

National Lutheran School Accreditation

Early Childhood Consultant Manual

Revised September 2021



MISSION, PURPOSE, VISION and VALUES

Mission

National Lutheran School Accreditation 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 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 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 CONSULTANT

A. A Letter to the Consultant

Congratulations! The National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) director, in consultation with the district education executive, has appointed you to this important responsibility. As the school's assigned Consultant, you play a critical role in the accreditation process. Your selection is based on your previous NLSA experience, communication skills and leadership ability. Your primary task is to help the school improve. To accomplish this task, you are to assist the applicant school to successfully complete its Self-Study process and prepare for a Validation Team Visit of outside educators representing NLSA.

From the time of application, the Consultant informs, assists, directs, encourages and oversees the applicant school. Your mission as a Consultant is to assist school leadership to ensure that the accreditation process is successful. You are an advocate of the school and represent NLSA to ensure that the school, with integrity, completes the process. Within this role it is your responsibility to determine the school's readiness for a Validation Team Visit and later work with the Team Captain who will lead the visit.

Perhaps your greatest concern for the process is "acceptability." As the school Steering Committee and subcommittees conduct their work and prepare their reports, they typically ask, "Is this acceptable?" As a Consultant, you will view each Standard of the Self-Study Report and accompanying evidence through the eyes of the Validation Team members who are the primary audience. It is the responsibility of the Consultant to determine when the school has completed the Self-Study satisfactorily and has assembled the required evidence.

A school should schedule a Validation Team Visit only when success is expected. Thus, it is vital that the Consultant alert the school in advance to potential problems and ensure that the school has successfully completed the accreditation process before the Validation Team Visit is scheduled. It is far better for the school to delay or stop the process than to put effort, resources and emotion into the process only to result in failure.

NLSA is most dynamic when schools use the process to effect changes that result in school improvement. Accreditation does not end with the Validation Team Visit and the awarding of the accreditation certificate. Plans that result from an NLSA process (the School Action Plan) become the blueprint for changes in the school that help make it become a school of choice in its community. An effective NLSA Consultant helps the school understand and accept the challenges associated with an ongoing process.

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



Dr. Rebecca Schmidt
Interim Director, National Lutheran School Accreditation

B. The Role of The Consultant

Mission: The consultant informs, encourages and assists school leaders to ensure that the accreditation process is successfully completed.

Role: The Consultant serves as the NLSA representative and is an advocate for the school. The Consultant collaborates with district accreditation officials and the Team Captain.

Key Concern: The responsibility of the consultant is to determine the readiness of the school for the Validation Team Visit by viewing each Standard of the Self-Study Report and accompanying evidence for its acceptability to the Validation Team members who validate the work of the school during the Validation Team Visit.

C. Consultant Job Description

Qualifications:

- The Consultant:
 - Has completed NLSA Consultant Training.
 - Is currently serving or is a recently retired educator or administrator in a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod school (childcare, early childhood, elementary, middle or secondary).
 - Has successfully led a Lutheran school through an NLSA process.
 - Is committed to the success of the assigned school.

Characteristics of an Effective Consultant

- **Knowledgeable:** The consultant is familiar with NLSA materials and processes.
- **Positive:** The consultant reflects a positive outlook and an optimistic view of the future. The focus is on what can be done and what is possible, rather than on negatives or obstacles.
- **Humble:** A humble spirit is evident; arrogance or a condescending nature negates the effectiveness of an NLSA consultant.
- **A Leader:** An effective consultant provides leadership without being the decision-maker.
- **A Model:** The consultant models the quality of the work expected. When the school is advised to be accurate in written materials, then the written correspondence from the consultant should be flawless. The credibility of the consultant’s recommendations is enhanced by demonstrating what is recommended.
- **A Good Listener:** Listening is necessary to ensure that accurate and complete information is received. School leaders are more receptive to advice when they are confident that the consultant has listened and understood their concerns.
- **A Catalyst:** Effective consultations result in school improvement. The successful consultant maximizes involvement, validates decisions and serves to initiate people’s assistance in support and completion of plans for improvement.
- **A Planner:** Skills are necessary to help schools develop plans that have a dynamic impact on school improvement and student learning.

- **Future-Oriented:** The consultant's view directs the school toward the future. Although a study of the past and present is an essential element of a Self-Study, the consultant's focus is on future direction, goals and plans that are essential to the school's success.
- **Time-Oriented:** The accreditation process is planned in order for the school to become accredited within its chosen time frame. District and national deadlines are incorporated into the timeline and overall planning process.
- **Enthusiastic:** It is the consultant's task to bring an atmosphere of enthusiasm for the accreditation process when the preparation of the Self-Study is cumbersome. A consultant's leadership and enthusiasm is encouraging for the school leaders.
- **Affirming:** The consultant affirms the ministry of each member of the school staff and the team captain who leads the Validation Team Visit.
- **Realistic:** The consultant provides a realistic assessment of the likelihood of success for the school. Assessment is based upon a thorough examination of written materials and documentation provided by the school.
- **A Prayer Warrior:** The consultant upholds the school, staff, children, families, congregation, pastor, and lay leaders in prayer.

Responsibilities

- Contact the school administrator immediately after the appointment as consultant to offer assistance and become acquainted.
- Contact the school regularly throughout the school's Self-Study process.
- Visit the school at least once, preferably twice, at the school's expense, during the first four months of the Self-Study process.
 - Meet with the school administrator.
 - Meet with the faculty and the pastor.
 - Meet with the NLSA Steering Committee.
 - Remind all groups of values of accreditation (Addendum #2).
 - Discuss priority of addressing Required Indicators of Success (Addendum #4) and Required Responses and Required Evidence (Addendum #5) with all groups.
 - Observe the school in action for several hours.
 - Review a tentative timeline, with deadlines for the entire process up to the date of the Validation Team Visit (the tentative date listed on the application form).
 - Review the method of assigning ratings to Required and General Indicators based upon a preponderance of evidence and practices.
- Throughout the process the consultant will:
 - Review and react to all preliminary versions of the Self-Study document.
 - Answer specific questions, make suggestions and encourage the school's progress.
 - Maintain contact with district accreditation officials and report the school's progress.
 - Provide recommendations of qualified team captains for the Validation Team. The selection of the team captain must be supported by district accreditation officials and approved by the NLSA Director.
 - Consult with the school administrator about adding members to the Validation Team.
 - Direct the school administrator to send the list of proposed Validation Team Visit members to the NLSA Director for approval. 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.

- Determine that the school complies with accreditation requirements related to documentation and indicators.
- Determine that the school’s report indicators reflect the actual practice at the school.
- Notify district accreditation officials that the school is ready to host a Validation Team Visit. Reschedule the visit if the school is not prepared or the outcome of the visit is uncertain.
- Inform the Administrator of the Levels of Accreditation (Addendum #6).
- Inform the Administrator of the potential for Powerful Practices (Addendum #7).
- Inform the Administrator of the potential for a School Shepherd Award (Addendum #8).
- Remind the school of its responsibility to submit required documentation to the District Accreditation Commission (DAC) and their LCMS District office.

D. Consultant Timeline and Checklist

The Checklist of Consultant Duties (Addendum #3) is a sample timeline for a 12-month accreditation process. It provides approximate times for the completion of the various steps of the process.

Experienced NLSA consultants recognize that no two schools are exactly alike and that schools may take two years or longer to complete the process. It is the responsibility of the consultant to assist the school in determining the amount of time necessary to assure success. Most schools are able to conduct a process including the Self Study and Validation Team Visit in one year. It is helpful to share the completed checklist with the Team Captain.

E. Consultant Do’s and Don’ts

DO	DON’T
Use a variety of communication methods	Rely solely on verbal communication
Be specific in writing	Write in generalities
Know current NLSA materials and processes	Use outdated materials
Establish deadlines collaboratively	Require rigid and uncompromising deadlines
Be open and honest	Say one thing and mean another
Become acquainted with the campus	Judge only on appearances
Become acquainted with school leadership	Rely on input from one person
Respect the school’s unique nature	Try to remake the school
Share examples from a variety of sources	Tell them how to do it
Be their advocate	Be their taskmaster
Give “hard” advice when needed	Value being liked at any cost
Respond promptly to questions and material	Be the reason for delays
Assist the Steering Committee	Become identified with a committee individual
Facilitate school improvement	Tell them specifically how to improve
Encourage quality work	Accept the unacceptable

F. Clarification of Consultant and Team Captain Roles

The Consultant and the Validation Team Visit Team Captain play significant and distinctive roles in the school's pursuit of accreditation. Each has an important role in evaluating the school's processes related to compliance with the Required and General Indicators of Success, in addition to identifying potential improvements for the benefit of students and families.

The roles of Consultant and Team Captain are complementary rather than competitive. Thus, each has a unique and distinctive responsibility to guide the school. The Consultant helps the school achieve success with its Self-Study process. The Team Captain helps the school by directing the activities of the Validation Team members.

In consultation with the district education executive, the Consultant selects a Team Captain for the school. The Team Captain assists the school in the selection of the Validation Team members.

The Consultant's responsibility is to educate the faculty, the Steering Committee, the governing authority and other stakeholders in the school about the NLSA process. The Team Captain's responsibility is to educate the Validation Team.

The Consultant helps to determine whether the school is ready for a successful Validation Team Visit. The Team Captain, with team members, collaboratively provide an unbiased evaluation of the school's accreditation status and verify whether the school is ready for a recommendation for accreditation to the district and national commissions.

The chart below illustrates differences in the relationship of the two roles.

CONSULTANT	TEAM CAPTAIN
HELPS SCHOOL THROUGH	
Self-Study Process	Validation Visit
HELPS SELECT	
Team Captain	Validation Team Members
HELPS SCHEDULE	
Self-Study Work	Validation Team Work
HELPS EDUCATE	
Faculty and Stakeholders	Validation Team Members
HELPS DETERMINE	
Readiness for the Validation Visit	Accreditation Qualifications

II. THE WORK OF THE CONSULTANT

A. Sample Initial Consultant Visit

An early task of the school consultant is to schedule an orientation visit with the faculty and governing authority. This can be accomplished in a half-day visit. The schedule below suggests topics and the approximate time to schedule for the orientation visit.

Arrival at School: 12:30pm

- School Walkthrough (30 min.)
- Meet with Pastor(s) and Other Church Staff Members (15 min.)
- Meet with Administrator (2 hours)
 - Review NLSA Process and the Role of the Consultant
 - Review Costs of Accreditation
 - Discuss Organization—Steering Committee and Subcommittees
 - Review Required Indicators of Success and Required Responses and Evidence
 - Clarify Standards and Ratings
 - Confirm NLSA Materials are Current
 - Review Levels of Accreditation and Powerful Practices
 - Explain School Shepherd Award
- Meet Briefly with Teachers and Staff (15 min.)
 - Encourage, Offer Assistance, Get Acquainted and Assure of Benefits
 - Review Process and the Role of the Teachers and Staff
 - Review Required Evidences
 - Clarify Standards and Ratings
 - Explain the Importance of a Written Curriculum
- Meet with Governing Authority (30 min.)
 - Commend the Governing Authority for Pursuing Accreditation
 - Review Accreditation Benefits and Process
 - Review the Roles of the Consultant and the Governing Authority
 - Review Required Indicators of Success and Required Responses and Evidence
 - Clarify Standards and Ratings
 - Review Costs and other Plans Made with School Administrator
 - Assure the Support of the Consultant

B. Working with the Steering Committee

The Steering Committee consists of five (5) to eight (8) people representative of various segments of the community. It is recommended that the Steering Committee (and subcommittee) membership include parents, teachers, administrator(s), pastor(s), church staff members and governing authority members.

The primary task of the Steering Committee is to plan, guide and coordinate all activities related to the Self-Study process. Its responsibilities include appointing the subcommittees, overseeing the preparation of the Self-Study Report, reviewing the Validation Team Report and making final recommendations for continued school improvement.

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 Validation Team Visit and incorporating suggestions from the Validation Team members after the Validation Team Visit.

C. School Curriculum Requirements

A written curriculum is an NLSA Required Document. For many, it is typically one of the most challenging parts of the accreditation process. At a minimum, the NLSA expectations for curriculum design include:

- Written objectives and learning outcomes for the spiritual, social/emotional, cognitive, physical and creative domains for all age groups.
- Faith integration throughout the curriculum.

Accredited schools continuously use a variety of assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of their curricular outcomes, adjusting related teaching strategies and instruction when necessary. Therefore, the curriculum becomes a living document that guides and directs the instructive process.

The Consultant works with the school to assure that the school meets NLSA curriculum requirements and that documentation is complete before the Validation Team Visit.

D. 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 ten 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 ten Standard areas follow a consistent reporting format that includes:

Required Responses and Required Evidence

Required Responses are narrative responses for questions 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 Responses may be written in paragraph or list form.

Required Evidence must be attached to the Self-Study Report.

The Consultant is charged to verify that Required Responses and Evidence are 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 Responses and Required Evidence is well-prepared and reflects the actual condition at the school.

All Required Responses and Required Evidence must be present for the school to be accredited in good standing. If "NO" is marked for any Required Responses or Required Evidence, it is strongly suggested that the school develop and provide those items before moving forward with the accreditation process.

Required Responses and Evidence build a case of support for how well a school engages the Required and General Indicators of Success. The more significant the documentation, the higher the school can rate its accomplishments. The compliance rating for each Required and General Indicator of Success is determined, in part, through careful evaluation of the Required Responses and Evidence by the subcommittees.

Required Indicators of Success

The **Required Indicators of Success** describe the practices that are essential for Lutheran schools seeking accreditation. The school must respond "YES" to Required Indicators of Success to be accredited in good standing. The school must also provide written comments for every Required Indicator of Success.

General Indicators of Success

General Indicators of Success help the school to quantify its compliance with the Required Standards. The General Indicators are specifically designed for each Standard and are written, not only for clarification, but also to stimulate thought, reflection and self-evaluation by the subcommittees.

The assignment of a rating for each General Indicator of Success is determined by reviewing Required Responses and Required Evidence for the Standard, observing at the school, and interviewing people involved in or affected by that Standard. Each General Indicator is to be rated by the subcommittee using the criterion below with the corresponding point value.

Met in Full (2) — The General Indicator of Success has been completely accomplished by the school. It is verifiable through evidence and documentation.

Partially Met (1) — The General Indicator of Success is moderately accomplished but additional detail, depth and written documentation is needed to meet the Indicator in full.

Not Presently Met (0) — The General Indicator of Success is not present or is emerging (minimally present).

After the level of implementation is determined, the school provides a written response for every Indicator.

- If an Indicator is fully met, the comments will support that rating.
- If an Indicator is not fully met, comments will include an explanation as to why an indicator is not met in full.
- Additionally, the school provides proposed actions for all General Indicators of Success not “Met in Full.”

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. The Consultant encourages making improvements and scoring Indicators based on improved conditions when applicable.

Summary and Response Actions

The Summary and Response Actions are determined from the results of the ratings assigned by the subcommittee and are related to the school’s strengths and the items needing improvement.

E. Starting with the School’s Purpose

It is important for the Consultant to emphasize the need for everyone involved in NLSA accreditation of the school to have a clear understanding of all aspects of the school’s purpose and how it is lived out in the life of the school.

Every accredited Lutheran school must be able to present a scriptural rationale for its existence, clearly state its purpose and define the preferred future condition of its organization.

The Self-Study rating process begins with the evaluation of the school’s purpose including a careful review of the statements 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 Standard 1: Purpose establishes a tone for the accreditation process and models the procedure for completing the rest of the Standard sections in the Self-Study Report.

Mission and Ministry Statement: A mission and ministry statement is a brief purpose statement that reflects the reasons for the school's existence. It is developed by the leadership team after receiving input from those invested in the future of the organization. A mission and ministry statement:

- Is brief
- Is clear, concise and memorable.
- Is separate and compatible with the congregation or supporting organization's mission.
- Clearly defines the purpose of the school.
- States how the school positively impacts children, families and the community it serves.

Schools develop mission, ministry, purpose and vision statements to communicate and serve as the basis for forming school goals, learner outcomes and action plans as well as determining direction for all activities of the school. For clarity in this accreditation process, these statements are referred to as "Mission and Ministry Statements."

Philosophy Statement: An early childhood program philosophy is a cooperatively formed statement of beliefs that reflects every aspect of the program. Practices of the program align with the philosophy. A Philosophy Statement:

- Is one page or less
- Is written in narrative form
- Describes how young children learn
- Describes the importance of Christian education

Documents such as the Mission and Ministry Statement and Philosophy Statement that define and support the school's purpose are to be presented clearly and concisely and must not conflict with the mission statement of the sponsoring congregation or organization.

F. Reacting to a Self-Study Report Draft

A Validation Team Visit cannot be scheduled until the Self-Study Report and accompanying documentation materials have been reviewed and approved by the Consultant. A key responsibility of a Consultant is the acceptability of all written reports and documentation related to the Self-Study process. It is critical that the Consultant review drafts of all written materials prepared by the school.

Many Consultants prefer receiving drafts of Self-Study documents electronically. Others desire to review drafts in a paper format. Either method is acceptable. After the documentation is received, the Consultant must evaluate whether the materials are clear, accurate and truthful. The Consultant also determines whether the school has complied with all requirements and rated itself accurately.

Reviewing the drafts can be summarized into four tasks: Review, Check, Look and React.

1. Review

- Read each Standard from the viewpoint of a Validation Team member.
- Provide notes similar to an editor.
- Ensure **each Standard** area includes:
 - Narrative responses in the Required Responses section.

- Required Evidence attached to Self-Study or available for Validation Team at Validation Team Visit.
 - Comments associated with each Required and General Indicator of Success.
 - Answers to the Summary and Response questions at the end of the Standard.
 - Proposed Actions for each General Indicator that is Rated 1 or 0.
 - Concerns as noted from the Standard area assessment.
 - Suggestions for addressing concerns identified in the Standard.
 - A comprehensive School Action Plan related to the entire Self-Study process.
- 2. Check**
- Accuracy
 - Logic
 - Clarity
 - Completeness
 - Exhibits recently prepared
- 3. Look**
- Grammatical and spelling accuracy
 - Documented School Improvement Plans related to identified concerns
 - Clarity of information for Team Members
- 4. React**
- Be positive and encouraging
 - Be specific
 - Suggest helpful alternative
 - Be honest
 - Use tact
 - Point out successes as well as problems
 - Keep the process moving with few delays
 - Return drafts with inserted comments, readable scribbles or Post-It Notes and accompanying correspondence
 - Provide feedback in writing
 - Keep a copy of all correspondence for future reference
 - Speak with the Administrator or Steering Committee (in Addition to the Written Response)

G. Determining School Readiness for the Validation Team Visit

After careful examination of all Self-Study documentation, the NLSA consultant determines the school's readiness for the Validation Team Visit. In addition to a careful analysis of all written documentation the Consultant must consider the following:

1. The Self-Study Report is completed with Required Responses.
2. All Required Indicators of Success are met with written comments provided for each.
3. All Required Documentation is complete and in order.

4. Based on what the consultant has received and observed, is the school eligible for accreditation?

If, in the Consultant's judgment, the school has met the requirements associated with NLSA and is eligible for accreditation, the Consultant shall provide formal approval of school readiness for a Validation Team Visit. The Consultant notifies the Team Captain and the district accreditation officials that the school is ready a minimum of 30 days before the Validation Team Visit.

H. Requesting an Extension

If there is a risk that the school may not be eligible for accreditation he/she may suggest that the school delay the Validation Team Visit. An extension for one year may be requested using the following procedure:

1. School's must complete the *Extension Application Form* found on LuthEd.org.
2. Requests for extension must be in writing and include a complete description of the circumstances that have resulted in the request.
3. Requests must be endorsed in writing by the District Education Executive or District Accreditation Commissioner and submitted to the NLSA Director.
4. The school's *Extension Application Form* and the District endorsement of the school's extension application must be sent together with the applicable extension fee to:
National Lutheran School Accreditation
1333 South Kirkwood Road
Saint Louis, MO 63122
5. The NLSA Executive Committee will consider all extension requests and its decision is final.

I. 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.

III. ADDENDUMS

Addendum #1: NLSA Conflict of Interest

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.

Addendum #2: Benefits of Accreditation

1. Allows a school to identify and celebrate its strengths.
2. Exposes weaknesses that can be corrected.
3. Provides validation for the school's existence.
4. Prepares a "blueprint" for improvement during the next five years.
5. Provides accountability for school improvement.
6. Engenders support from individuals who might not be involved.
7. Builds cohesiveness among staff members.
8. Strengthens the school's image in the community.
9. Provides the school with a positive public relations tool.
10. Connects the school with the greater community of accredited LCMS schools.
11. Provides an objective set of eyes to endorse the Self-Study (Validation Team Visit).
12. Provides accountability with the congregation, constituents and community.
13. Compares the school program to a set of objective national standards.
14. Provides opportunity to evaluate the spiritual component of the school.
15. Helps establish an image for the school.
16. Provides motivation for staff development.
17. Validates the credibility of the school through an objective outside agency.
18. Publicly acknowledges the quality of the institution.
19. Provides opportunity for public acknowledgement and celebration.
20. Is something every Lutheran early childhood, elementary and high school can attain.

Addendum #3: Checklist of Consultant Duties

The steps listed below guide the work of the consultant and are designed to be checked off upon completion. This checklist is not intended to be comprehensive and should be modified according to the specifics of each school and process.

Month 1

- As soon as appointed, contact the school administrator to offer assistance.
- Review the Getting Ready for Accreditation document with the school administrator.
- Advise the school as to the formation of a Steering Committee and subcommittees
- Establish an orientation date for a visit with faculty, pastor(s) and the governing authority to discuss the purpose and process of accreditation.

Month 2

- Assist the school in establishing a tentative timeline with deadlines for the entire process up to the date of the Validation Team Visit.
- Visit the school.
- Consult with the administrator regarding the organization of the accreditation process.
- Discuss accreditation requirements and review the method of assigning ratings to indicators based upon a preponderance of evidence and practices.
- Advise the administrator that the school's Self-Study Report is to accurately reflect the current practices in place at the school.
- Establish the process for sharing information between the school and the consultant.

Months 3 – 6

- Advise the school of its responsibility to share drafts of all material as they are prepared.
- Review drafts of the Self-Study Standards that are prepared by the school. React and make recommendations within one week of the receipt of the information in writing.
- Advise the school leader and ensure that the Self-Study document accurately reflects conditions in place at the school.
- Consult with district accreditation officials for a list of Team Captain candidates.

Month 7

- Report the school's progress to district accreditation officials.
- Consult and assist in the final collaborative selection process of a Team Captain.

Month 8

- Verify that the Self-Study Report is nearing completion and that the Standard ratings are based upon evidence and practices that are currently in place at the school.
- Validate that a variety of school constituents have participated in the process.
- Alert the administrator to any concerns you have about the quality and process of the process.
- Assess readiness for the Validation Team Visit.
- Outline the process related to securing members for the Validation Team Visit.

Months 9 – 10

- Consult with the administrator about the selection of Validation Team members. Ensure the recruitment and commitment of the members to follow established NLSA protocol.
- Remind the school accreditation leader that the Self-Study Report must be distributed to all Validation Team Visit members no later than one month before the visit. Electronic submissions are acceptable.

Month 11

- Review the final copy of the school's Self-Study report with narratives before it is distributed to Validation Team members. Ensure that requirements related to the Self-Study have been met.
- Inform the school of its readiness for the Validation Team Visit. Postpone the visit if success is uncertain.

Month 12

- Remind the administrator to send copies of the Self-Study Report to Validation Team members and the District Accreditation Commission (DAC) or LCMS District office. Verify that copies are received.
- Inform the school administrator of the completion of consultant responsibilities to the school and offer ongoing assistance as needed.

Addendum #4: Required Indicators of Success

Standard	Required Indicators of Success
1A:01	The early childhood program has a Mission and Ministry Statement designed specifically for the center that reflects the congregational Mission and Ministry Statement.
1B:06	The written philosophy is Bible-based and reflects a Christ-centered approach to learning.
1B:07	The written philosophy includes reference to spiritual, social/emotional, cognitive, physical and creative development of young children with an emphasis on the importance of play.
2A:01	A Statement of Nondiscrimination is evident in school printed materials and assures that students are admitted without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.
2B:18	The school is operated by one or more congregations of The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod (LCMS) or maintains an active Registered Service Organization (RSO) status with the Synod.
2C:32	The school’s mission and ministry statement reflects a unified school.
3A:01	The operating organization designates the governing authority and has written policies clearly defining lines of governing authority, responsibilities, limitations of the governing authority and membership.
3B:31	The director demonstrates a personal Christian faith, a commitment to Lutheran education and a dedication to the teaching ministry.
4:01	All staff members demonstrate agreement in writing with the stated school mission.
4:02	All staff members in licensed and license-exempt centers meet the state’s requirements for criminal record checks including documentation regarding any history of substantiated child abuse, neglect or physical and psychological conditions that might adversely affect a child’s health or safety.
5:01	The school promotes positive, Christ-centered relationships among all children and adults.
5:02	Staff members provide a safe and nurturing environment free from negative verbal interaction, physical punishment, psychological abuse, coercion and threats as forms of discipline.
6:01	The center complies with all federal, state and local building, health, safety and disaster preparedness facility requirements and maintains documentation of the requirements including certificates, licenses and records of violations or deficiencies with documentation of resolution.
7A:01	The center complies with all federal, state and local building, health, safety and disaster preparedness requirements.
7B:60	The center complies with all local and state food safety requirements and inspection records are kept on file.

8:01	The center implements a Christian curriculum that promotes learning and development in each of the following domains: spiritual, social / emotional, cognitive, physical and creative growth.
9:01	Teaching staff members supervise infants and toddlers by sight and sound at all times.
9:02	To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, infants are placed on their backs to sleep on a firm surface that meets the standard of the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, unless otherwise ordered by a physician.
9:03	At least one teaching staff member who has a certificate showing satisfactory completion of pediatric first aid training and satisfactory completion of pediatric CPR is always present with each group of children.
10:01	The center collects and analyzes data from stakeholders (i.e. parents, staff, congregation members and leaders).

Addendum #5: Required Responses and Required Evidence

Required Responses

Standard 1: Purpose	
1A: Mission and Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how the early childhood center reflects a mission outreach purpose in its community. List the communication methods used to share the Mission and Ministry Statement with the governing authority, staff, parents/guardians and congregation. Describe how the Mission and Ministry Statement is implemented by the governing authority, staff, parents/guardians and congregation. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
1B: Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the communication of the Philosophy Statement to stakeholders. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 2: Relationships	
2A: Home / Family Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List family education programs presented during the past 12 months. List special programs for families. (i.e. Christmas service, Family Night, Literacy Festivals, service projects) Describe orientation methods for welcoming and engaging new families. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
2B: Congregational Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the ways children and families participate in congregational activities and ministries. List the ways the congregation participates in activities and ministries of the center. List the ways the director functions as a member of the congregational administrative team. List the ways the congregation supports the early childhood program. (i.e. regular prayer, tuition sponsorship, reading buddies, fundraising) List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
2C: Elementary School to Early Childhood Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List school-wide parent education programs and activities. Comment on the ways the shared vision is evidenced in the staff, school, church and community-at-large.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 3: Leadership	
3A: The Early Childhood Governing Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the major decisions the governing authority and / or direct supervisor has established for the early childhood program during the past three years. Describe the process used by the governing authority and / or direct supervisor for systematic needs assessment and development of short and long-term goals. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
3B: The Early Childhood Administrator / Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize the ways the administrator uses leadership skills in the congregation, community and professional organizations. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 4: Personnel	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List compensation package(s) paid to staff (i.e. salary scale, health care, vacation, sick leave, tuition assistance) List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 5: Staff / Child Interactions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the progressive steps followed by teachers and parents / guardians to address the needs of students who exhibit ongoing behavioral or developmental concerns. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 6: Facilities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the individuals / group responsible for the overall care and maintenance of the school and grounds. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 7: Wellness	
7A: Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how the indoor / outdoor facility is made secure against intruders. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
7B: Food and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the meal / snack delivery system. Who is responsible? What procedures and protocols are in place? List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.

Standard 8: Curriculum	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the curriculum supports and reflects the philosophy of the program. • Describe how often the curriculum is evaluated and share who is engaged in the process. • Describe how the curriculum meets the anti-bias / cultural / social / economic needs of the church and community. • Describe the type of curriculum used for faith development of children. • Describe the methods of assessing children’s growth and individual needs. • List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 9: Infants / Toddlers	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 10: Continuous Improvement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the processes used for collecting, analyzing and using data from staff, parents / guardians, director and governing authority to identify needed program improvements. • Identify program goals based on parent / guardian, staff and governing authority input and student assessment data. • List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.

Required Evidence

Standard 1: Purpose	
1A: Mission and Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congregation's Mission and Ministry Statement • Mission and Ministry Statement for the early childhood program
1B: Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood program's Philosophy Statement • Documents where the Philosophy Statement is present (i.e. handbook, brochure)
Standard 2: Relationships	
2A: Home / Family Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five (5) forms of communication used to share information with parents / guardians (i.e. school newsletter, classroom newsletter, emails, blogs, personal notes) • A copy of the written NLSA Family Survey questions • NLSA Family Survey summary • Family handbook
2B: Congregational Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written copy of the evangelism approach (i.e. activities, strategies, methods) used by the congregation with early childhood families • Completed NLSA Church Ministry Staff Survey(s) • Current budget(s) for the congregation and the early childhood program
2C: Elementary School to Early Childhood Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agendas for meetings that include administrators from all school levels
Standard 3: Leadership	
3A: The Early Childhood Governing Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagram of the governing structure of the early childhood / school / church • Governing authority policy manual • Governing authority grievance and due-process resolution procedures • Governing authority minutes from the past three meetings • Short- and long-range goals for the program • Evaluation form used to assess the director • Director's Supervisor Survey, if applicable
3B: The Early Childhood Administrator / Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrator completed profile form(s) • Administrator diplomas and proof of professional organization membership • Administrator proof of early childhood coursework • Administrator job description • Administrator evaluation form used by the staff • Most recent statistical report submitted to the National office. • Orientation checklist used with new staff members

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy for ensuring adequate staff / child ratios at all times • Profile of each class showing the staff / child ratio with the age, number of children and number of adults • Enrollment materials (i.e. written admission procedures, waiting list process) • Completed Director’s Survey
Standard 4: Personnel	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff profiles • Schedule of staff meetings and three meeting agendas • Description and / or checklist used for new teaching staff orientation • Job descriptions, personnel policies, calls or contract agreements • Current salary and benefit scale • In-service training program / schedule provided by the center in the last 12 months • Staff Survey for Teachers and Assistant Teachers Summary • Support Staff Survey for Non-Teaching Members Summary • Employee handbook • Biblically-based code of ethics for staff
Standard 5: Staff / Child Interactions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood discipline policy
Standard 6: Facilities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floor plan of the early childhood facility, including indoor and outdoor areas and square footage of each area used by students • Plans for further development of the early childhood facility • Daily, weekly and monthly cleaning / maintenance plan
Standard 7: Wellness	
7A: Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written policy for storing and dispensing children’s medications • Written communicable disease policy • Written accident and injury policy • Written policies regarding smoking, alcohol, illegal drugs and drug testing • Written procedures for the safe arrival and departure of children • Written disaster and evacuation procedures
7B: Food and Nutrition (ALL SCHOOLS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written policies related to food storage and food service • Health inspections • Food service license or license exempt documentation • Food preparation area / kitchen cleaning schedule

<p>7B: Food and Nutrition (FOOD PREPARED ON SITE OR VENDED)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of the individual who participates in food service training and a copy of the current certificate, according to state licensing • Menus • Vendor contract (if applicable) assuring that the business, food handlers and premises are inspected and approved by the local health department
<p>Standard 8: Curriculum</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One week of lesson plans for each classroom • Center’s written curriculum guide, goals and early learning state standards • Daily and weekly class schedules from each teacher • Forms used for student assessments
<p>Standard 9: Infants / Toddlers</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms used to communicate with families • Curriculum framework • Daily schedules • Assessment materials • Diaper changing procedure • Documentation that staff working with infants / toddlers are trained in “safe sleep” practices and “shaken baby syndrome” • Child care license / certificate indicating the program is certified to provide infant / toddler care in accordance with state licensing regulations • Policies regarding sanitation
<p>Standard 10: Continuous Improvement</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NLSA surveys used to solicit input from stakeholders about the overall early childhood program

Addendum #6: 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.

Addendum #7: NLSA Powerful Practices

NLSA seeks to identify and share unique practices that set a school apart and make it a highly respected educational institution in its community. *Powerful Practices* are carefully researched, collaboratively established and dynamically affect student learning and/or ministry opportunities in a Lutheran school. These are the practices that have the potential for replication in other Lutheran schools.

A school's *Powerful Practice* is much more than an expectation that quantifies Standard compliance. It innovates and exceeds accreditation expectations. It is a calculated risk that results in significant reward for students. Therefore, it is a desirable condition that has ramifications for schools throughout the LCMS.

Addendum #8: NLSA School Shepherd Award

The Validation Team may nominate a pastor for the School Shepherd award based on the following criteria. The 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

One nominated Pastor will be chosen in July by an appointed committee of the NLSA National Accreditation Commission to receive the national NLSA School Shepherd Award. District and Synod recognition will follow at a later time and date. Additional specifics can be found on the “NLSA District Commissioner Resources” page of LuthEd.org.