

Questions & Answers



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I. What Is National Lutheran School Accreditation?

National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) is a process of self evaluation followed by a visit of objective observers to confirm the school's quality based on national standards and assures ongoing improvement. It is a completely voluntary process that is available for every school operated by a single congregation, by an association of congregations, or by a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod or the Lutheran Church—Canada. NLSA is a national, rigorous accrediting process designed to evaluate schools on the basis of their unique purposes as Lutheran schools. It helps schools evaluate not only their academic quality, but especially the spiritual dimension of the school. The standards and report forms are based on other accrediting programs, both secular and religious. NLSA is supervised by the National Accreditation Commission, made up of representatives from the various participating districts of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church—Canada. The process has been authorized and approved by the Board for District and Congregational Services of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is a service of the LCMS School Ministry.

II. What Are the Purposes of National Lutheran School Accreditation?

The purposes of NLSA are to:

- A. Help Lutheran schools—early childhood, elementary, and secondary—to improve.
- B. Assure a level of quality based on national standards for all accredited Lutheran schools.
- C. Help all Lutheran schools and centers to evaluate their quality based on their unique purposes and on national standards.
- D. Give appropriate recognition to those schools that complete the process successfully.

III. Why Should a Lutheran School Apply for NLSA?

- A. NLSA is a process that helps the school to improve.
- B. Self study and evaluation, based on a set of standards, improve the quality of the school.
- C. The school gains greater self respect.
- D. The process and its results may be used as a public relations/marketing tool by the school.
- E. Accreditation publicly acknowledges the quality of the school.
- F. National accreditation provides accountability to your community, constituents, and congregations.
- G. Accreditation gives evidence of professionalism by the school and its staff and of an objective evaluation by educational professionals not personally involved in the school.
- H. It helps the school evaluate and improve its unique ministry as a Lutheran school.
- I. NLSA is international in scope, supported by a group of approximately 2,200 schools.
- J. NLSA assures parents who move that a quality Lutheran school program exists wherever NLSA accreditation is found.

The accreditation that results from the successful culmination of an NLSA process is a high honor and should be perceived as the **highest accreditation** a Lutheran school could achieve because it **evaluates the true nature and purpose of the school**.

Most accrediting programs are secular in nature, sponsored by the state, province, regional accrediting agency, or other secular organization. These agencies and their accreditation standards and processes do not concern themselves with the spiritual dimension of schools. The main purpose of Lutheran schools is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior. This is done through worship, religion classes, and the permeation of faith throughout the day in each subject. The result of secular self evaluation is to evaluate and improve all aspects of the school except for that which is most important. NLSA helps schools to evaluate and improve that also.

IV. Does a Lutheran School Have To Be Accredited?

NLSA accreditation is completely voluntary. No school is required to gain it. NLSA does not imply or determine recognition by the church body. It does not result in discrimination or prejudice against those schools and districts that choose not to be involved, but it encourages them to participate.

V. Which Schools Are Eligible for National Lutheran School Accreditation?

All schools and early childhood centers, including child care agencies, that are recognized by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church—Canada may apply. Early childhood, elementary, secondary and any combination of these levels are eligible. All levels and sizes of schools have equal opportunity to become accredited.

VI. How Does NLSA Allow for Differences of Levels of Schools?

Lutheran schools may reflect a variety of levels in their structure. NLSA has specifically designed appropriate accreditation processes for three levels of accreditation: Early Childhood, Elementary and High Schools. Schools have a number of accreditation options depending on their structure.

Rigorous and appropriate standards exist for early childhood centers. These standards and the NLSA accreditation process may be used to evaluate a stand-alone early childhood center or a center attached to another school.

Standards Based (SB) and Ongoing Improvement (OI) processes are appropriate for elementary and high schools. Adaptations and suggestions for evaluating and reporting plans and progress on some standards need to be made to allow for differences in these levels. Administrators of elementary schools and high schools are provided with specific manuals to help them provide leadership for their accreditation process.

Schools that serve a variety of levels may choose to become accredited using a single Standards Based or Ongoing Improvement process. They also have the option of completing specific accreditation processes simultaneously with their partner schools. When processes are undertaken simultaneously each school level will follow all required accreditation components including self-study, team visit and the submission of annual reports documenting ongoing improvement. Consult with your district officials to determine which option will best serve your school.

VII. Which Types of Reports Are Required?

There are two basic kinds of reports required: the Self Study Report and the Cumulative Annual Report.

- A. The Self Study Report is the result of a year-long self evaluation of every aspect of the school, based on the school's philosophy and NLSA standards.

There are two self-study processes: the Standards Based process and the Ongoing Improvement re-accreditation process. If a school seeks dual accreditation, the school may choose to use the regional agency's (or NAEYC's) self study process as its primary accrediting process, but must supplement the study with NLSA's "Guide for Evaluating the Christian Mission" report.

- B. The Cumulative Annual Report documents the school's progress toward further self improvement, based on recommendations made by the NLSA visiting team and the school's School Improvement Plan (SIP). Each recommendation made by the visiting team must be given careful consideration by the school at some time during the five-year cycle of accreditation. If the Ongoing Improvement process was used, the school must consider actions related to each Indicator of Success rated as less than fully met. **IN ADDITION, OI SCHOOLS MUST DOCUMENT PROGRESS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL'S SIP IN THE CUMULATIVE ANNUAL REPORT. THIS REPORT MUST BE SUBMITTED TO THE DISTRICT OFFICE BEFORE MAY 15 EACH YEAR IN ORDER FOR THE SCHOOL TO RETAIN ITS ACCREDITATION STATUS. ANNUAL FEES ARE DUE IN THE NATIONAL OFFICE BY OCT. 15. NO ANNUAL FEE OR ANNUAL REPORT IS DUE IN THE YEAR AN APPLICATION FEE AND SELF-STUDY REPORT HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED. EACH YEAR ONE REPORT MUST BE SUBMITTED AND ONE FEE PAID.**

VIII. What Is the Relationship Between NLSA and Other Accrediting Programs?

Lutheran schools frequently desire accreditation by NLSA and another accrediting body. Many high schools and elementary schools want accreditation by a regional agency (NCA, SACS, WASC, NASC, or MSACS) in addition to NLSA. Early childhood centers often want also NAEYC accreditation. NLSA has forms and/or agreements to allow for dual accreditation with these agencies.

Many other accrediting bodies of smaller scope (state, local, or professional) have formal agreements with NLSA, but in most cases these agreements have been negotiated by LCMS district leaders and are unique to that state. In those states in which state accreditation is required, schools applying for NLSA are expected to have achieved, or be in the process of achieving that accreditation.

Schools that also desire accreditation by NCA, SACS, NASC, or MSACS should apply directly to NLSA and indicate the desire for dual accreditation on the NLSA application form. Because the dual accreditation process with AdvanceEd (including former NCA and SACS) is presently under revision, the national office will send the most current information for how to use the NLSA materials and what else is necessary.

Schools that desire accreditation by another legitimate accrediting body may use that body's materials and team (with one appointed by NLSA) as the school's primary accrediting instrument. However, since that body's accreditation process is secular, the school must complete the NLSA "Guide for Evaluating the Christian Mission of a Lutheran School" and submit this supplemental report along with the school's whole self-study report and visiting team report to NLSA.

In all cases, the school must complete only one self-study report and have one visiting team to become accredited by both accreditation agencies.

IX. What Is the Relationship Between NLSA and the Districts of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church—Canada?

All applications for NLSA must be signed and submitted by the district education executive of the district in which the school is located. At all steps in the accreditation process, the district education executive will be kept informed.

In order to receive national accreditation, the schools located in districts that have district accreditation available must achieve district accreditation before or in the same process in which they are considered for national accreditation.

It is expected that every LCMS district will establish a District Accreditation Commission to supervise the national accreditation process in that district. It is expected that the District Accreditation Commission will review the ongoing progress of accredited schools in their district through careful monitoring of cumulative annual reports submitted by their schools. District Accreditation Commissions will also review the applications of candidate school in relation to national standards and processes before national accreditation is recommended. The commission will attest by its recommendation that the national standards are kept in essence by the recommended schools. The district education executive will appoint this commission and the District Commissioner. The district commission will:

1. Train team captains.
2. Recommend team members for NLSA Director's appointment.
3. Determine if the school qualifies for NLSA accreditation and make a specific recommendation regarding a candidate school's accreditation status.
4. Submit recommendations for NLSA accreditation to the national commission.
5. Award the NLSA accreditation certificates to the schools.
6. Review school Cumulative Annual Reports and indicate school progress to the NLSA office.
7. Maintain and use an accurate list of trained consultants and captains serving their district.
8. Be responsible for submitting accurate accreditation information and reports to the national office.

X. How Does a School Apply for NLSA?

- A. The school administrator expresses initial interest to the District Education Executive or to the NLSA office (1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122).
- B. The district executive or the NLSA office will send initial information and an application form to the school.
- C. Schools will review the initial information. If interested, they will complete three copies of the application and send them, along with the application fee, to the District Education Executive for his or her signature. Additional district accreditation fees and forms may be required.
- D. The district executive will sign the application forms, keep one copy, send two copies to the NLSA office along with the school's application fee, and suggest a trained consultant for the school. The team visit must occur within three years from the time of application to NLSA or a second application must be filed and another fee must be paid.
- E. Upon receipt of the application and fee NLSA will send a set of materials to enable the school to complete the NLSA process and the director will appoint an NLSA consultant for the school. The application and fee must be received by the NLSA office at least nine months before the site visit occurs.

XI. Is It Necessary for a School to Fulfill the Requirements of Each Standard?

Compliance with 11 national standards is required for accredited Lutheran schools. The standards are to be evaluated in relationship to the school's unique mission and vision. Standards compliance is evaluated through the evaluation of Indicators of Success identified in the Self-study document. A school can determine if it is eligible for accreditation by examining its compliance with the indicators of success using the rating scale that applies. Schools that do not measure up to the level of compliance with Required Standards should work immediately toward improving the quality of their school before inviting the visiting team to evaluate its program. Close communication with the school's accreditation consultant will assure the school's success in the accreditation process.

XII. What Is the Nature of the Team that Will Visit Our School?

At the end of the self study process for both the Ongoing Improvement and Standards Based processes as well as the "Guide for Evaluating" supplement, a team of educators will visit the school to evaluate the school's self study report and to make recommendations for the improvement of the school.

A minimum of three team members will visit the school. To save expenses, team members within commuting distance of the school ordinarily will be appointed.

Visiting teams may be made up of individuals representing more than one accreditation process, so there will be one visit resulting in accreditation from more than one agency. If the team is formed by the other body, at least one team member must be appointed by and represent NLSA.

The site visit shall last for no less than two full school days for the Standards Based (SB) process or one full day for the Ongoing Improvement (OI) process. Team members will be recruited and suggested by the school administrator, recommended by the District Accreditation Commission, and appointed by the NLSA Director.

A. For the Standards Based Process:

Team members will be selected from the following types:

1. The captain will be selected from the approved list of trained potential captains, approved by the District Accreditation Commission.
2. A teacher or administrator from a non LCMS Christian school.
3. A teacher or administrator from another LCMS school. It is suggested that at least one teacher from an LCMS (or LCC) school which is not accredited be recommended and appointed to each visiting team.
4. A public school teacher or administrator. (This person may be an LCMS congregation member.)
5. An LCMS pastor of another congregation with a school.
6. A specialist, college professor, or staff person from a district or national LCMS office.

The following minimum number of site visitors will be required, chosen from the suggested members listed above, according to the size of the school to be visited. Additional team members from any types of members may be selected in addition to these minimal requirements.

Students	Minimum Team	Suggested member types
1 to 150	4	1, 2, 3, 4
151 to 250	5	1, 2, 3, 3, 4
251 to 350	6	1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 5
351 or more	7	1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, 6

B. For the Ongoing Improvement Process:

The Ongoing Improvement initial visit team will be made of three members. These same team members will make up the Mid-cycle Visiting Team that will visit the school 3-4 years after the initial visit. The three team members are:

1. The Captain (selected from the approved, district list of trained potential Ongoing Improvement Team Captains).
2. The NLSA School Consultant.
3. A visitor selected by the school to help the school in the field/areas to be addressed in the SIP. This person need not have experience with NLSA.

All three members of the Visiting Team will be selected and recruited by the local school, approved by the District Accreditation Commission, and appointed by the NLSA Executive Director.

Careful attention should be given to the selection of visiting team members in order to have competency and balance. Members of the visiting team should know the characteristics of a good school program and represent the level of the school being visited. Official letters of appointment should be sent by the school administrator to all visiting team members after appointment by the NLSA Director.

When a Lutheran early childhood center or other level of school seeks accreditation by NAEYC or another secular agency and NLSA, the center/school will be required to complete the NLSA "Guide for Evaluating the Christian Mission" as part of its self study report. One member of the visiting team must be appointed by NLSA.

C. For the Early Childhood Process:

The early childhood initial team will include a minimum of three members. The three team members are:

1. The Trained Team Captain (selected from the approved, district list of trained Early Childhood Team Captains)
2. An early childhood educator from another LCMS ECC. It is suggested that at least one teacher from an LCMS ECC which is not accredited be recommended and appointed to each visiting team.
3. An early childhood educator selected by the ECC with specific expertise in areas of concern identified in the school's self-study report. This person need not have experience with NLSA.

All three members of the Visiting Team will be selected and recruited by the local school, approved by the District Accreditation Commission, and appointed by the NLSA Director.

Careful attention should be given to the selection of visiting team members in order to have competency and balance. Members of the visiting team should know the characteristics of a good school program and represent the level of the school being visited. The school administrator should send official letters of appointment to each visiting team member after appointment by the NLSA Director.

When a Lutheran ECC seeks accreditation by NAEYC or another secular agency and NLSA, the center/school will be required to complete the NLSA "Guide for Evaluating the Christian Mission" as part of its self study report. One member of the visiting team must be appointed by NLSA

XIII. Who Reviews the Self-Study Report?

The visiting team must receive the self study report and "Guide for Evaluating" report one month before the visit and review it to determine if a visit is appropriate. A visit will be delayed if the team does not receive the report one full month before the scheduled visit. A copy of the report must be given also to the district office and to the NLSA office.

XIV. What Type of Report Will Be Made by the Visiting Team?

The Standards Based visiting team, Early Childhood visiting team and “Guide for Evaluating” team will report the observed strengths, concerns, and recommendations for each of the sections of the standards. These will be reviewed in light of the local school’s philosophy and the NLSA standards.

The Ongoing Improvement team report includes a checklist of standards compliance and recommendations for improvement based on the standards, and recommendations related to the School Improvement Plan.

All teams will make a recommendation about NLSA accreditation for the school, and provide supporting statements. The school will send a final copy of the team report to each member of the visiting team, the district office and the District Accreditation Commission.

XV. Who Determines the Accreditation Status of the School?

The visiting team is responsible for a recommendation for or against accreditation as part of its report. The district commission will review the team’s report and recommend specific action to the National Accreditation Commission. The NLSA National Accreditation Commission will make the final decision at its annual meeting in August.

XVI. What If We Disagree with Any Level of Recommendation?

The school may appeal the recommendation of the visiting team to the District Accreditation Commission. The school may make a written appeal to the District Accreditation Commission, or to the chairperson of the National Accreditation Commission. The National Accreditation Commission’s decision is final.

XVII. What Will NLSA Cost?

A. Self Study Costs

1. Much time and effort
2. Secretarial time
3. Reproducing the report for the visiting team members, the district commission, and the NLSA office.

B. Visiting Team Expenses

1. Transportation (usually mileage)
2. Meals during the visit
3. Incidentals (coffee, paper clips, etc.)
4. Housing (if needed)
5. Substitute teachers (ordinarily this is considered a professional courtesy by the team members’ schools, but sometimes compensation for substitute teachers is requested).
6. Producing and reproducing the visiting team’s report. Copies shall be sent to each member of the team, the district commission, and the NLSA office.

C. Fees

1. An NLSA application fee of \$325.
2. An annual fee of \$325, beginning one year after the site visit.
3. Possible district accreditation fees.

XVIII. What Is the Result of the NLSA Process?

The school will receive a certificate of accreditation at a public event of the congregation or school, presented by the district education executive, or a representative of the district Accreditation Commission. The school will benefit from the improvement it has made through the self evaluation process. The school constituents will become more aware of the quality of the school as verified by national standards and processes. The school will have a variety of recommendations to guide further self-study and improvement. The school will be able to announce it has been accredited by a legitimate, international accrediting process. Accredited schools will be required to submit a Cumulative Annual Report to their district office, documenting their continued improvement, during the five-year term of accreditation.

XIX. Under What Circumstances Might National Accreditation Be Revoked?

A. Violations that may lead to revocation:

1. Fees not paid within three months of the due date.
2. Annual reports not submitted within three months of the due date.
3. No evidence of continued improvement based on visiting team report recommendations.
4. Major deficiencies noted by the visiting team or the District Accreditation Commission which have not been removed within the prescribed time (no longer than two years).
5. Major deficiencies which have been identified after the site visit by the District Accreditation Commission and have not been removed within the Commission's prescribed time frame.

B. Action to be taken

1. Revocation will be done automatically by the NLSA Director for violations (1) and (2), after one warning given two months after the due date.
2. Action on violations (3), (4), and (5) will be taken by the NLSA National Commission at its annual meeting. These actions may be taken as a result of recommendation by a District Accreditation Commission, but a district recommendation is not required prior to action by the national commission.

XX. What Is the National Accreditation Commission?

The National Accreditation Commission membership consists of one voting representative (commissioner) from each participating LCMS district. This commissioner shall be sent at district expense to the annual national commission meeting. If districts choose to send a regional representative (representing and sponsored by more than one district), that representative will have one vote. Since the national commission meets annually, recommendations must be received from the districts two months (June 15) before the commission meeting in order to be considered at that meeting.

A. The primary responsibilities of the National Accreditation Commission are to:

1. Grant accreditation to schools recommended by the districts.
2. Consider and adopt revisions in the NLSA process or standards, or any other materials produced by NLSA.
3. Supervise other matters related to national accreditation for LCMS schools.
4. Provide representation from the districts to the national commission and from the national commission to the districts.
5. When necessary, consider revocation of accreditation from schools in violation of NLSA requirements.

B. The national commission will:

1. Meet at least annually.
2. Determine the budget and fees of NLSA and NAC.
3. Be funded by the districts, by NLSA fees, and by outside agencies where possible.
4. Provide contact persons for those districts and schools that are interested in NLSA.
5. Assist districts with the implementation of the NLSA process.
6. Elect NLSA leaders.
7. Determine operating procedures for NLSA and the NAC.