

# **National Lutheran School Accreditation**

## **Early Childhood Administrator Manual**

*Revised September 2022*



# 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 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.

A meaningful and successful accreditation process requires exceptional leadership. That leadership begins at the school's administrative level. It starts with the director's perception and enthusiasm for accreditation. (Addendum #1) NLSA is an ongoing process that results in ongoing improvement that does not end with the Team Validation Visit. It is an impetus for positive and directive change (Addendum #1). The purpose of the *Early Childhood Administrator Manual* is to provide a detailed overview of the NLSA process relating to the school accreditation leader's work, from beginning to end.

Three defined steps of the NLSA accreditation process are outlined below:

**Step One:** A Self-Study is conducted by the administration, staff, pastor(s), governing authority members, parents and other constituents of the school. The procedure is described in detail in the Section II, Leading the Self-Study Process.

**Step Two:** A Validation Team of outside observers visits the school to review and verify the Self-Study Report and make recommendations for further improvement. This step is explained further in the Section III, Hosting the Validation Team Visit.

**Step Three:** A School Action Plan resulting from the Validation Team's recommendations guides ongoing improvement for the school. This step is explained in Section V, Expectations for Continuing Improvement.

Every Lutheran school is unique based upon the implementation of its philosophy, mission and vision. Therefore, it is likely that schools that are quite different may be equally good. This belief dictates the basic principle that a Lutheran school should be evaluated based on generally accepted standards of quality in the context of what it is striving to accomplish and the school's own community, beliefs and constituents. The implementation of a school's philosophy, mission and vision along with national standards determine when a school is worthy of accreditation.

### 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 a combination of early childhood, elementary and/or high school may request the use of separate accreditation processes (NLSA Early Childhood and Evidenced-Based Self-Study Reports). 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. Schools considering this option are advised to consult with district accreditation officials to determine what process would best serve the school.

Before applying for NLSA, the school and church/supporting organizations must make plans to cover the financial costs of accreditation. Costs include:

- Yearly NLSA fees to the national office and to the district. (Contact district office or accreditation commission for costs.)
- Mileage and expenses for the assigned Consultant to make one or two visits to the school.
- Validation Team Visit expenses, including mileage, lodging and meals.
- A meal at the beginning of the visit for the Visitation Team, school and church staff, governing authority members and other stakeholders.

Schools also need to consider the administrative time required for this process and decide if additional administrative time should be funded.

Accreditation is a significant undertaking. It requires careful reflection and evaluation related to every aspect of the school's program. Schools that have evidence in place will have the time to complete the process successfully. Introductory materials outlining the NLSA process are available online at LuthEd.org. Schools applying for accreditation for the first time are advised to have all Required Indicators in place and a majority of the Required Evidence and Responses gathered and completed before beginning a Self-Study 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.

An NLSA Consultant is assigned to every school working through the accreditation process. The Consultant is an advocate and resource for the success of the accreditation process.

Consultant 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
  - Discuss priority of addressing Required Indicators (Addendum #2) and Required Responses and Evidence (Addendum #3) 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.
- 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.
- Inform the Administrator of the potential for Powerful Practices.
- Inform the Administrator of the potential for a School Shepherd Award.
- Remind the school of its responsibility to submit required documentation to the District Accreditation Commission (DAC) and their LCMS District office.

## 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. It does not, in any way, fall within the purview of those who serve on the Steering Committee and subcommittees.

### 2. Evaluating the 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.

**Mission and Ministry Statement:** The 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 statement:

- Is brief
- Is clear, concise and memorable
- Is separate from 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

In evaluating the relevance of Lutheran education, a school determines how the stated purpose is reflected in the overall operation of the school, including administration, instruction and learner outcomes. Clearly defined documentation (Mission and Ministry Statement and Philosophy Statement) 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.

It’s recommended that 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 Standard 1 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 for The Self-Study Report

NLSA has established requirements associated with each of the ten Standard areas. To be accredited in good standing, a school must provide **Required Responses and Required Evidence**. (Addendum #2), be able to respond YES to all **Required Indicators of Success** (Addendum #3) and meet or exceed 80% of the points assigned to the **Required and General Indicators of Success**.

During the NLSA process, it may become apparent that some facets of the school need to be improved. The desirable improvements that can be completed before the Validation Team Visit are done as part of the accreditation process and not delayed for future action.

The responsibility of the school’s assigned accreditation Consultant is to verify that Required and General Indicators of Success in addition to Required Responses and Required Evidence are complete and in place. It is essential that the Self-Study Report reflects the actual practice at the school. Conducting a Validation Team Visit without required items in place can result in the denial of accreditation.



## 4. Required Responses and Required Evidence

**Required Responses** are written for the questions at the beginning of each Standard area. The answers to these questions provide a school with the opportunity to describe how it meets the needs of children. This also allows the school to indicate any nuances that are unique to the school's learning environment.

**Required Evidence** consists of what is kept on file to guide the school (i.e. documents, policies, schedules, meeting minutes, written curriculum).

Schools are not limited to the items listed in the **Required Responses** and in the Self-Study Report but are encouraged to identify and include additional documentation as needed.

## 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. After gathering evidence and citing practices and the results, the subcommittee arrives at consensus about the correct rating for each General Indicator of Success.

## 6. Required and General Indicators of Success

The Required Indicators of Success describe the practices that are essential for Lutheran schools seeking accreditation and provide evidence and practices to support each YES answer.

The General Indicators of Success are rated according to the actual practice in place at the school using one of the following ratings:

**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).

## 7. 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.

## 8. Preliminary School Action Plan

A preliminary School Action Plan is developed using the concerns identified during the Self-Study process. The Validation Team will also add recommendations to the School Action Plan during the Validation Team Visit. This will generate a blueprint for ongoing improvement. The plan is designed to improve child outcomes, enhance ministry and develop and improve programs, facilities and/or services for the benefit of all children. The School Action Plan includes the following:

- Goals that are related to findings from the Self-Study process and the Validation Team recommendations.
- Strategies that are aligned with the school action goals and provide ideas, plans, actions and steps for accomplishing the goals within a prescribed timeframe (targeted dates).
- Strategies that 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.

## 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 director is also a member of the Steering Committee.

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 ideas from the Validation Team members after the Validation Team Visit.

### B. Self-Study Subcommittees

The members of the Steering Committee and the school administrator determine how the interests of the school community are best served as it selects and appoints subcommittee members. Every faculty and staff member serves on a subcommittee. In small schools, some faculty members serve on more than one subcommittee. Membership of the subcommittees also includes pastor(s), governing authority members, parents and school constituents with expertise or knowledge in the assigned Standard.

Responsibilities of a subcommittee include but are not limited to:

- Completing the written responses for the Required Responses in paragraph or list 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 comments.
- Evaluating each General Indicator of Success and providing a rating based on the level of completion of the Indicator and the actual practice of the school.
- 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 General Indicator rated as less than “Met in Full” for use in the School Action Plan.
- Submitting completed reports to the Steering Committee for final approval.

## C. Required Surveys

NLSA surveys are correlated with the 10 Standards and are required to be used at the beginning of the Self-Study process. As a part of the needs assessment, a school may determine the method of administering the surveys. Additional questions may be added, but no questions can be removed.

Surveys listed below are available at [LuthEd.org](http://LuthEd.org):

- Church Ministry Staff Survey
- Director’s Supervisor Survey
- Director’s Survey
- Early Childhood Staff Survey
- Early Childhood Support Staff Survey
- Family Survey

## D. Timeline

A general timeline for the NLSA process is listed below. Consult with your 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 – January                Subcommittee meet to gather Required Evidence and complete reports for assigned Standards
- 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 is 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 assembled by the school accreditation leader and reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee. A second component of the Self-Study Report encompasses the ten Standards. The report summarizes the school's findings and reflects the actual conditions found at the school at the time of the study. Both components are compiled into a single Self-Study Report.

As each Standard is completed by a subcommittee, the administrator reviews, edits, and sends the report for that Standard to the assigned Consultant for review and editing suggestions before finalizing that section of the Self-Study Report.

## F. 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.

The school may identify any practice (no more than three) that may be considered a Powerful Practice. 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 dates).
- Strategies that 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 dates). 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

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 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. Advance 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

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 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.

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 to ensure selection of a trained Team Captain 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 three (3) to four (4) additional members, depending on the size of the school and variety of programs offered. 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 should 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 or others who are experienced early childhood educators.

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:

- Arrange for specific Validation Team needs, including meeting space, technology, meals, transportation and hotel accommodations (when necessary).
- Develop a Validation Team Visit Schedule in consultation with the Team Captain for the entire Validation Team Visit.
- Schedule interviews. (Pastor, staff, director, families)
- Plan to host a Validation Team dinner or gathering. (Validation Team members, Steering Committee, Pastor(s), staff, subcommittee members, Governing Authority members)
- Prepare a token of appreciation for the Validation Team members.
- Invite the Steering Committee, pastor(s), school staff, governing authority members and subcommittee members to the Team Validation Visit exit report meeting.
- Distribute the material that the Validation Team members need to complete their tasks 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 to deliver copies of the Self-Study Report and the Validation Team Report to the District Accreditation Commission or LCMS 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 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 to 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. Addendums

### Addendum #1: 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 #2: Required Indicators of Success

Standard	Required Indicators of Success
<b>1A:01</b>	The early childhood program has a Mission and Ministry Statement designed specifically for the center that reflects the congregational Mission and Ministry Statement.
<b>1B:06</b>	The written philosophy is Bible-based and reflects a Christ-centered approach to learning.
<b>1B:07</b>	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.
<b>2A:01</b>	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.
<b>2B:18</b>	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.
<b>2C:32</b>	The school’s mission and ministry statement reflects a unified school.
<b>3A:01</b>	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.
<b>3B:31</b>	The director demonstrates a personal Christian faith, a commitment to Lutheran education and a dedication to the teaching ministry.
<b>4:01</b>	All staff members demonstrate agreement in writing with the stated school mission.
<b>4:02</b>	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.
<b>5:01</b>	The school promotes positive, Christ-centered relationships among all children and adults.
<b>5:02</b>	Staff members provide a safe and nurturing environment free from negative verbal interaction, physical punishment, psychological abuse, coercion and threats as forms of discipline.
<b>6:01</b>	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.
<b>7A:01</b>	The center complies with all federal, state and local building, health, safety and disaster preparedness requirements.
<b>7B:60</b>	The center complies with all local and state food safety requirements and inspection records are kept on file.



<b>8:01</b>	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.
<b>9:01</b>	Teaching staff members supervise infants and toddlers by sight and sound at all times.
<b>9:02</b>	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.
<b>9:03</b>	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.
<b>10:01</b>	The center collects and analyzes data from stakeholders (i.e. parents, staff, congregation members and leaders).

## Addendum #3: Required Responses and Required Evidence

### Required Responses

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

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

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

## Required Evidence

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

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

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