



# Early Childhood Accreditation Team Captain's Manual

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## 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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# To the Team Captain

Congratulations on being selected to serve as the captain for an NLSA Visiting Team. You have received special training that equipped you to serve in this capacity. The District Accreditation Commission has a great deal of confidence in you because of your previous experience with NLSA and your leadership ability.

Immediately after your appointment, take time to confer with the administrator of the early childhood center to validate the center's progress on its self-study, arrange for the details of the visit, and gain the contact information for other members of the visiting team. Your mission as a team captain is to focus the visiting team's efforts on the evaluation of the center and the validation of its work. In the process you will guide and direct activities of visiting team members, prepare and edit a specific and helpful team report, and lead the visiting team as it presents an exit report to the center.

This manual has been prepared to assist you in your work. It provides a complete overview of your responsibilities, suggested guidelines and schedules, and samples that will guide you as you write your team report.

You are to be commended for accepting this responsibility. The visiting center and the National Accreditation Commission are thankful for your willingness to serve in this capacity and for the willingness of your center to release you for this purpose. God bless your efforts.

**Terry L. Schmidt, Director  
National Lutheran School Accreditation**

# The Purpose of an Early Childhood Accreditation Site Visit

The specific purpose of an early childhood accreditation site visit is to validate the work of the center, evaluate and make specific recommendations about how the center can improve its programs to help children learn and teachers and staff members function effectively.

Team members will visit the center to observe, inquire, and determine the accuracy of the self-study report for the purpose of obtaining a comprehensive view of the center's programs.

Team members will:

1. Review the written material before the scheduled visit.
2. Make independent observations.
3. Compare and contrast the written self-study report with on-site observations.
4. Interview teachers, directors, and others to obtain information as needed.
5. Summarize their findings in a formal written report organized around commendations and recommendations.

# The Early Childhood Standards Based Accreditation Site Visit

## WHEN:

*The center is visited after it has:*

- Completed the Standards Based Self-Study Report.
- Received final approval of the self-study report by the NLSA consultant.
- Sent the self-study report to the visiting team members no later than 30 days before the visit.

## WHO?

- Three team members make up an early childhood visitation team.
- The team is led by an NLSA trained team captain.
- Other team members are early childhood educators suggested by the center, recommended by the district, and appointed by the NLSA director.
- Ordinarily the team members will be within commuting distance of the center.

## WHY?

*The team's purpose is to:*

- Help the center improve for the benefit of its students.
- Validate the self study report.
- Evaluate the center and determine its worthiness for accreditation.
- Recommend ways in which the center could continue to improve.

## WHAT?

- The visit will last at least two full days, including events planned for the evening.
- Each class will be visited.
- Faculty, administrators, parents, board, students, and pastors will be interviewed.
- An oral report will end the visit, followed within two weeks by a written Visiting Team Report.

# Job Description of the NLSA Visiting Team Captain

## Qualifications:

Unless the district has requested an exception, the NLSA Director will appoint as a captain only a person who:

1. Has received training by the district or NLSA to be a visiting team captain. Training is specific to the process. To be a team captain for an Early Childhood Standards Based accreditation process, one must receive training specifically designed for that process.
2. Is currently or has recently retired from serving as a teacher or administrator in a Lutheran (LCMS) childcare or early childhood center.
3. Has successfully led a Lutheran center through the NLSA process used by the center at which he or she will captain the visiting team.
4. Has served on a NLSA visiting team.
5. Is willing and able to lead one or more visiting teams.

## Selection:

1. The center may request a qualified team captain, but the captain is recommended by the district and appointed by the NLSA Executive Director.
2. The captain should be appointed at least three months before the scheduled site visit.
3. Ordinarily the captain currently serves in or has recently retired from a Lutheran (LCMS) childcare or early childhood center.
4. The prospective captain is contacted by the district and/or center administrator, then indicates a willingness to serve that center. A letter or e-mail stating the captain's appointment is sent from the NLSA office to the district education executive and the center.

## Duties:

1. Confer with the center's administrator regularly until the site visit is completed and the Visiting Team Report has been given to the center.
2. Contact the NLSA consultant to make sure the center is ready to be accredited.
3. Together with the center's administrator, establish a tentative schedule and agenda for the visit.
4. Contact the Visiting Team members as soon as possible after they have been appointed, informing them of the visit schedule and asking them to complete the Assignment Preference Form and a Visiting Team Biography Form.
5. Ensure that you and all the team members receive the center's self study report no later than one month before the scheduled visit. If you do not receive the report on time, reschedule the visit.
6. Arrange visit details with the center administrator (housing, mileage, meals, team supplies, typist, etc.).
7. If possible, hold a meeting of the visiting team on site approximately one month before the visit to review the task and to train team members.
8. Make visiting team committee assignments and remind the members to study the self-study report before the visit.
9. Supervise the team and be a liaison between the administrator and the team during the visit.
10. Be a model team member, preparing your report first and leading the team through its review.
11. Instruct, direct, encourage, challenge, support, and advise team members during the visit.
12. Review rough drafts of team reports before they are typed for first consideration by the team.
13. Lead the team in considering, discussing, adapting, correcting, and adopting each committee report.
14. Write the visiting team's report summary, listing the team's recommendation for or against accreditation, outstanding strengths, and major deficiencies.
15. Collect all final committee reports before dismissing the team.
16. Lead the team's oral report.
17. Edit the Visiting Team Report as needed, and return it to the center within two weeks after the visit. Be sure to include the Center Profile of the self-study report and biographical information on team members in the final copy of the Visiting Team Report and remind the center to send two copies to NLSA, the district, and to each of the team members.
18. Give the center's administrator copies of "Center Evaluation of Team Captain" and "Center Evaluation of Consultant" forms and remind the administrator to send them to the NLSA office.
19. Remind the center's administrator of the responsibility of ongoing center improvement and the annual report.

# The Selection of Visiting Team Members for Early Childhood Centers

The visiting team is made up of one or two people, under the direction of the trained team captain, who visit an early childhood center that has applied for accreditation. Their function is to observe, interview and verify the self-study materials that were prepared by the center. Their objective findings provide the district and national accreditation commissions with the information needed to make an accreditation decision.

Team members are professional colleagues interested in promoting quality programs for young children within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They volunteer to serve as team members, without pay, in order to provide the district and national accreditation commission with the needed information to make an accreditation decision.

## **SELECTION:**

The captain and the visiting team are recruited by the center administrator, recommended by the District Accreditation Commission, and appointed by the NLSA director.

The visiting team should be selected and approved by the NLSA national director at least six weeks before the center's scheduled visit. This can be accomplished by submitting an e-mail seeking team approval to Terry.Schmidt@lcms.org. Last minute changes in the visiting team should be reported to the NLSA national director.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FOR VISITING TEAM MEMBERS:**

1. Lutheran educator.
2. Minimum two years of college training specific to early childhood.
3. At least five years of experience with early childhood.
4. Exhibits basic understanding of what constitutes a quality early childhood program.

Careful attention should be given to the selection of visiting team members in order to provide competency and balance on the team. After the team has been officially appointed by the NLSA director, official letters of appointment should be sent to all team members by the center's administrator.

The team captain is also responsible to contact team members as soon as possible after they have been appointed, informing them of the visit schedule and asking them to complete the Assignment Preference Form and a Visiting Team Biographical Form.

# Tasks of the Visiting Team

There are four basic tasks of the visiting team:

1. They will **read the center's self-study report** and other materials produced by the center and note particular questions that come to mind. They will note especially how the report reflects the philosophy of the center and the National Lutheran School Accreditation standards.
2. The team will **observe the center and its program** in full operation. The visiting team attempts to determine how the center normally operates based on observations while visiting. Their purpose here is to evaluate whether or not the center's self-study report agrees with the actual operation of the center. As the visitor observes, he or she takes special note of the center's strengths and seeming weaknesses. These notes become the basis for that visitor's assigned section(s) of the team's report.
3. They will **make general observations** about the center. The site visitors use their professional judgment and experience to consider what type of recommendations might be appropriate. As part of this process, the team members will attempt to get viewpoints not only from teachers but also from students, parents, congregation members, and citizens in the local community.
4. The team will **prepare a specific, helpful, written report** that reflects the observations made during their visit. The purposes of the report are to help the center and to reflect that the self-study report is accurate. Site visitors will be expected to give this report to the team captain before leaving the site.

Throughout the site visit, it is important that team members refer back to the center's stated philosophy and the national standards, for it is on those bases that accreditation is determined. It is appropriate to ask specific questions about the adequacy of the statement of philosophy and to determine if the center reflects it. It is also appropriate to question if the philosophy reflects the needs of the student body, their parents, the congregation, and the community in which it is found. The team report on the standard related to the center's philosophy will be the first report written and discussed by the team, so that the team keeps that report in mind for the rest of the report.

The early childhood center's goals, objectives, and activities are expected to flow from the center's statement of philosophy. The center's programs will be evaluated on the basis of its objectives.

# Organizing the Team for Its Work

Standards for Lutheran early childhood centers are organized around seven criteria. Your team will be subdivided into responsibilities directly related to those sections. Through use of the "Assignment Preference Form," you usually will be able to assign team members to their areas of expertise. This assignment is usually made at the time of the initial team meeting a month before the site visit.

Members of the team are assigned major and minor responsibilities for each of the seven accreditation criteria. Those assigned with major responsibilities write the report. Those assigned with minor responsibilities collaborate their partner and assist with the details contained with the report.

## **The seven criteria for Lutheran early childhood accreditation are:**

- A. STATEMENTS
  - 1. Philosophy
  - 2. Mission and Ministry
  
- B. RELATIONSHIPS
  - 1. Home/Parent
  - 2. Congregational
  - 3. School-to-Center
  
- C. ADMINISTRATION
  - 1. Early Childhood Governing Authority
  - 2. The Early Childhood Director
  
- D. PERSONNEL
  
- E. TEACHER/CHILD RELATIONS
  
- F. INDOOR/OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY
  
- G. CURRICULUM

## Sample Team Assignments

A sample listing of the responsibilities for a team of three members follows:

<b>Team Member</b>	<b>Major Responsibility Criteria</b>	<b>Minor Responsibility Criteria</b>
Mary (captain)	Statements Curriculum	Administration Relationships
Jennifer	Administration Personnel Teacher/Child Relations	Statements Health and Safety
Susan	Relationships Health and Safety	Curriculum Personnel Teacher/Child Relations

# Guiding and Directing the Activities of the Visiting Team

**N**ot all members of visiting teams are experienced in center accreditation reports, processes, or visits. Although it is expected that each member of the team rely primarily on professional knowledge, personal experience, insights, and common sense, the following suggestions may help each member to more fully realize the task before them. These suggestions are not meant to limit the professional observations of the site visitor, but to provide some guidance for those observations.

1. Be concerned primarily for **major issues** rather than looking for nits to be picked. Keep in mind the center's philosophy and **your purpose**: that of **helping the center**.
2. **Keep in mind** the comments made by the center's staff in its **self-study report**. At times you may want to affirm what is said in the self-study report. There is no excuse for not knowing what is said there.
3. The basic question for the site visit is to determine how effectively the early childhood center or the part of the center relates to the accreditation criteria that you have been assigned, effectively carries out its purposes, and meets the needs of its students. **Don't let little incidents or superficial concerns distract you** from the larger purpose of your visit and report.
4. **Every teacher** in the center **should be visited** by one or more members of the visiting team. However, the team members must be cautious not to evaluate individual teachers. The objective is to validate what has been written by the center, not evaluate individuals. Even when requested for an evaluation of their teaching, it is appropriate for the team members to indicate that their purpose is not to evaluate individuals but to observe the instructive process as a whole. **Any rating or specific evaluation of specific teachers is inappropriate** either by individual team members or by the team as a whole.
5. You are a professional early childhood educator. You have specific skills and abilities. Your knowledge and experiences allow you to tell what a good program is compared to a bad program. You have the ability to determine what is effective and what is not. **Do your task with confidence**, relying on the God-given abilities you have. You are not expected to be perfect, but expected to be capable.
6. Although each educator has specific opinions about educational thinking, it is not **the objective** of the visiting team **to impose any particular educational philosophy on the local staff**. Your personal opinions or educational philosophy are not appropriate in the report. It is your professional judgment and evaluation that is needed. You may wish to suggest alternatives to their practices and objectives, but not to indicate that these are weaknesses in the program. Centers are to be observed and evaluated on the basis of specific national criteria and standards and the local center's objectives, not individual, committee, or team opinions.
7. **Actively seek out information**. Don't wait for information to come to you. Information that is offered is sometimes the least credible or valuable in writing the visiting team report. Feel free to examine all parts of the center and to ask whatever professional questions you feel are appropriate. Aggressively, yet kindly and professionally, accomplish your task.
8. Time during the site visit is extremely limited. **Look for the specific answers** to questions you have and report those. Do not assume that you or anyone else will ever know all the answers to all the questions. It is possible that some of your assumptions based on your observations during the visit are inappropriate. All the visiting team is expected to do is to report on what they have observed while they were present and to make professional judgments on the basis of those observations.
9. **Stick to your assignment**. Look for information specifically related to your committee or individual assignment at the visit. You will not be able to observe everything or do every part of the report. Instead, try to determine the major questions or concerns about your areas of responsibility, then seek specific information to help you reach legitimate judgments.

10. As you observe and discuss those matters related to your areas of responsibility, you will come to tentative judgments. As soon as such judgments are made, check them out. **Evaluate** whether or not **your tentative judgments** are legitimate. Share them with other team members, but not with members of the local staff. However, by asking discreet questions you can check out your tentative judgments with the staff without letting them know what your judgments are.
11. Throughout the visit **be willing to modify your tentative judgments**. Keep on observing. Don't assume you know all the answers on the first day.
12. The art of questioning without revealing tentative judgments requires a great deal of careful thought. **Ask opening, not leading, questions** of the staff. Do not vent your judgments or evaluations. By all means, don't criticize what an individual tells you. However, do try to get that person to elaborate sufficiently so you have evidence indicating that what they have said is true.
13. **Watch and listen carefully**. Sometimes what you see or hear is done for a particular purpose. Be aware of those purposes and evaluate the obvious on the basis of the purposes.
14. **Evaluate** things you see or hear based **on the situation in which you see or hear them**. Some statements and actions are based totally on a specific situation and are not typical of the center operation.
15. Discuss the center and all your observations with colleagues on the team. **Share none of them with members of the staff at any time**. Compare your tentative findings with other insights from other team members.
16. Although you may have many suggestions that you would like to offer during the visit—or ideas for changing things—or appropriate observations—**withhold any comments until you write the report**. It is your role to listen and observe during the visit, not to suggest verbally or to make comments.
17. Use **available resources** to make sure your comments are legitimate. Resources include all exhibits made available with the self-study report, NLSA Notes of Clarification and other manuals, state curriculum and licensing guides, developmentally appropriate practices, and the students/children at the center.
18. Before you draw final conclusions, be sure you have sufficient facts to support them. If there is any doubt in your mind about something that you have assumed, **check it out again**. It is a great embarrassment to find that your conclusion is based upon biased or faulty information.
19. Already, when reading the self-study report, you probably have reached some tentative conclusions about what you will find at the center. Be careful that those tentative conclusions, made without ever seeing the center, are tested over and over again during your visit to the center. **Be sure your report is based upon your observations and judgments made during the site visit**.
20. As **recommendations** are considered, do your best to **make them realistic** in terms of the early childhood center. Sweeping, unrealistic recommendations are of no value. Only those recommendations that are somewhat realistic and possible are helpful. However, do not avoid making any recommendations for additional resources if the local center claims not to have sufficient funds. There are always appropriate goals for every center to reach.
21. Evaluate your conclusions, concerns and recommendations made in the self-study report. **At times** there will be conclusions and **recommendations** made there which **should be repeated in the site visit report**. In that way the early childhood center and its constituents may be helped in accomplishing their reasonable goals.
22. Remember that the accreditation process is a whole-center process. The total evaluation and recommendation about accreditation does not rest solely on one particular standard or section of standards. Your overall evaluation and observations are the bases of such decisions.

# Responsibilities of Team Members

## Individual Team Member

1. Be professional. Use professional judgment. Hold whatever information you receive in strictest confidence. Inquire, don't criticize. Make professional judgments, don't share them with staff.
2. Read and study the self-study report, taking special note of those parts that deal with your specific assignments.
3. Attend pre-visit meetings punctually. Spend all required time on the site visit. Do not schedule any other personal or professional business during the days spent on the site visit.
4. Serve on assigned committees. Chair some. Assist others.
5. Write your report professionally and on time.
6. Make observations and test those observations before making judgments. Test tentative judgments before writing the report.
7. Prepare the written reports for each of the committees to which you have been assigned major responsibility. This is to be done in cooperation with the other committee members.
8. Avoid criticisms of or reference to individual personalities or abilities.
9. Provide helpful, specific, realistic recommendations for each area of concern you note.
10. Be an active participant in the visiting team's oral report.
11. Pray for the center and your part in its accreditation.

## Those Assigned Major Responsibilities

1. For those criteria and standards for which you are responsible, consult with the other person with assigned responsibilities to the area. You are responsible for producing a well-written, informative report.
2. Schedule classroom visits for all team members. Make certain that all classrooms are visited.
3. Provide the written report to the visiting team as a whole for their approval.
4. Revise the report based on the visiting team's comments and present it in final form to the captain.
5. Be prepared to give a brief oral report to the center faculty at the end of the visit.
6. Provide an appropriate written report for your assigned areas to the team captain before leaving the center site.
7. Pray for your leadership and the team as a whole. Resolve to give witness to your faith throughout the visit.

## The Visiting Team As A Whole

1. Review the statements reflecting the center's philosophy and the objectives of the center.
2. Read and study the entire self-study report that has been prepared by the center.
3. Assist all members of the team to accomplish their tasks.
4. Become acquainted with the early childhood center, its congregation, and its community.
5. Prepare an overall evaluation of the center and state it in the "Report Summary." This overall evaluation will probably be the main portion of the exit report which the visiting team makes to the faculty and other persons on the last day of the visit.
6. Carefully evaluate all committee reports and make appropriate suggestions for changes. All parts of the visiting team report should be acknowledged and approved by the team as a whole. The final written report is a report of the whole team, not only of individuals serving on specific committees.

# The Visiting Team's Oral Report

The final task of the visiting team as a whole is to provide a brief exit (oral) report to the faculty and others invited by the school. All members of the visiting team are expected to be present for the exit report. The team captain will lead this report and, ordinarily, the team members will participate in the presentation. This report will be general in nature, perhaps highlighting the "overview" portions of each written report. Before the exit report, the team will prepare the "Report Summary." This report summary will be shared during the exit report. The only specific recommendation to be given at the exit report is the overall recommendation for or against accreditation. If the team has decided that the school has any "major deficiencies" that have a severe effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the school and/or endangers the health and safety of the school population, these should be listed. The "Report Summary" is to be the last page of the visiting team's written report. The team's exit report usually takes less than 45 minutes. After that time, a brief question-and-answer period may be held. If questions relate to specific recommendations or concerns, ask them to wait for the fully documented, carefully edited final written report that they will receive within two weeks.

## During the exit report be sure to:

1. Begin with prayer.
2. Thank the school and the individuals for their gracious hospitality. Be specific.
3. Comment on the cordiality with which you were received.
4. Share your personal appreciation.
5. Share something extra special you observed during the visit.
6. Compliment them on the effort and improvements that have occurred already.
7. Review the contents of the "overview" sections informally.
8. Let each member of the visiting team speak.
9. Read the team's "Report Summary."
10. Invite questions.
11. Explain the review process at the district and national levels.
12. If the school is not recommended for accreditation, explain the appeal process.
13. Let them know when they will receive the team's written report.
14. Remind the school's administrator to distribute that report, after they publish it, to the district accreditation commission at the district office, the team members, and others at their discretion. Assure them of the team's confidentiality.
15. Let them know when and how they will hear of the final approval of the team's recommendation by the national accreditation commission. (Ordinarily, they will receive a letter from the NLSA office in late summer, with the certificate presented by the district education executive or NLSA commissioner in the fall.)
16. Encourage them to realize that school improvement is never over, and that you hope the team's recommendations will help as they continue that process and prepare annual reports.
17. Close on a positive, happy note. Assure them of their quality (if such assurance is justified).
18. Close with prayer, the Lord's benediction, and the Doxology.

# The Visiting Team's Written Report

Writing the report is the most important part of the visiting team's task. Therefore the report must be written carefully. The way it is written has great influence upon the morale and future progress of the early childhood center.

The report for each section should contain four distinct parts:

- A. Overview
- B. Strengths
- C. Concerns
- D. Recommendations

For each strength and concern, the source of information should be noted by the code:

- 1 = self-study report
- 2 = interview
- 3 = observation
- 4 = written documentation

Every concern should numerically refer to the standard(s) to which it relates.

## Overview

The overview should be an objective statement of what is, devoid of any concerns or recommendations. It should provide a brief, general look at this part of the center.

## Strengths

It is important that the section on strengths includes specific parts of the center which deserve note and commendation. It is vital that the report contain nearly as many strengths as concerns where possible. The purpose of the report is to help, not to criticize unduly or to leave them with a feeling of despair.

## Concerns

Without indicating that a particular facet of the center is a weakness or a limitation, it is appropriate that the report indicate concerns of the committee. Avoid relating to insignificant details and focus on major issues. Base your specific concerns on specific observations. Relate each concern to an NLSA standard. This may be the most vital part of the report since it indicates places where continued improvement may occur.

## Recommendations

For every concern there should be at least one corresponding recommendation. A report that lists only concerns does not provide help for improvement. Recommendations are based on the team's professional judgment and experience. They are not requirements for the center to implement. Rather, they are suggestions that the center is to address as it continues to improve itself.

The report is to be written by members of each committee, then approved by the visiting team as a whole. The team captain has responsibility for final editing, but the local center has responsibility for typing, duplicating, and distributing the report. The center is not authorized to make any changes not approved by the visiting team captain. Copies of the report should be sent to each member of the site visit team, the district office and the NLSA office.

## Suggestions for Writing the Report

1. Keep the four parts of the report (Overview, Strengths, Concerns, Recommendations) separate.
2. Within each section of your report, number each of the strengths, concerns, and recommendations.
3. Write carefully, using complete sentences and correct grammar and spelling. The quality of the report helps to convey the importance of the accreditation process.
4. Submit your reports to the team captain before you leave the facility.
5. Make your report objective rather than personal.
6. Follow the format and examples of the attached samples of reports.
7. Cite the source of information (observation, documentation, interview, self-study) for the strengths and concerns in your report. Cite the applicable standard and indicator of success.
8. Be sure the "Report Summary" (the last page of the report) includes the team's recommendation about accreditation and any outstanding strengths or major deficiencies. A major deficiency is any condition that is based on an NLSA standard which has a severe negative effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the center, and/or endangers the health and safety of the center's population. The deficiency must be remedied by the early childhood center within the time parameters prescribed by the team (no longer than one year).

# Final Suggestions for the Team Captain as the Report is Prepared

1. Make sure the report is edited so that it reads well and is accurate.
2. Provide your final edits to the center within two weeks after the visit. If possible, enter edits onto a disk or CD to ensure accuracy of transcription.
3. Be sure to include a standard disclaimer on the front page of the report. A suggested disclaimer is given on page 19.
4. As part of the final report, be sure to indicate whether or not the center is recommended for National Lutheran School Accreditation. The whole team should agree with this recommendation before the visit ends.
5. Write a brief one-page summary of the report, including the team's recommendation for accreditation. Include a few outstanding strengths and identify major deficiencies (if any). A major deficiency is any condition that is based on an NLSA standard which has a severe negative effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the center, and/or endangers the health and safety of the center's population.
6. Include the list of team members, with some brief biographical information about each one.
7. Include the "General Information" section of the self-study prepared by the center. This is required for all copies of the Visiting Team Report.

# Exemplary School Status

## ***Exemplary: serving as a model or pattern, worthy of imitation.***

NLSA team visits assure that a school provides quality, Christian education and is committed to ongoing improvement. Occasionally a visiting team observes a school that exceeds quality expectations and exhibits unique “Best Practices.” A visiting team may nominate a school for Exemplary Recognition when the school demonstrates a high degree of excellence by complying with at least 90 percent of the indicators of school success used to quantify compliance with required national accreditation standards in each standard area. But the visiting team must also observe that the school is:

- Christ-centered and service driven.
- Documenting an outstanding record of student academic preparation and success.
- Perceived positively in its community.
- Serving satisfied stakeholders.
- Demonstrating innovative leadership through specific “Best Practices.”

Accredited School Exemplary Status is achieved after a school is found worthy and nominated by an NLSA visiting team or its district education official. Schools may only be nominated in the year of their NLSA team visit. Lutheran schools do not apply for this special award but are recognized for the quality of their programs and established “Best Practices.” The National Accreditation Commission reviews and endorses nominations received from the districts. Schools nominated may then apply for special recognition of exemplary status. Additional supporting documentation and an additional site validation visit assures that the school is worthy of special recognition. Accreditation with Exemplary Status is awarded for school year following the granting of a school’s new accreditation cycle.

Schools may not apply for Exemplary Status. They are found worthy of the accomplishment through observations made by the visiting team at the time of the site visit. The Exemplary School process will allow a school that is selected to intentionally share its “Best Practices” with other LCMS schools in our system. It encourages Lutheran schools to work together, as a system, in order to improve and grow.

In order to nominate an accredited school, the team captain must submit a nomination letter to NLSA Director Terry Schmidt. The letter should indicate specific “Best Practices” observed by the visiting team and assure that the school has met 90 percent of the indicators of success in each standard area. The letter should be prepared separately from the visiting team report and sent to the NLSA director with a copy to the district education executive.

# Checklist for Team Captains

## A. BEFORE THE VISIT:

- 1. Contact the center's administrator upon accepting the assignment as captain.
- 2. Confer with the administrator regarding the visiting team selection.
- 3. Contact visiting team members as soon as possible after they have accepted the assignment. Include the Assignment Preference Form (page 24) and a Visitation Team Biography Form (page 27).
- 4. Set up a detailed time schedule covering the visit in terms of the center's daily schedule.
- 5. Establish and maintain communication with the center concerning the intended visit.
- 6. Arrange with the administrator for a suitable visiting team meeting room.
- 7. If you haven't received your copy of the self-study one month before the scheduled site visit, you must reschedule the visit so you and your team members get no less than one month to review it before the visit takes place.
- 8. If possible, hold a meeting of the visiting team on site approximately one month before the visit.
- 9. Arrange visit details with the administrator (meals, supplies, secretarial help, etc.).
- 10. Arrange, with the administrator, suitable housing for the committee, if necessary.
- 11. Inform each member of the visiting team of the names of the other members and their biographical information.
- 12. Make committee assignments to the members of the team.
- 13. Ask visiting team members to read the center's Self-Study Report carefully.
- 14. Study all parts of the center's Self-Study Report carefully.
- 15. Prepare tentative agendas for your meetings with the team. Be sure to include worship opportunities.

## B. DURING THE VISIT:

- 1. Review with the visiting team the purpose, procedures, and precautions listed elsewhere in this manual.
- 2. Review team member responsibilities and suggest classroom visiting and interview schedules.
- 3. Provide guidance to individual team members as they carry out their tasks.
- 4. Visit and observe. Be a model team member. Don't have long meetings behind closed doors. Be readily available at all times.
- 5. Share your notes with other team members. Review their notes as requested.
- 6. Model questions, techniques, unobtrusive classroom observations, organized note taking, and educational professionalism.
- 7. Lead (don't dominate) the team's discussion of the tentative philosophy report. Use it as a model for other discussions and reports!
- 8. Share high standards of report acceptability with the team. Hurried, inadequate reports are not acceptable!
- 9. Advise, counsel, listen to, and keep team members on task.
- 10. Consider how the visiting team report will be prepared. Is a typist needed? Will the group provide their own laptops and associated software so reports may be shared?
- 11. At the beginning of each day, review the team's schedule for that day.
- 12. Be sure that each teacher is observed at least twice, by different team members. Be sure that each subject is observed in at least two different classrooms.
- 13. Arrange for either the whole team or appropriate team members to meet briefly with the pastor(s).
- 14. Discourage disrupting the education of students during the visit.
- 15. Review rough drafts of committee reports before they are typed for first consideration by the entire team.
- 16. Lead the discussion following each committee report.
- 17. Help committees as they revise tentative reports according to team discussions.

- \_\_\_18. Lead a brief discussion of revised reports to the team to gain consensus approval.
- \_\_\_19. Lead the team in identifying any major deficiencies. A major deficiency is any condition that is based on an NLSA standard which has a severe negative effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the center, and/or endangers the health and safety of the center population. List these, if any, in the final report summary written by the team captain and indicate the time limit for them to be addressed, never longer than one year.
- \_\_\_20. Collect all final reports before dismissing the team.
- \_\_\_21. Lead the presentation of the verbal team exit report.
- \_\_\_22. Personally thank everyone for their cooperation.
- \_\_\_23. Give team members an "Evaluation of the Team Captain by Team Members" form and ask them to send it to the national NLSA office.

### **C. AFTER THE VISIT**

- \_\_\_ 1. Thank the team members.
- \_\_\_ 2. Thank the centers that released team members for the site visit.
- \_\_\_ 3. Thank the center for its hospitality.
- \_\_\_ 4. Edit the team report as needed without changing its substance.
- \_\_\_ 5. Within two weeks, send a final copy of the team report to the center.
- \_\_\_ 6. Review the final distribution of the team report.
- \_\_\_ 7. Instruct the administrator to send a copy of the final visiting team report to each team member and the required number to the District Accreditation Commission.
- \_\_\_ 8. Give the administrator a copy of "Center Evaluation of Consultant" form and ask the administrator to send them to the NLSA office in St. Louis.
- \_\_\_ 9. Remind the administrator of the responsibility of ongoing improvement and an annual report due to the district and national office May 15 of each year.
- \_\_\_10. Be available to the center administrator to answer questions and offer clarifications on items in the team report.

# SAMPLES

## Scheduling the Team Visit

A normal visitation team site visit for early childhood programs lasts two full days. The following schedule sample illustrates a typical visit schedule when the initial meeting has occurred before the site visit. If the initial visit was not completed before the actual site visit, an extra half-day should be scheduled.

### **Day One:**

- Opening of center through close
- Faculty devotions with the Visiting Team
- Briefing with administrator and team captain
- Classroom observations, team meetings
- Lunch with students and faculty
- Team meeting
- Classroom observations, meetings with invited guests
- Meeting with the faculty
- Team meeting
- Reception with the Governing Board
- Dinner together (visiting team and invited guests)

### **Day Two:**

- Team meeting
- Collaboration, verifying concerns and legitimacy of recommendations
- Report writing and sharing
- Lunch, write and share reports
- Exit report to administrator and invited guests

# Team Captain's Letter to Members of the Visiting Team

Dear Friends:

No doubt about it! We have been asked to perform an important task as we visit Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool May 1 and 2. Our task is to help the preschool improve its program for the benefit of the children it serves. We will do this by observing, discussing and recording information that we hope will be helpful.

Little Lambs Preschool has already done extensive self-evaluation. At our meeting at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, April 3, you will receive a copy of its self-evaluation report. This self-study comprises an essential element of the accreditation process. We are to compare the self-study report based on NLSA standards with our on-site observations and, on that basis, make recommendations for the center. We are also to determine whether or not Little Lambs should be recommended for National Lutheran School Accreditation.

In order to facilitate our work, our team must be subdivided. All our committee reports will be discussed by the whole team, but the individual reports will be written entirely by the committees. Each of you will be given major responsibility for some committees and minor responsibility for others. Enclosed is an "Assignment Preference Form." It will help me make committee assignments. Please return it to me right away. I will share tentative committee assignments with you on April 3.

Thank you for giving of your time and of yourself to serve on this visiting team. As your team captain, I hope that I can be of assistance to each of you and can facilitate the work of the team so that it can be done as effectively as possible.

I look forward to meeting each of you in person on the third. I promise to dismiss that meeting no later than 10 p.m. As a reminder, keep track of your mileage. You will be reimbursed for your mileage at whatever rate is in effect for that calendar year.

Serving the Master Teacher,

Team Captain

# Assignment Preference Form

Please indicate your degree of interest for each of the National Lutheran School Accreditation sections below. On each blank write a "1" for high interest, a "2" or "3" for some interest, or a "4" for little interest. Your responses will help determine the best possible committee assignments for the visiting team. Think prayerfully and carefully about your preferences and expertise before you complete this form. Please understand that some assignments may be made against your preferences in order to complete team committee assignments. Thank you for your willingness to serve.

\_\_\_\_A. STATEMENTS

1. Philosophy
2. Mission and Ministry

\_\_\_\_B. RELATIONSHIPS

1. Home/Parent
2. Congregational
3. School Center-to-Center

\_\_\_\_C. ADMINISTRATION

1. Early Childhood Governing Authority Board
2. The Early Childhood Director

\_\_\_\_D. PERSONNEL

\_\_\_\_E. TEACHER/CHILD RELATIONS

\_\_\_\_F. INDOOR/OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY

\_\_\_\_G. CURRICULUM

Team Member \_\_\_\_\_ Home/Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_ Office Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**RETURN THIS FORM PROMPTLY TO THE VISITING TEAM CAPTAIN.**

# Sample Report Section—Foreword

## FOREWORD

Becoming accredited is a strenuous process. Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool and its administration are to be highly commended for their efforts in this accreditation process. The self-study document and the various arrangements for the accreditation team were done exceptionally well. It is the hope and prayer of the members of the visiting team that the enclosed document is one that is accurate and helpful for the continued improvement of the center.

The committee hereby expresses sincere gratitude to the staff and students at Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool for the opportunity to serve on the visiting team and for the many kindnesses shown to us during our visit. Each of us on the committee has grown as a result of the experience.

Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool obviously has an excellent preschool program. This was reflected not only in its self-study but also in the comments and observations of the visiting team. We were delighted with the whole climate of the preschool. The teachers at this center represent our Christian faith to the students and to the community very effectively.

This report is carefully written and includes specific recommendations that should be considered seriously by the center and the supporting congregations. Not every suggestion needs to be followed, but each should be considered.

The three members of the visiting team were grouped into seven subcommittees. This report combines the talent of all members of the team and of the subcommittees. The report has been written and edited by the team as a whole, with only minor editing done by the team captain. Each part of this report follows the following format:

1. **Overview.** This provides an introduction and a few observations in general terms about that particular aspect of the school program.
2. **Strengths.** These are the most obvious strengths of the topic of the report.
3. **Concerns.** The committee felt that the school should be aware of these items. They may not be weaknesses, but they gave members of the committee some concern.
4. **Recommendations.** Wherever possible, specific, practical suggestions have been made to help to remedy the concerns expressed.

The team captain and the consultant pledge their continued support and assistance should you care to call upon us in the implementation process.

May the Lord richly bless the faculty and constituents of Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool so that, with the Lord's help, they might continue to proclaim His Gospel ever more effectively through their early childhood center.

Team Captain

## ***Limitations on the Distribution, Use, and Scope of this Document***

It is the official intent of the National Lutheran Center Accreditation Commission that this report be considered a privileged document, to be submitted by the captain of the visiting team directly to the administration of the early childhood center. The distribution of the report and its availability for public consideration rest solely in the hands of the center's administration.

Neither the captain nor the other members of the visiting team are authorized to release any of the information contained in this report without the approval of the administration of the center.

The primary purpose of the visiting team has been to examine the educational ministry of the center, including courses of study, learning materials, student needs and interests, staffing, and facilities. The visiting team has attempted to assess the effectiveness of the center's total program in meeting the educational objectives the center has established for itself and in meeting national NLSA standards.

It has not been the purpose of the visiting team to evaluate individual teacher performance. The use of this report as an official assessment of any staff person's professional competency would be in violation of the process and the intent under which the center evaluation was conducted. Such use would be inherently invalid since at no time during the team visit has the team been concerned with the evaluation of individual teacher performance.

# Visiting Team Report

## A. Statements

### Overview

Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool has a written mission and purpose statement that reflects the loving care that our Savior has for children in its community. The mission statement is the same statement that is used by Our Shepherd Lutheran Church, the organization that sponsors Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool.

### Strengths

*(1 = Self-study, 2 = Interview, 3 = Observation, 4 = Written documentation)*

1. Little Lambs Lutheran Preschool has a written mission and philosophy statement. (1,2,4)
2. The mission statement has been approved and is being used by its sponsoring congregation. (1,2)
3. The governing board and pastor have approved and support the stated philosophy of the center. (1,2)
4. The philosophy statement reflects the values of a solid Christian education. (1,3)

### Concerns and Recommendations

*(1 = Self-study, 2 = Interview, 3 = Observation, 4 = Written documentation)*

1. *(Concern)* **Written publications do not include the preschool's mission statement.**

*(1,2,4)* (Standard A2d)

*(Recommendation)* Include your mission statement on every piece of literature that promotes your preschool to the community and congregation.

2. *(Concern)* **The mission statement is not posted in classrooms, hallways or in the church.**

*(1,3)* (Standard A2d)

*(Recommendation)* Post your mission statement in classrooms, in the office and in the church narthex as a reminder of the preschool's mission to its community.

# Sample: Report Summary

The visitation team unanimously recommends that \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Preschool, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, receive National Lutheran School Accreditation.

## OUTSTANDING STRENGTHS

1. The Philosophy and Mission Statements are Christ-centered and are evident in daily practice.
2. The congregation has a strong commitment to Christian education which is reflected in the financial support of the school by covering utilities, maintenance, secretarial help and budget shortfalls.
3. It is extremely evident that \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Preschool is a warm, caring environment where children are nurtured in God's Word by faith-filled teachers and assistants. A strong rapport exists between staff, students, parents and administration. The pastor is a strong supporter of the school.
4. The administrator has a strong commitment to Lutheran education and young children. She provides leadership in curriculum development and supports collaboration.
5. The building reflects a caring attitude. Christian witness is displayed in murals, bulletin boards and windows. Jesus is evident to whoever enters the building. The center is attractively appointed and well-maintained.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Preschool has a strong reputation in the community. It is well-known and is the largest preschool in town.

## PRIMARY CONCERNS

1. While there is ongoing ministry taking place during the school day, there is no formal evangelism program for reaching out to the unchurched and unbaptized families whose children attend the school.
2. The play area is not fenced in. The close proximity of the Illinois State Waterway presents a potentially hazardous condition to young children.
3. The salary schedule needs to be reviewed to fairly compensate all workers.

## MAJOR CONCERNS

1. The doors where chemicals and cleaning supplies are store are not kept locked. Give written verification of compliance to the NID District Commissioner by June 1, 2009.

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

# Required Visiting Team Biographical Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Present Position \_\_\_\_\_

Education \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Expertise \_\_\_\_\_

Previous experience on an accreditation team:

<b>Center</b>	<b>Accreditation Process</b>	<b>Year</b>
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# Consultant Evaluation Form

## National Lutheran Center Accreditation Center Evaluation of Consultant

Within a week after the departure of the Visiting Team, the center administrator should make a copy of and complete the following evaluation of the consultant. This evaluation should be sent along with the Visiting Team Report to your district education executive and the NLSA office in St. Louis. Circle or underline the word or phase which best defines your agreement with each statement. Feel free to make additional comments below as well.

Name of Consultant \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of Duties \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Center/Location (city/state) \_\_\_\_\_

1. The preliminary contact was prompt, helpful, and positive.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

2. The initial visit by the consultant helped set a tentative timeline, organize for the process, and plan for exhibits that require advance preparation, planning, and considerable time.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

3. Regular contact was maintained by phone or personal visit to review process or goals.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

4. The consultant was helpful in suggesting appropriate team captain candidates.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

5. The consultant reviewed and shared helpful encouragement and suggestions on sections of the report.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

6. The consultant met with the steering committee (or was willing to) to discuss progress and quality while ensuring the participation of a wide variety of center constituents in the process.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

7. The consultant gave advice in selecting team members, preparing documents for the team, and encouraged continued progress and quality of process.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

8. The consultant reviewed all materials before reproduction and distribution to assure completeness and readiness for the site visits.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

9. The consultant was positive and professional in helping the center prepare for the site visit.

Definitely      Generally      Somewhat      No

10. The consultant was knowledgeable and helpful in sharing the process for distributing reports, announcing readiness to the team captain, and offering ongoing assistance following accreditation.

Definitely

Generally

Somewhat

No

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Administrator                      Phone Number                      Date

# National Lutheran School Accreditation Evaluation of the Team Captain by Team Members

At the conclusion of the visit, each team member is asked to complete this evaluation and return it to the district education executive and NLSA office in St. Louis. Circle or underline the word which defines your agreement with each statement. Feel free to make additional comments below as well.

Name of Team Captain \_\_\_\_\_ Dates of Team Visit \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Center/Location (city/state) \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |            |           |          |    |
|---|------------|-----------|----------|----|
| 1. Communication from the captain was shared with me within a few weeks of my accepting the team position.  | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 2. A detailed time schedule was distributed.  | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 3. The team meeting room was adequate.  | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 4. Details of the visit were well planned (meals, supplies, secretarial help).  | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 5. Housing arrangements were suitable.  | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 6. Basic information regarding fellow team members was shared.  | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 7. Assignments were made ahead of time and appropriately explained.   | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 8. My responsibilities as a team member were clearly explained.   | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 9. I was given guidance as to how to carry out my assigned tasks.   | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 10. Questioning techniques, observation procedures, report writing techniques, performance standards, note taking, and educational professionalism were explained and demonstrated. | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 11. The team captain facilitated the discussion and review of the various committee reports.  | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |
| 12. Consensus of approval was sought.   | Definitely | Generally | Somewhat | No |

13. How could the team captain prepare you to better fulfill your role as a team member?

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14. If you were asked to serve on another visiting team, would you elect to serve? Why?

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Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Team Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**National Lutheran School Accreditation**

1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295  
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