

**National Lutheran School Accreditation**  
Evidence-Based Accreditation  
Administrator Manual

*Revised September 2021*



# MISSION, PURPOSE, VISION and VALUES

## Mission

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

## Purpose

- Help all Lutheran schools improve.
- Help all Lutheran schools evaluate themselves based on their unique purposes.
- Assure a level of quality for accredited Lutheran schools based on national standards.
- Give appropriate recognition to those schools that complete the process successfully.

## Vision

The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, “Go and make disciples,” includes ministering to children. He also encourages, “Let the children come to Me.” Lutheran schools serve children and families by providing God-pleasing, quality learning experiences, adult-child relationships and nurturing environments.

National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) provides a service that empowers schools to develop and improve high-quality, Christ-centered education through a voluntary process.

## Values

- Lutheran Culture
- Educational Excellence
- Continuing Improvement
- Innovation

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## I. THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LEADER

Lutheran schools share the Gospel with children and families and strive to operate with the highest standards of academic quality. National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) is a strategic tool that is used to evaluate a school's overall effectiveness in the areas of purpose and quality. A school that chooses to participate in NLSA demonstrates, through the preparation of a Self-Study Report, that its stated mission is accomplished and that it complies with NLSA requirements. It is the impetus for positive change and ongoing evaluation based on national standards and the school's unique mission. No other process accomplishes this task as effectively.

The purpose of the *Administrator Manual* is to provide a detailed overview of the NLSA process relating to the school accreditation leader's work, from beginning to end. A meaningful and successful accreditation process requires exceptional leadership. However, the school accreditation process is not required to be administered by the school administrator. A highly effective teacher can coordinate the leadership of the process. With the support of the school leader, the teacher leader can facilitate the details of the accreditation process.

Note: Additional directions for conducting the Self-Study process are provided in the *NLSA Evidence-Based Self-Study Report for Lutheran Schools*.

### A. Preparing the School for a Self-Study Process

NLSA accreditation is an evaluation and improvement process that addresses the whole school. All programs and levels of a school can be evaluated using a single NLSA process. However, schools containing more than one level (early childhood, elementary or high school) may request the use of separate accreditation processes. This is accomplished by submitting separate applications for each level of the school. Schools that incorporate a variety of levels have found separate, but related, processes to be relevant when conducting the Self-Study process and schools considering this option are advised to consult with district accreditation officials to determine what process would best serve the school.

Accreditation is a significant undertaking. It requires careful reflection and evaluation related to every aspect of the school's program and schools who have evidence in place will have the time to complete the process successfully. Introductory materials outlining the NLSA process are available through the LCMS district office, online at [LuthEd.org](http://LuthEd.org) or directly from the NLSA national office. The materials include a resource, *Getting Ready for Accreditation*, and schools applying for accreditation for the first time are advised to have a majority of the included items completed before beginning a Self-Study process.

For re-accrediting schools, preparation of the Self-Study involves a careful analysis of the Standards and the assembly of documents and evidence that support Indicator ratings. It is an expectation that schools applying for a reaccreditation process currently comply with all the Required and General Indicators of Success.

An NLSA Consultant is assigned to every school applying for accreditation and they serve as an advocate and resource for the success of the accreditation process. From the beginning of the process to its conclusion, a minimum of nine months to one year is to be allotted to complete the Self-Study process.

## B. Administering the Self-Study Process

### 1. Challenges in Leading the Self-Study Process

NLSA is designed to involve school leaders, board or governing authority members, teachers, parents, students and congregational members. It is important that the Steering Committee and subcommittee members put aside any biases and complete the assigned areas with objectivity and open minds. Completion of the work is to be influenced by evidence and practices in place at the school.

It is also important for those involved with the Self-Study process to understand that they are involved in a school-wide assessment process that does not include the evaluation of individual teacher effectiveness. Teacher supervision is the job of school administration and it does not, in any way, fall within the purview of those who serve on subcommittees or the Steering Committee.

### 2. Evaluating School Purpose

Every accredited Lutheran school must be able to present a scriptural rationale for its existence, clearly stating its purpose and defining the preferred future condition of its organization. Documents that define and support the school's purpose are to be presented clearly, concisely and not conflict with the mission statement of the sponsoring congregation or organization.

In evaluating the relevance of its purpose, a school determines how the stated purpose is reflected in the overall operation of the school, including administration, instruction, co-curricular activities and learner outcomes. Clearly defined documentation and evidence provide additional support and direction for the accomplishment of the school's purpose. Given that these concepts guide and direct all programs and activities at the school, they must be well-defined and clearly understood by all stakeholders.

The accreditation Self-Study begins with the evaluation of the school's mission including a careful review of the documentation and practices that support and reflect the school's purpose. The process of completing *Standard 1: Purpose*, is undertaken with the entire teaching staff, the school board or governing authority and the Steering Committee. The work with the "Purpose" Standard establishes the tone for the accreditation process and models the procedure for completing the rest of the Standard sections in the Self-Study Report.

### 3. Process Requirements

NLSA has established requirements associated with each of the seven Standard areas. The **Required Indicators of Success** describe the practices that are essential for Lutheran schools seeking accreditation. To be accredited in good standing, the school must be able to answer "YES" to all required indicators and provide evidence and practices to support the answers.

To be accredited in good standing, **required evidence** and **documentation** must be present and engaged in the school. The school's assigned accreditation Consultant is charged to verify that required evidence

and documentation is in place. Conducting a Validation Team Visit without required items in place may result in the denial of an accreditation award. It is essential that all required evidence and documentation is well-prepared and reflects the actual condition at the school.

During the NLSA process, it may become apparent that some facets of the school need to be improved. The desirable improvements that can be done quickly should be done as part of the process, not just delayed for future action. School improvement is to be intentionally pursued, not just discussed, as part of the NLSA process.

#### 4. Potential Evidence and Practices

Evidence and practices build a case of support for how well a school engages the **General Indicators of Success**. The Self-Study Report provides a list of suggestions of potential evidence and practices for a school to consider as it evaluates its compliance within each Standard area. The more significant the evidence and practices, the higher the school can rate its accomplishments.

Evidence consists of what the school has on file to guide the school (documents, policies, schedules, meeting minutes, written curriculum, etc.). Practices are what the school does to implement the evidence (training, teaching methods, supervision, building inspections, etc.). A compliance rating for each General Indicator of Success is determined by subcommittees through careful evaluation of the evidence and practices that are assembled in support of the indicator. Schools are not limited to the items of evidence and practices listed in the Self-Study Report and are advised to list all practices and evidence present at the school.

#### 5. Determining Indicator Ratings

Subcommittees start their work by securing the **Required Evidence** and evaluating the school's compliance with the **Required Indicators of Success**. All required items must be present for the school to be accredited in good standing. If "NO" is marked for any Required Indicator, it is strongly suggested that the school develop the Required Indicator and correct the deficiency before moving forward with the accreditation process.

Next, a careful analysis of the school's status using the **General Indicators of Success** is conducted. The General Indicators are specifically designed for each Standard and are written, not only for clarification, but to stimulate thought, reflection and self-evaluation by the subcommittees.

The work of the subcommittee is to assemble the evidence and practices that support the overall rating of the Standard that aligns with the actual condition of the school. The more significant the practices and their impact related to the attainment of the indicator, the higher the rating. After gathering evidence and citing practices and the results, the subcommittee arrives at consensus about the correct benchmark rating for each General Indicator of Success.

The Operational rating of "3" is defined for each General indicator of Success. To comply with the Standard, the expectation is that a school will average "3" (Operational) for all General Indicators of Success assigned to the Standard. General Indicators of Success ranked as "2" (Emerging) or "1" (Not

Evident) are required to be addressed in a well-developed School Action Plan that is implemented over the course the school's accreditation cycle.

## 6. Curriculum

A written curriculum is an NLSA Required Standard. Curriculum development is an ongoing process for schools, and for many, it is typically one of the most challenging parts of the accreditation process. Accredited schools continuously use a variety of assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the curricular outcomes and make the necessary adjustments in teaching strategies and instruction based on the assessment data. The curriculum becomes a living document that guides and directs the instructive process. Teachers are continuously engaged with the curriculum as it establishes the direction for teaching and learning.

Schools have options related to curriculum development. Many LCMS districts have taken the lead on curriculum development for schools, several other districts are involved with joint curriculum mapping projects and regional associations of Lutheran schools are also involved in curriculum work. Curriculum mapping and the Concordia Curriculum series (Concordia Publishing House) are also acceptable resources for curriculum development.

Schools are advised to confer with the assigned NLSA consultant to determine whether the written curriculum meets the NLSA requirement for submission as evidence for the Standard. At a minimum, the NLSA expectation for curriculum design includes written objectives (learning outcomes) for every grade level in every subject area designated by the Standard area and faith integration is a required expectation related to curriculum development in Lutheran schools.

## 7. NLSA Classroom Observation Tool

The NLSA *Classroom Observation Tool* has been developed to assist school leaders and Validation Team members to observe, identify and document evidence of classroom environments that are conducive to student learning and growth. Each section of the *Tool* is designed to specifically review the following classroom areas: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, Faith Integration and Technology.

Currently, NLSA does not require a school to use the *Classroom Observation Tool* as evidence or in classrooms prior to a Validation Team Visit. Also, a Validation Team may choose not to use the *Tool* based on time constraints or other individual circumstances. However, NLSA strongly encourages a school and the Validation Team to implement the *Classroom Observation Tool* in order to improve student learning and reflect upon classroom environment and practices.

If a school chooses to utilize the *Classroom Observation Tool*, the documentation of such implementation can be used as evidence in the Self-Study process to demonstrate the reflective and growth processes adopted by the school.

If used by the Validation Team, ratings from the *Classroom Observation Tool* will not impact the overall accreditation rating of the school at this time. However, the *Classroom Observation Tool* ratings will be included in the final Validation Team Report so that school administrators and other stakeholders are aware of the observations of the Validation Team at the time of the school visit.



## II. LEADING THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

An NLSA Self-Study provides an opportunity for a school to honestly and objectively reflect upon its quality through a careful and honest evaluation of the Required and General Indicators of Success that quantify compliance with National Standards for Lutheran schools. The process helps the school identify its greatest strengths and areas of concern.

### A. Self-Study Steering Committee

The school selects five to eight people, representing various members of the school community to serve on a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee's primary task is to plan, guide and coordinate all things related to the Self-Study process. It is suggested that committee membership includes parents, teachers, administrator(s), pastor(s), other church staff members and board of education or governing authority members.

The tasks of the Steering Committee include but are not limited to:

- Appointing the members of all subcommittees.
- Establishing a schedule for the Self-Study process.
- Establishing a method and schedule for subcommittees to report to the faculty and Steering Committee.
- Insuring that surveys are administered to the appropriate groups.
- Securing materials and supplies for the subcommittees.
- Editing and approving the final written work of all subcommittees.
- Submitting written reports to the consultant as soon as they are completed.
- Assuring that the school complies with all Required Indicators of Success of the Self Study Report.
- Assuring that the Standards section of the Self-Study Report is complete per NLSA directives.
- Directing actions that bring the school into compliance with accreditation standards before the Self-Study process is completed.
- Determining the school's readiness for a Validation Team Visit based upon compliance with the required NLSA Standards and Indicators of Success.
- Coordinating the development of the school action plan with recommendations from the subcommittees prior to the site visit and the Validation Team Visit members after the site visit.

## B. Self-Study Subcommittees

Subcommittees are responsible for the completion of the Standards. The work begins with Standard 1. With involvement of the faculty, Steering Committee and governing authority, Standard 1 is completed. Then, each subcommittee can complete its assigned Standard. Membership of subcommittees include representation from the faculty, the governing authority, parents and school constituents with expertise or knowledge in the assigned Standard.

Responsibilities of the subcommittee include but are not limited to:

- Completing the written responses for the Required Responses in paragraph form.
- Gathering the Required Evidence for the Standard and attaching them to the Self-Study.
- Determining whether the Required Indicators of Success are met and providing the evidence.
- Gathering evidence and practices to verify that each benchmark is met.
- Evaluating each General Indicator of Success and providing a rating based on the level of completion of the benchmarks.
- Providing written comments for all General Indicators of Success. A bullet point list of evidence and practices is acceptable to verify the rating of an Indicator.
- Completing the Summary and Response Actions section.
- Organizing all evidence for the Validation Team to review at the time of the Validation Team Visit.
- Including recommendations for each Standard that is rated a “1” (Not Evident) or “2” (Emerging) in the preliminary School Action Plan.
- Including recommendations for improvement on Indicators rated “3” (Operational) that will benefit the school as it seeks to improve.
- Submitting completed reports to the Steering Committee for final approval.

## C. Required Surveys

NLSA-developed survey questions are correlated with the seven Standard areas and are required to be used at the beginning of the Self-Study process. As a part of the needs assessment process, a school may determine the method of administering the survey templates. Additional questions may be added to the template, but no questions can be modified or removed. Survey questions are developed for the following four groups:

- Parents
- Teacher
- Students: Grades 1 – 3
- Students: Grades 4 – 8

## D. Timeline

A general timeline for the NLSA process is listed below. Consult with you assigned consultant regarding specific deadlines before proceeding with the accreditation process.

- January – June Submit Application
- June – August Form Steering Committee
- September Establish Subcommittees and Administer Surveys
- October to January Committee Reports and Collect Exhibits
- February Finalize Self-Study
- March Organize Evidence and Documentation
- April Validation Team Visit
- May Send Validation Team Visit Report to the District
- June District Accreditation Commission Meetings
- July National Accreditation Commission Meeting

Note: A detailed sample accreditation timeline is available in the NLSA resources on LuthEd.org.

## E. The Self-Study Report

The Self-Study Report Form is used as a tool for self-evaluation and overall school improvement and is the culmination of a school’s Self-Study process. A required component of the Self-Study Report is a summary of general information describing the school. This information is usually assembled by the school accreditation leader and reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee.

A second component of the Self-Study Report involves the seven Standards. Each of the Standards are addressed and considered independently with the understanding that all Standards are guided and directed by the school’s purpose. The findings of the subcommittees are compiled into a single Self-Study Report which reflects the actual conditions found at the school at the time of the study.

The seven Standard areas follow a consistent reporting format that includes:

### Potential Evidence

The determination of each rating is based on the actual condition of the school related to the evidence and practices in place. Potential evidence documents provide support as the subcommittee determines the rating for each General Indicator of Success. The list of potential evidence included in the Self-Study Report provides suggestions but is not all-inclusive. Schools are to review the list of potential evidence and determine those present at the school. Evidence found in addition to the list may be presented. This evidence, or lack thereof, will assist the subcommittee in reaching an agreement on a rating. Potential evidence does not need to be included with the Self-Study Report but should be available for the Validation Team to review.

### Potential Practices

Like potential evidence, potential practices are identified to demonstrate how well the school is meeting the Indicators. A practice describes something that is being done at the school. It is often supported with written documentation, but it can be observed in classroom activities or

daily routines. Schools are to identify the practices currently in place. A list of suggested practices is included in the Self-Study Report, but it is not all inclusive. The identification of practices allows the subcommittee to arrive at a rating that reflects the condition currently in place at the school. It is the combination of evidence and practices that provide the support for an Indicator rating.

#### Respond to the Following Questions

Narrative responses are to be written for every question at the beginning of each Standard area. The answers to these questions provide a school with the opportunity to communicate how it meets the needs of students. This also allows the school to list activities, programs and practices that are unique to the school's learning environment.

#### Required Evidence

Required Evidence must be attached to the Self-Study Report and used to assign a rating and complete the written comments for each General Indicator of Success.

#### Required Indicators of Success

The school must respond "YES" to Required Indicators of Success to be accredited in good standing.

#### General Indicators of Success

General Indicators of Success help the school to quantify its compliance with the Required Standards. The assignment of a rating for each General Indicator of Success is determined by the evidence and the practices that support the rating. Each General Indicator is to be rated by the subcommittee, using the criterion below with the corresponding point value. A written response is required for every Indicator in the "Comments" section.

**Highly Functional (4) — This is an area of outstanding strength of the school.** It not only meets ALL the benchmarks related to the General Indicator of Success but is supported by extensive documentation and/or observable practices that exceed expectations related to the indicator. This indicator establishes practices for other Lutheran schools to consider. The Validation Team verifies that these practices and/or documentation exceed the Operational (3) level.

**Operational (3) — This is the expected rating for a strong Lutheran school.** ALL benchmarks must be met completely for this indicator to be considered Operational. The condition is supported with documentation and/or observable practices that support the rating.

**Emerging (2) — Improvement is required in this area.** If one or more benchmarks are not fully met, the rating must be Emerging. This indicator is recognized as important by the school but is inconsistently applied. Any benchmark not fully met must be addressed in the School Action Plan.

**Not Evident (1) — There is observable conflict or deficiency with this indicator at the school.** A majority of the expected benchmarks are not met or addressed with sufficient practices, evidence or documentation. This rating may result in the assignment of Provisional Status. This must be addressed in the School Action Plan.

#### Summary and Response Actions

Subcommittees carry on the primary work of evaluating the school's compliance with the assigned Standards through a thoughtful and purposeful evaluation of each of the General Indicators of Success. The Summary and Response Actions are determined from the results of the evaluation and are related to the school's strengths and the items needing improvement.

## F. Powerful Practices

The school may identify any practice (no more than three) that may be considered a Powerful Practice. A Powerful Practice is rated a "4" (Highly Functional) and exceeds the normal school operation. Schools may meet all accreditation Standards without identifying a Powerful Practice.

## G. School Shepherd Award

A school may identify its pastor as one deserving of recognition for support of the school. The Validation Team verifies that a nominee:

- Has completed a minimum of three (3) years of service at the church and school (birth through Grade 12) in which he serves
- Understands and articulates a clear philosophy of Lutheran education
- Values and supports school administrator(s) and actively participates in team ministry in the church and school community
- Engages and participates in school activities
- Works well with the governing body of the school and/or parent advisory associations
- Champions the school

## H. Developing the School Action Plan

Accreditation is an ongoing process that does not end with the self-evaluation process. Evaluation is a stimulating force that leads to school improvement for the benefit of its students and community. Accreditation requires that a school identifies its strengths and concerns in every Standard area. The strengths are to be celebrated and areas of concern are to be considered and addressed strategically. It is the responsibility of the Steering Committee to develop a preliminary School Action Plan using the concerns identified during the Self-Study process. The Validation Team will also add recommendations to the School Action Plan to generate a blueprint for ongoing improvement.

The School Action Plan is the school's corrective response to concerns that are identified during the accreditation process. A preliminary School Action Plan is developed by the school as a part of the Self-Study process and included with the school's Self-Study document. The plan is designed to improve

student learning, enhance ministry or develop and improve programs, facilities and/or services for the benefit of all students. The preliminary School Action Plan includes the following:

- A well-organized plan for school improvement that relates to the NLSA Standards by focusing on improved student learning, ministry enhancement or improvements related to programs, policies or facilities.
- Goals that are related to findings from the Self-Study process and are consistent with the school's purpose.
- Strategies that are aligned with the school action goals and provide the vehicle (ideas, plans, actions and steps) for accomplishing the goals within a prescribed timeframe (targeted date).
- Strategies are specific and measurable.
- The target school year identifying when each strategy is to be addressed in the School Action Plan.
- A representative group that is responsible for initiating, planning, coordinating and evaluating the progress of the school's action plan.

The recommendations of the Validation Team include specific ways to enhance the preliminary School Action Plan. The school must respond to each concern expressed by the Validation Team. The concerns and recommendations are to be integrated into the final School Action Plan. School Action Plan goals are developed with the following components:

#### **School Action Goals**

- Goals are statements of desired future conditions consistent with the school's mission and NLSA Standards based on concerns identified by the school in its Self-Study process.
- Short-range goals are accomplished in two years or less. Long-range goals take 3-4 years to accomplish.

#### **Strategies**

- Strategies are aligned with School Action goals and provide the vehicle (ideas, plans, actions, steps) for accomplishing the goals within a prescribed timeframe (targeted date). Strategies are specific enough to be measurable.

A school that links an accreditation process with an intentional School Action Plan, and continually uses it to better serve its students, is a school on a pathway to success.

## **I. Preparing the Final Documents**

The Self-Study is to be prepared in a professional manner, speaking well of the school. Self-Study reports can be delivered in a format in which the school is comfortable. Many schools choose to print and organize the Report in a three-ring binder with dividers for each Standard while other schools have moved to a digital or online delivery system. Additionally, several District offices have established protocols regarding the delivery of the Self-Study Report. Regardless of the format, the final Self-Study Report must include the following:

- School Profile
- Self-Study
- School Action Plan

- Required Evidence and Practices

The school may remove redundant sections of the Self-Study Report from the final Self-Study Report. Please note that Part 1 of the Self-Study is NOT submitted to the Validation Team members, District Accreditation Commission, National Accreditation Commission, or the LCMS School Ministry Office. Part 2 of the Self-Study is the “working document” and IS required to be submitted to the Validation Team members and the District Accreditation Commission. Copies of the completed Self-Study Report are to be sent to the following individuals no later than one month in advance of the scheduled Validation Team Visit:

- All Validation Team Members.
- NLSA Consultant
- District Accreditation Commission or LCMS District Office

### III. HOSTING THE VALIDATION TEAM VISIT

National Lutheran School Accreditation requires a site visit conducted by a team of qualified outside observers. The purpose of the Validation Team Visit is to verify that the Self-Study Report reflects the actual practices in place at the school. Through a review of documentation, interviews and observations, Validation Team members evaluate the school's compliance with the required Standards and makes recommendations for further improvement.

The school leader, Consultant and district officials work collaboratively to ensure that the Validation Team members are selected following NLSA procedures. Advanced communication and planning with district officials and the Team Captain is essential for the Validation Team to complete its work efficiently and effectively.

#### A. NLSA Conflict of Interest Policy

The National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) *Conflict of Interest Policy and Code of Ethical Behavior* ensures the integrity of the entire accreditation process. Individuals interacting with the process (Validation Team, Team Captain, School Consultant, District Accreditation Commission, National Accreditation Commission, and NLSA National Office Staff) must not have any real or perceived financial, institutional, or personal interest(s) in the outcome of the Validation Team Report or overall Accreditation process that would impact their ability to be objective and independent throughout the entire process.

Prior to the appointment of a Validation Team, all members of the prospective team must complete an NLSA *Conflict of Interest Policy and Code of Ethical Behavior Agreement*. This is to be submitted, alongside the list of prospective Team member names for approval and appointment, to the NLSA director and will be kept on file in the NLSA National Office until the completion of the school's NLSA accreditation process.

#### B. Selecting the Validation Team Members

The work of the Validation Team is led by a Team Captain who has experience and training in the NLSA protocol. Careful attention is given to the selection of team members for competency and balance. Members of the Validation Team should know the characteristics of a good school program and exemplify the level leadership of the school being visited.

The Team Captain and the Validation Team members are selected in a collaborative process with the school administrator, the Consultant and district accreditation officials. The school's accreditation leader discusses the selection of a Team Captain with appropriate district accreditation leaders and the selection of a trained Team Captain should take place a minimum of six months before the visit. After the Team Captain is selected and confirmed, additional team members are added. Continual communication is advised between school leaders and district accreditation leaders as the team members are appointed.

The Validation Team consists of the Team Captain and five (5) additional members, for a total of six (6) team members. Serving as a member of a Validation Team is a highly professional undertaking. It is important to secure team members who are professional, cooperative, helpful and constructive. A



minimum of two (2) members of the Validation Team shall have previous experience with NLSA serving as a member of a Validation Team or as a faculty member of a school that has completed or is currently involved in the accreditation process. The remaining balance of the Validation Team may be selected from Lutheran schools that have not completed the NLSA process.

Team members may be selected using the following criteria:

- A teacher or administrator from a non-LCMS Christian school.
- Two teachers or administrators from another LCMS school.
- A public school educator or administrator. (LCMS congregation member when possible).
- A pastor of another LCMS congregation with a school.

All prospective Validation Team members must be approved by the NLSA director. Ensure that the list of Team members and their completed *Conflict of Interest Policy and Code of Ethical Behavior Agreement* statements are submitted to the NLSA director no later than four (4) weeks prior to the Validation Team Visit, although earlier submission for approval is recommended. Once approved, the school administrator is to send a letter of appointment to all Validation Team members welcoming them to the Team and providing any details pertinent to the upcoming visit.

## C. Preparing the School for the Validation Team Visit

The school accreditation leader and/or the Steering Committee prepare for the Validation Team Visit. This provides consistent and professional leadership throughout the Self-Study process and the Validation Team Visit. The school accreditation leader is an encourager for the members of the faculty and the accreditation committee in all aspects of the Self-Study process.

The school accreditation leader is expected to complete the following checklist to assure complete readiness for the Validation Team Visit:

- With the NLSA Consultant, establish a schedule for the completion of the Self-Study Report.
- Submit all written work to the NLSA Consultant for approval.
- With the NLSA Consultant and District Education Executive, select Validation Team members.
- Request appointment of the list of Validation Team members from the NLSA director.
- Arrange for specific Validation Team needs, including meeting space, technology, meals, transportation and hotel accommodations (when necessary).
- Distribute materials about the school to every team member not less than one month before the Validation Team Visit. These materials include: copies of the Self-Study Report, directions for reaching the school, parking arrangements and instructions for entering the building. (If the Self-Study report is not received one month before the planned visit, the Validation Team Visit must be postponed.)

After the Validation Team Visit, within ten calendar days of receiving the final copy of the Validation Team Report, and no later than May 15, the school accreditation leader is required submit an electronic copy of their Self-Study Report and the Validation Team Report to the District Accreditation Commission or District office.

## D. The Work of the Validation Team

The work of the Validation Team is intensive. During the visit, the Validation Team is called upon to determine a comprehensive view of the school to evaluate and prepare the Validation Team Report.

As a part of the work, team members visit classrooms to validate student engagement in the teaching/learning environment, and through observation, assess whether Indicator ratings reported in the Self-Study Report reflect the actual practice at the school. It is not the purpose of the team members to make judgments about teacher effectiveness during the classroom visits as teacher supervision is the responsibility of the school. The school accreditation leader is to assure teachers that they are not being evaluated when team members observe their classrooms.

The final task of the Validation Team is to provide a brief oral exit report for the faculty and other individuals invited by the school. The Team Captain leads the report, and often, the team members participate in the presentation. Outstanding strengths of the school are highlighted as the report is general in nature and only serves to outline the forthcoming written report. The Team Captain shares the report summary. Should there be major deficiencies (conditions that may have a severe effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the school and/or endanger the health and safety of the school population), the Team Captain will share these deficiencies. The only specific recommendation given during the exit report is the overall recommendation for or against accreditation. The exit report should not exceed 45 minutes and after that time, a brief question-and-answer period may be held.

## IV. LEVELS OF ACCREDITATION

Most schools receive the recommendation for **Accredited in Good Standing** status. A school receiving this status reports progress on its School Action Plan yearly on a Cumulative Annual Report Form beginning the year following the Validation Team Visit.

Some schools receive the recommendation for **Provisional Accreditation** status. A provisionally accredited school fails to comply with the Required Standards or Indicators of Success and/or is cited with major deficiencies by the Validation Team. These schools must show progress on the identified concerns within a designated time frame, usually one year. The District Accreditation Commission reports the progress of provisionally accredited schools to the LCMS National Accreditation Commission, and failure to address the concerns cited for provisional accreditation may result in the loss of accreditation.

## V. EXPECTATIONS FOR CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT

Accreditation is a continuous process that does not end with the Validation Team visit. Evaluation is a stimulating force resulting in ongoing school improvement for the benefit of students and the community. After the school receives the written report from the Validation Team, the administrator, staff, governing authority board members and the accreditation Steering Committee are to carefully review the written report.

It is important that the school leader communicates any errors or misinterpretations of facts that may appear in the report to the Team Captain of the Validation Team. This should not be done in a defensive manner, but in a studied, professional way. Both the District Accreditation Commission (DAC) and the National Accreditation Commission (NAC) are interested in avoiding errors and welcome the explanations that can improve the accuracy and completeness of the report.

After identifying concerns and recommendations of the Validation Team, the preliminary School Action Plan is revisited. The school has written a preliminary School Action Plan based on the findings of the school's Self-Study Report. New concerns noted by the Validation Team are also considered and addressed in the School Action Plan. When concerns noted by the school through its Self-Study are merged and consolidated with the concerns and recommendations of the Validation Team, a seamless School Action Plan is created that guides and directs the improvement efforts of the school throughout its next accreditation cycle.

The School Action Plan is a comprehensive document listing each goal with targeted completion dates and the individuals and/or groups responsible for addressing them. Continuous follow-up by the school leadership and faculty is necessary to address and complete the goals.

The extent to which the school's stakeholders are made aware of the complete Validation Team Report is the responsibility of the school. To maintain momentum for continuous change and improvement, it is critical that everyone who is invested in the success of the school understands the School Action Plan which will result in the continuous improvement of the school. The school may wish to retain its accreditation Steering Committee to follow through with the work related to the School Action Plan.

Members of the school community invest much time, energy and effort in a successful NLSA process. Schools are encouraged to report on the accomplishments related to the School Action Plan regularly at faculty meetings, with the school governing authority board and interested members of the community. The accomplishment of every targeted action is a reason to celebrate.

## **VI. ONGOING SCHOOL ACCREDITATION ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE DISTRICT AND NATIONAL OFFICES**

### **A. School Action Plan**

The School Action Plan is the tool that makes it possible for a school to describe and document its progress. The school administrator is required to annually report the progress related to the accomplishment of the goals of the School Action Plan to the District Accreditation Commission (DAC). This level of accountability insures ongoing progress for district accreditation officials.

The School Action Plan is the strategic document used to engage the school in a continuous improvement process. Actions that are accomplished are recorded in the School Action Plan. The school accreditation leader is accountable for the school's progress reported on the School Action Plan and its annual submission to the District Accreditation Commission (DAC). Every spring, it is the responsibility of the DAC to review the updated School Action Plan submitted by the school. The commission (DAC), in turn, confirms the ongoing progress to the National Accreditation Commission (NAC).

### **B. Annual Fee**

Every accredited school is also required to submit an annual fee. Invoices are mailed to every accredited school in September and the fee is due and payable to the NLSA office in St. Louis no later than October 1 each year.

The completion and submission of the School Action Plan documenting the school's ongoing improvement and the annual fee are both required for maintaining the school's accreditation status. Failure to comply will result in the revocation of the school's accreditation status.

### **C. Substantive Changes in Accredited Schools**

For a variety of reasons during an accreditation cycle, a school may choose to make substantive changes in its offerings that significantly alter the status of its school. A school must initiate a substantive change procedure with NLSA if the school experiences a change in any of the following:

- Physical location of school
- Addition of or transfer of programs to new or different buildings
- Grade level configuration
- Type of school
- Change in ownership and/or control
- Change in legal status or form of control of the institution
- Opening a branch or classroom extension
- Change in established mission or objectives

- Addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, in terms of either the content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when NLSA most recently evaluated the institution.

If a substantive change occurs in an accredited school, continuation of accredited status shall require:

- Reporting the changes, in writing, to the respective district office;
- Approval by the district office of the changes and submission of the written changes to the NLSA National Office;
- Approval of the change by the Director of NLSA and;
- A one-day onsite visit by a District Accreditation Commission representative confirming continued standard compliance.

All changes should be reported, in writing, by the school within one month of the established change, to its local district office for review and submission to the National Office. The required visit by the District Accreditation Commission representative must occur within 90 days of the implementation of the change. The district is responsible to report any findings related to their visit to the NLSA National Office within two weeks of the conclusion of their visit.

## VII. SAMPLE STANDARD REPORT

### STANDARD 4: PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL

*A qualified and competent staff serves the school.*

#### Overview

Maintaining a qualified and competent staff is an essential quality related to an accredited Lutheran school. The performance of the instructional, administrative and auxiliary personnel, functioning as a unit, should reflect the stated philosophy and objectives of the school.

#### Potential Evidence

Potential evidentiary documents provide support as the subcommittee determines the rating for each General Indicator of Success. The list includes suggestions for the documentation, but is not all-inclusive. The school reviews the list of potential evidence and determines those established at the school. Additional evidence that is not listed in the potential listing may also be presented. Evidence or lack thereof, assists the school in reaching an agreement on a rating. Potential evidence does not need to be included with the Self-Study, but is to be available for the Validation Team to review.

- Faculty handbook
- Job descriptions for all non-administrative school positions
- Teacher portfolios
- Professional personnel files related to teacher qualifications and competency
- List of teachers' professional organization memberships
- Policy and procedures for preparing volunteers
- Policies related to support staff
- Current salary and benefit scale
- Qualification and training of school volunteers
- New teacher induction guidelines
- Survey results

#### Potential Practices

Like potential evidence, potential practices are identified to demonstrate how well the school is meeting the indicators. A practice describes something that is being done at the school. It is often supported with written documentation, but it can be observed in classroom activities or daily routines. Schools are to identify the

practices in place. A list of suggested practices is included in the Self-Study Report, but it is not all-inclusive. The identification of practices allows the subcommittee to arrive at a rating that reflects the condition currently in place at the school. It is the combination of evidence and practices that provide the support for an indicator rating.

- Peer-to-peer observations
- Teacher visits and observations in other schools
- Participation in accreditation work
- Effective vetting, preparation and support for new teachers
- Teacher home visits



## Required Responses

*Narrative responses are to be written for all questions at the beginning of each Standard area and included in the Self-Study document. The answers to these questions provide a school with the opportunity to describe how it meets the needs of students. This also allows the school to indicate any nuances that are unique to the school's learning environment.*

**1. State the educational requirements and/or credentials for professional personnel.**

All teachers are certified for the positions that they teach. If teachers are from another state, they are required by School Board policy to obtain state certification within three years.

**2. What is the current student-teacher ratio?**

In the early childhood department, the ratio of teacher to students does not exceed 1 to 10. In kindergarten through eighth grades, the average class size is 17 students.

**3. Describe the staff development process in place to help teachers learn and grow professionally.**

The School Board has established a policy that all full-time teachers must obtain a minimum of 5 credit hours every 3 years. At the end of the school year, the administrator meets individually with each teacher and discusses the professional development plan. Goals are established and monitored annually.

**4. Describe the content and frequency of staff meetings and evaluate their effectiveness.**

The faculty meets twice a month on Monday afternoons. The first Monday of the month is used for business items, schedules and committee reports. The third Monday of the month is used for curriculum or professional development. Meetings are agenda driven and planned in advance, with teacher input as needed. Minutes from all school meetings are e-mailed to faculty to review the progress on agenda items in order to report announcements, deadlines or advise the faculty. Meetings are on-task and productive.

**5. Describe ways in which teachers demonstrate their personal relationship with Jesus Christ and their dedication to the Lutheran teaching profession.**

All new teachers sign a covenant with the church.

Each teacher is a member of the church and is faithful in worship attendance and Bible study. The faculty also has a small group Bible study on Thursday mornings which is led by the administrator or pastor. Teachers participate in congregational activities including Choir, Handbell Choir, Men's Club, Women in Mission, Vacation Bible School and Stephen's Ministry.

Classroom displays reflect the teacher's personal faith and commitment to the Lutheran teaching profession. The importance of relationships and the ministry of presence are evident by the involvement of staff at events and celebrations.

**6. Describe the entire induction process, including background checks for staff members.**

All new personnel are required to submit to a background check. A faculty member who will serve as a mentor is assigned to each new teacher at the beginning of the teacher's service to the school. The administrator also meets with all new teachers to review the Personnel Manual, Faculty Handbook, Parent Handbook and other policies and procedures.

**7. Describe the ways teachers and staff members are equipped in current instructional technology.**

Technology in-services are conducted annually to update faculty members with current technology practices. Faculty members also view webinars, take professional classes, attend teacher conventions and work collaboratively with fellow teachers to keep skills current. Teachers use technology on a regular and frequent basis.

**8. How are non-Rostered teachers informed of the teachings and doctrine of the Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod?**

Non-Rostered teachers are required to complete the colloquy process. Teachers are required to start the process within the first two years at the school. A line item in the school budget assists teachers with the payment of the colloquy classes.

## Required Evidence

Required Evidence must be attached to the Self-Study Report and used to assign a rating and complete the written comments for each General Indicator of Success. Place an "X" in the box and attach required documentation.

School's staff development plan

Non-discriminatory salary and benefit scale or policy

## Required Indicator of Success

Required indicators must be answered "YES" and supported by evidence and comments for the school to be accredited in good standing. Place an "X" in the box and identify supporting evidence and practices.

**4:01\* All school personnel express and demonstrate agreement with the stated school purpose.**

YES

NO

**Identify and list supporting Evidence or Practices:**

- Faculty members were intricately involved in the development of the school Mission Statement.
- Mission and Ministry Development meeting minutes
- Professional Growth and Development Forms
- Chapel Schedule identifying Teacher Leaders

**Comments:**

Daily, administrators and teachers demonstrate their desire to share the love of Jesus Christ with students, families and the community.

## General Indicators of Success

*General Indicators of Success help the school to quantify its compliance with the Required Standards. The assignment of a rating for each General Indicator of Success is determined by the evidence and the practices that support the rating. Each general indicator is to be rated by the subcommittee, using the criterion below with the corresponding point value. A written response is required for every indicator in the “Comments” section.*

**Highly Functional (4)** — This is an area of outstanding strength of the school. It not only meets ALL the benchmarks related to the General Indicator of Success, but is supported by extensive documentation and/or observable practices that exceed expectations related to the indicator. This indicator establishes practices for other Lutheran schools to consider. The Validation Team verifies that these practices and/or documentation exceed the Operational (3) level.

**Operational (3)** — This is the expected rating for a strong Lutheran school. ALL benchmarks must be met completely for this indicator to be considered Operational. The condition is supported with documentation and/or observable practices that support the rating.

**Emerging (2)** — Improvement is required in this area. If one or more benchmarks are not fully met, the rating must be Emerging. This indicator is recognized as important by the school, but is inconsistently applied. Any benchmark not fully met must be addressed in the School Action Plan.

**Not Evident (1)** — There is observable conflict or deficiency with this indicator at the school. A majority of the expected benchmarks are not met or addressed with sufficient practices, evidence or documentation. This rating may result in the assignment of Provisional Status. This must be addressed in the School Action Plan.

**4:02: Christ-centered teachers have qualities and qualifications necessary for success in their defined areas of service.**

*Schools must demonstrate with documented evidence and practice that they comply with the following to function at the “operational” level. Place an “X” in the boxes below which currently apply to the school.*

- All teachers demonstrate a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a dedication to teaching in the Lutheran school.
- Full-time faculty members are on the Roster of the LCMS, eligible to be on the Roster of the LCMS or are actively enrolled in the colloquy program.
- Teachers have been prepared and vetted following prescribed federal and state mandates for background checks and training.
- Full-time professional staff members have appropriate teaching certificate(s) from the state and meet requirements for their specific assignments.

<i>Place an “X” in the Rating Box Which Reflects the Actual Condition of the School</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Highly Functional (4)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Operational (3)</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Emerging (2)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Not Evident (1)</b>

**Identify and list supporting Evidence or Practices:**

- All teachers are Lutheran
- School Board Policy Manual
- Church attendance records
- Lesson plans for Religion classes
- Survey results
- Personnel files
- Teacher state licensure certification
- Teacher transcripts

**Comments:**

All teachers, except one, are on the Roster of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. The non-Rostered teacher is new to the school and is planning to enroll in the colloquy program. A written plan and timeline for completion of the program is in her personnel file.

**4:03: Teachers are informed of, and subsequently evaluated and supported in the continuing pursuit of professional growth and development.**

*Schools must demonstrate with documented evidence and practice that they comply with the following to function at the “operational” level. Place an “X” in the boxes below which currently apply to the school.*

- Programs for teacher supervision/evaluation/growth have been adopted and are implemented by the administrator.
- Teachers engage in professional development, including spiritual development and are accountable for implementation that supports student learning.
- Teachers attend workshops, conferences, seminars and training appropriate to their position and discipline.
- LCMS Rostered teachers are provided opportunities to attend LCMS events.
- Teachers hold membership in professional organizations.
- The school provides opportunity, training and support so that teachers may effectively and appropriately engage technology in classroom instruction.

*Place an “X” in the Rating Box Which Reflects the Actual Condition of the School*

- Highly Functional (4)**     **Operational (3)**     **Emerging (2)**     **Not Evident (1)**

**Identify and list supporting Evidence or Practices:**

- Board Policy Manual
- Teacher personnel files
- Teacher Professional Development Plan
- Spiritual Development Plan
- Educator conference receipts
- Self-Study School Profile
- Lesson Plans
- Faculty Workshop minutes

**Comments:**

A powerful practice of the school is that in addition to the development of an individualized Teacher Professional Development Plan, each teacher also meets with the Senior Pastor annually and develops a

Spiritual Development Plan. Included in the plan are goals for worship attendance, Bible study, small group participation, devotional life, congregational involvement and service opportunities. This process could serve as a model for other churches and schools.

**4:04: Teachers and support staff are empowered and equipped to effectively accomplish their assigned task.**

*Schools must demonstrate with documented evidence and practice that they comply with the following to function at the “operational” level. Place an “X” in the boxes below which currently apply to the school.*

- New teachers receive thorough orientation and are supported with experienced, assigned teaching mentors.
- Teachers demonstrate and continuously improve knowledge and skills necessary for effective instruction and modeling of Christ-centered values.
- Policies related to teachers and support staff are established and practiced.
- The average student-professional personnel ratio is appropriate for the age and level of the students and ensures optimal student growth.
- The number of staff members is adequate to provide effective instruction and supervision for students at all school activities.
- The nondiscriminatory salary and benefit scale is adopted and implemented for all personnel.

<i>Place an “X” in the Rating Box Which Reflects the Actual Condition of the School</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Functional (4)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operational (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Emerging (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Evident (1)

**Identify and list supporting Evidence or Practices:**

- Faculty Mentor Procedure
- List of each Teacher’s Coursework (School Profile)
- Personnel Manual
- Board Policy Manual
- Parent Handbook
- LCMS Early Childhood and Statistics Report
- Volunteer Handbook
- Salary Guideline

**Comments:**

The highly qualified and dedicated staff is supported through a specialized mentoring program, ongoing professional development, and policies that provide adequate compensation and benefit packages for faculty and staff.



**4:05: Employees and volunteers serving in support roles have the qualifications and training necessary for success in their defined area of service.**

*Schools must demonstrate with documented evidence and practice that they comply with the following to function at the “operational” level. Place an “X” in the boxes below which currently apply to the school.*

- Support staff (e.g., teacher assistants, student teachers, nurse) meets state requirements for their specific assignments.
- Appropriate policies related to support staff are established and practiced.
- Adequate training for support staff is provided.
- Appropriate policies and training for volunteers are in place.
- Staff members understand and relate appropriately with students and their families.

<i>Place an “X” in the Rating Box Which Reflects the Actual Condition of the School</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Functional (4)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operational (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Emerging (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Evident (1)

**Identify and list supporting Evidence or Practices:**

- Board Policy Manual
- Personnel Files
- Volunteer Handbook
- Minutes of Professional Development Programs
- CPR Training
- Bloodborne Pathogen Training
- Parent Survey Results
- Student Survey Results

**Comments:**

Copies of all manuals and certification certificates are available for the visiting team to review.

## Summary and Response Actions

Summary and response actions, related to the school's strengths and items needing improvement, are to be provided. Subcommittees carry on the primary work of evaluating the school's compliance with the assigned Standard through a thoughtful and purposeful evaluation of each of the General Indicators of Success. Based on any general indicator ratings of "1" or "2", the school must develop specific plans to improve. Plans must include specific targeted completion dates and assignments. At the discretion of the school, actions may be developed for indicators that have been rated as "3".

**A. Are the Required Indicators of Success met for Standard 4? (YES / NO)**

YES

**B. Based on evidence, what are the strengths of the school related to Standard 4?**

The faculty and staff of the school are dedicated to sharing God's love with students and their families while maintaining high academic standards for teaching with excellence. The teachers are continuous learners, many with advanced degrees. All teachers are Lutheran and model their Christian faith in and out of the classroom. The Spiritual Development Plan and process involving the Senior Pastor provide a spiritual growth component to the teacher's individualized professional development plan. Well-developed policies in the Board Policy Manual and the Personnel and Volunteer Handbooks support the professional development plans for faculty and staff. Survey results support the positive teaching climate evident in the school.

**C. Based on evidence, what are the challenges of the school related to Standard 4? All areas identified as "emerging" [2] or "not evident" [1] must be addressed in the School Action Plan.**

Ensure that non-Rostered teachers complete the colloquy program as prescribed by the School Board policy (Standard 4:02).

**D. What is the school's average rating for all General Indicators of Success for Standard 4, rounded to the nearest tenth?**

STANDARD	RATING
4:02	2
4:03	4
4:04	3
4:05	3
<b>Total:</b>	12
<b>Average:</b> (Total ÷ 4)	3.0

*Accreditation by National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) indicates that a school successfully completed the NLSA process of Self-Study, reporting, evaluation with a Validation Team Visit, and that the Validation Team Visit members recommended NLSA accreditation as a result of the 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.*