish a tone for the process that will assure the center's success. He or she must recognize when a school is demonstrating positive progress and encourage the school to continue in that direction. He or she must also slow down or stop the process when inadequate progress has been made or if the school is improperly prepared for the site visit.

Your mission as a consultant is to serve as the center's advocate through the accreditation process. You will inform, encourage and assist the center's leaders so the accreditation process will be successful. You will speak for NLSA to make sure that the center completes the appropriate process with integrity. You are also responsible for approving and recommending the center's readiness for a site visit and accreditation to the team captain when that time comes. Thus it is important that you become very well acquainted with the center so that you might communicate with them and communicate on their behalf.

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

May God bless you as you complete this important ministry of helping your early childhood center succeed in its National Lutheran School Accreditation process.

Terry L. 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. Organization leaders are responsible for articulating the mission so that every stakeholder understands his or her individual responsibilities in regard to accomplishing 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 ensure 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 is familiar with the mission, purpose and values of NLSA and internalizes 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: Help the school to 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. 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. 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.
13. 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, especially when a firm stand must be taken by the consultant, or conflict and rejection can result, negating the effectiveness of the consultant.
3. **A Leader:** An effective consultant provides leadership without being the decision-maker.
4. **A Model:** Practice what you preach. If you advise the school to be accurate in written materials, be sure the written materials you produce are exemplary. Credibility of the consultant's recommendations is 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 be more receptive to advice when they are sure that the consultant has listened to and understood their information and concerns.
6. **A Catalyst:** An effective consultant is a stimulus to help the school improve. The consultant will cause others to become involved, to develop commitment to decisions and to act on their decisions and plans.
7. **A Planner:** Skill is needed in planning for school leadership, planning with the school leadership and teaching the school leadership how to plan.
8. **Future-Oriented:** The consultant's view should always be toward the future. Although a study of the past and present may be necessary, the consultant's focus should always be, "Where do we go from here?", "What goals should be set?", "What plans are needed?"
9. **Time-Oriented:** The accreditation school improvement process must be planned so the school can become accredited in the year it chooses. Since the National Accreditation Commission meets only once each year, the process must be planned so it is complete in time for the school to be ready by the commission's deadlines.
10. **A Spark Plug:** When appropriate, it is the consultant's task to bring an atmosphere of enthusiasm for the blessings received from the accreditation process. 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 holds the center, staff, children, families, congregation, pastor and lay leaders in prayer throughout the accreditation process.

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 page 20) with the school administrator.
- 2. Help the school establish its steering committee and subcommittees.
- 3. 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

- 4. Help the school form a tentative timeline, with deadline dates, working backward from the tentative date of the visit listed on the application form.
- 5. Visit the center.
- 6. Consult with the administrator about organizing for the accreditation process, including the role of the consultant.
- 7. Advise the administrator which exhibits require advance planning and considerable time to complete, especially curriculum and the policy manual.

Months 3-6

- 8. Monitor school progress through regular telephone calls, e-mail, and/or personal visits (at least once a month).
- 9. Review the first draft of the Philosophy and Mission and Ministry Statements. React within one week. Offer to share appropriate samples.

Month 7

- 10. Obtain a list of trained team captains from the district office.
- 11. Periodically report school progress to the district accreditation commission.
- 12. Suggest appropriate team captains to the school administrator and submit to the District Accreditation Commission for selection.

Month 8

- 13. Briefly review and comment on sections of the report as they are completed. Encourage and make suggestions.
- 14. Validate that the self-study is being prepared by a variety of center constituents. The administrator should not be completing the work on her own.

Three months before NLSA Visitation Team Visit

- ___ 15. Remind the administrator that the self-study report and evidence book must be in the hands of all visiting team members no later than one month before the visit.
- ___ 16. Alert the administrator to any concerns you have about the quality and progress of the self-study report. Speak about success, not failure.

Two months before NLSA Visitation Team Visit

- ___ 17. Review a final copy of the self-study report with narratives before it is copied for distribution. Be sure all exhibits are attached.
- ___ 18. Either give your approval of the school's readiness for a site visit or reschedule the site visit if necessary.

One month before NLSA Visitation Team Visit

- ___ 19. Remind the administrator to send copies of the self-study report to visiting team members, the district NLSA commission, and the NLSA national office. Verify that copies were received.
- ___ 20. Contact the team captain, announce your approval of the school's readiness for a visit, share information, and wish the team God's blessings.
- ___ 21. Announce the completion of your responsibilities to the center's 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 only 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 accreditation consultant is to set up an orientation visit with the faculty, steering committee and school board and to make the visit. The schedule below suggests approximate times for the visit along with an agenda to facilitate discussion.

Arrive 12:30 p.m.

- Building tour (30 min.)

- Meet with pastor(s) and church staff (20 min.)

- Meet with the director (2 hours)

 - Costs

 - Organizational structure

 - Review the self-study instrument

 - Assure use of proper materials

 - Review your role as consultant

- Meet with faculty briefly (30 min.)

 - Get acquainted

 - Encourage

 - Offer assistance; assure benefits

 - Review the process and their role

- Meet with board and steering committee

 - Commend

 - Assure your ongoing assistance

 - Review benefits and process

 - Review your role and their role

 - Review costs and other plans made with the director

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. An intentional school improvement plan resulting from an NLSA 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

Since the key concern of the consultant is acceptability, it is important that the consultant review drafts of the self-study report and react to that draft in terms of acceptability. Reacting to that draft can be summarized in three tasks: 1) Review it; 2) React to it; 3) Make suggestions to improve it.

Review It

- Read it 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
 - Letter ratings for each standard
 - Comments for each standard
 - Answers to the three summary questions for each section
- Check for:
 - Accuracy
 - Logic
 - Consistency in ratings
 - “Understandability”
 - Completeness
 - Exhibits prepared recently
- Look for:
 - Grammatical and spelling accuracy
 - Rationale for low ratings
 - School improvement completed and planned
 - Clarity of information for “outsiders”

React to It

- Your task:
 - Be positive and encouraging.
 - Be specific.
 - Suggest alternatives.
 - Be helpful.
 - Be honest.
 - Point out problems and successes.
 - Keep the process moving with few delays.
 - Return drafts with readable scribbles or post-it notes and accompanying letter.
 - Write your reactions on a separate document/letter.
 - Keep a copy of your comments for future reference.
 - Speak with the administrator or steering committee (in addition to your written response).

Make Suggestions to Improve It By:

- Specific rewording.
- Getting editorial assistance.
- Expanding the number of people involved in planning and writing.
- Delay in timeline to improve chance of success.
- Write specifically for the visiting team.
- More emphasis on 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 seven 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 seven 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.

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).

NLSA Checklist: Getting Ready for Accreditation for Early Childhood Centers

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

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

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 school'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.



National Lutheran School Accreditation

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