National Lutheran School Accreditation

Evidence-Based Accreditation

Team Captain Manual

Revised September 2020

NLSA
National Lutheran School Accreditation

MISSION, PURPOSE, VISION and VALUES

Mission

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

Purpose

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

Vision

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

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

Values

- Lutheran Culture
- Educational Excellence
- Continuing Improvement
- Innovation

Table of Contents

The Role of the Team Captain

The Work of the Team Captain

Addendums

THE ROLE OF THE TEAM CAPTAIN

Letter to the Team Captain

Congratulations! In consultation with the district education executive and the school consultant, you have been appointed to this important responsibility. Your selection as Team Captain reflects your demonstration of professional insight, experience, common sense and the ability to work well with others. It confirms your district's high degree of respect for your leadership abilities and in your role you will have a dynamic effect on the school's future.

You have experienced the benefits of NLSA in your own school setting. That was an important part of your overall training as you serve your appointed school. As you guide the activities of the Validation Team Visit, you are not expected to be an expert, but to be a peer who brings an outside viewpoint of the school's operation. This manual also serves to document the requirements and conditions of your work as Team Captain. Review it carefully as it contains everything you need to successfully complete your task.

As the school's assigned Team Captain of the Validation Team Visit, your primary task is to lead the members of the Validation Team through a process to verify and provide an unbiased response to the school's Self-Study Report and School Improvement Plan. As you conduct your work as Team Captain, you are called upon to validate the work that the school has prepared. Their work is to be accurate, truthful and reflect the actual practices currently in place at the school. Verification of the work of the school is accomplished as the Validation Team members interview, observe and evaluate the written documentation of the school.

The responsibilities of the Team Captain include ensuring that the school complies with the Required Indicators of Success and have responded, with documentation, to the General Indicators of Success in the seven Standard areas. Your purpose is not to criticize or find fault, but it is to strengthen the school by making specific, helpful recommendations. The recommendations reached by the consensus of the team in the final report are to accurately reflect the Validation Team's findings which leads to a process of continued improvement for the school.

Thank you for agreeing to serve as Team Captain of the Validation Team. The school and the National Lutheran School Accreditation Commission are grateful for your willingness to serve in this capacity. God bless your efforts on behalf of the school and its students.

Rebecca Schmidt

Dr. Rebecca Schmidt
Interim Director, National Lutheran School Accreditation

The Role of the Team Captain

The Team Captain is a critical stakeholder in the National Lutheran School Accreditation process. The Team Captain's work at the school must also be aligned with the purpose of NLSA. In collaboration with the members of the Validation Team, the Team Captain works to verify that the school's Self-Study is accurate and truthful. Additionally, the Team Captain ensures that school's action goals are realistic, measurable and attainable. These efforts ensure the present and future quality of the Lutheran school.

The success of NLSA is directly aligned with the efficiency and effectiveness of the leadership of the Team Captain. It is critical that the Team Captain is familiar with the mission, purpose and values of NLSA and internalizes them with his or her work with schools.

> **Mission:** The Team Captain provides unbiased ratings and responds to the school's self-evaluation and action plan with recommendations that lead to continued school improvement.

> **Role:** The Team Captain prepares a written report based on observations and judgments made during the Validation Team Visit.

> **Key Concern:** The Team Captain is responsible for leading the Validation Visit to arrive at accurate ratings and recommendations based on an unbiased evaluation of the Self-Study Report and the actual practices in place at the school.

Team Captain Job Description

Qualifications
- The Team Captain:
    - Has received specific NLSA Team Captain 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.
    - Has served as a member of an NLSA Validation Team.
    - Is committed to the success of the assigned school.

Responsibilities
- Confer regularly with the school administrator from the time of the Team Captain appointment through the Validation Team Visit and until the Validation Visit Report is given to the school.
- Confer with the school's NLSA Consultant to ensure that the school is ready for the visit. (If materials are not ready, reschedule the Validation Team Visit.)
- With the school accreditation leader, establish a tentative schedule and agenda for the Validation Team Visit.
- Assign rating and writing responsibilities to Validation Team members. Remind members to arrive at the school prepared with their initial rating completed.
- Contact Validation Team members after they have been appointed, informing them of Validation Team Visit schedule and work assignments. (Addendum #3)

- Ensure that all Validation Team members receive the school's Self-Study Report one month before the scheduled visit.
- With the school accreditation leader, arrange Validation Team Visit details (housing, meals, mileage, team supplies, technology needs, etc.).
- Conduct an orientation meeting for Validation Team members before the Validation Team Visit to review tasks and train members for their work. (Addendum #4)
- Supervise the work of the Validation Team Visit.
- Be a model team member, with the preparation of the first report first and its review with Validation team members.
- Review rough drafts of the Standard reports before they are presented for initial consideration by the team.
- Discuss, adapt and adopt each Standard of the report. Ensure that all ratings are based upon evidence that accurately reflects the condition of the school.
- Instruct, encourage, challenge, support and advise team members throughout the process.
- Prepare the Validation Team Visit's summary, listing the team's recommendation for or against accreditation, outstanding strengths and major deficiencies.
- Determine if a designation of provisional status applies.
- Determine any Powerful Practices that are transformative and replicable.
- Consider the nomination for a School Shepherd Award.
- Prepare the PowerPoint presentation for the exit report.
- Collect all final Standard area reports before dismissing the Validation Team.
- Edit the Validation Team Visit Report and send it to the school within two weeks following the visit. Include the Team Submission Checklist, School Profile of the Self-Study Report and biographical information of team members in the final copy of the Validation Visit Report.
- Instruct the school accreditation leader to send copies of the Validation Visit Report to the District Accreditation Commission or LCMS District office.

THE WORK OF THE TEAM CAPTAIN

The Team Captain's work is primarily focused on the Validation Team Visit conducted at the school. Preparation, communication and coaching are necessary to lead a Validation Team Visit successfully.

Selection of the Validation Team Members

The Team Captain, in consultation with the school administrator and the district accreditation leader, recruits team members for the Validation Team Visit. 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.

The Validation Team consists of the Team Captain and five (5) additional members, for a total of six (6) team members. Serving as a member of a Validation Team is a highly professional undertaking. It is important to secure team members who are professional, cooperative, helpful and constructive. A minimum of two (2) members of the Validation Team shall have previous experience with NLSA serving as a member of a Validation Team or as a faculty member of a school that has completed or is currently involved in the accreditation process. The remaining balance of the Validation Team may be selected from Lutheran schools that have not completed the NLSA process.

Team members may be selected using the following criteria:
- A teacher or administrator from a non-LCMS Christian school.
- Two teachers or administrators from another LCMS school.
- A public school educator or administrator. (LCMS congregation member when possible).
- A pastor of another LCMS congregation with a school.

Attention is given to the selection of Validation Team members for competency and balance. Members of the Validation Team should know the characteristics of a good school and be representative of the levels (early childhood, elementary or high school) of the school being visited.

A letter of appointment is sent to all Validation Team members by the school administrator following their appointment by the NLSA director.

Preparation of Validation Team Members for Effective Service

Each Validation Team member is assigned the responsibility of reviewing, rating and responding in writing to at least one of the seven Standard areas. Team members are instructed to read the entire Self-Study Report with a focus in their assigned Standard area(s). They are to assign a whole-number rating that reflects their initial impression of the school's compliance in the Standard. This initial rating serves as a starting point for the work of the Validation Team. Additionally, team members are expected to come the Validation Team Visit prepared to share reviews of the Standard areas.

During the Validation Team Visit, the work of the team confirms, enhances or diminishes the initial ratings of the team members and ensures that the Required Indicators of Success and General Indicators of Success are supported with evidence and practices that reflect the actual condition at the school.

The Validation Team Report, by consensus, is prepared after careful review, discussion and editing of the individual Standard drafts of each Validation Team Visit member.

The following suggestions identify the scope of the work for Validation Team members. An initial orientation of the team includes:
- A review of the Validation Team's purpose, procedures and precautions.
- Encouragement for team members to observe, visit, interview, validate and stay on task.
- Verification of the school's compliance with all Required Indicators of Success and General Indicators of Success in the assigned areas.
- Validation that the ratings provided by the school are honest, accurate and supported by practices and evidence.

Additional verification is to be secured through observations and interviews during the Validation Team Visit.   All assumptions are verified unconditionally before they are shared in the Validation Team Report.

Self-Study Process Requirements

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

To be accredited in good standing, **required evidence** and **documentation** must be present and engaged in the school. The school's assigned accreditation Consultant is charged to verify that required evidence and documentation is in place. Conducting a Validation Team Visit without required items in place may result in the denial of an accreditation award. It is essential that all required evidence and documentation is well-prepared and reflects the actual condition at the school.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Operational rating of "3" is defined for each General indicator of Success. To comply with the Standard, the expectation is that a school will average "3" (Operational) for all General Indicators of Success assigned to the Standard. General Indicators of Success ranked as "2" (Emerging) or "1" (Not Evident) are required to be addressed in a well-developed School Action Plan that is implemented over the course the school's accreditation cycle.

Validating General Indicators of Success

In a school's Self-Study process, compliance ratings for each General Indicator of Success are determined through careful evaluation of the evidence and practices assembled in support of the indicator. General Indicators of Success help the school to quantify its compliance with the Required Standards. The assignment of a rating for each General Indicator of Success is determined by the evidence and the practices that support the rating. Each General Indicator is to be rated using the criterion below with the corresponding point value. A written response is required for every Indicator in the "Comments" section.

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

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

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

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

At the time of the Validation Team Visit, the team is required to verify that each rating identified by the school is supported with sufficient evidence and practices. Schools may rate themselves too highly or not highly enough. When the Validation Team considers the change of a rating assigned by the school, team members are to support the divergent rating with sufficient evidence to justify the change.

The more significant the practices and their impact related to the accomplishment of the indicator, the higher the rating. After gathering evidence and citing practices and their results, a team member should arrive at a rating that is an accurate reflection of the condition in place at the school.

A rating of 4 (or Highly Functional) is a great strength of the school and requires significant support with much evidence and impactful practices. The words "every and all" are used will be used often to defend a rating of Highly Functional. The rating of 3 (Operational) describes a condition that is in place at the school and supported by practice and evidence.

A ranking of Emerging (2) or Not Evident (1), will result in required actions by the school. The school will be required to develop specific responses to each of these indicators and will result in improvement over the course of its next accreditation cycle.

Finally, General Indicators of Success provide the basis of support for an overall area rating for each of the seven Standard areas. To determine the overall Standard rating, the Validation Team computes the average of all General Indicators of Success in the Standard area. The average of the General Indicators is expressed in a whole number with one decimal point and provides the rating for Standard.

NLSA Classroom Observation Tool

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

- Planning and Preparation
- Classroom Environment
- Instruction
- Faith Integration
- Technology

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

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

If a Validation Team chooses to utilize the NLSA *Classroom Observation Tool* during its visit to the school, the following practices for implementation are encouraged:

- Each classroom observation should be between 15 – 20 minutes in duration.
- At least 75% of classrooms/classes should be observed during the Validation Visit.
- Observations focus on the students and the classroom; they do not evaluate the teacher.

Please note, if used by the Validation Team, ratings from the *Classroom Observation Tool* will not impact the overall accreditation rating of the school at this time. However, the *Classroom Observation Tool* ratings will be included in the Validation Team Report so that school administrators and other stakeholders are aware of the observations of the Validation Team at the time of the school visit. Resources related to the *Classroom Observation Tool* (form, calculating spreadsheet, etc.) are located on LuthEd.org under "NLSA Validation Team Resources".

Opportunities for Special Recognition

Validation Team visits assure that a school provides quality, Christian education and is committed to ongoing improvement. Occasionally a team observes a school that exceeds quality expectations and exhibits unique, replicable best practices. A Validation Team may nominate a school for a potential **Powerful Practice** or may nominate the pastor for the **School Shepherd Award**.

Practices associated with General Indicators of Success that are rated as "highly functional" (4) by the school have the potential for identification as a **Powerful Practice** when the practice is transformational and replicable.

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 Validation Team may also 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.

Review of the School Action Plan

As a school conducts its Self-Study process, it identifies areas needing improvement. These items are usually rated as **2 (Emerging)** showing that the condition is recognized as important by the school but is inconsistently or irregularly applied. It is not supported with sufficient practices, evidence or documentation and there is room for improvement in this area. A rating of **1 (Not Evident)** means there is observable conflict or deficiency with the condition at the school or that the school does not enact this condition.

Items that have been identified as **2 (Emerging)** or **1 (Not Evident)** require planned improvement actions. Over the course of the school's accreditation cycle, the items must be targeted (with a completion date), assigned, evaluated and completed. The School Action Plan is the organization's roadmap, guiding the improvement process during the school's accreditation cycle.

Certain items will be rated as **3 (Operational)**, and while the condition is in place and functionally supported and practiced, it may not always be fully enacted or easily evidenced in every aspect of the school program. The school functions acceptably in this area and the school is not required to develop ways to improve in this area.

It is the responsibility of the visiting team to review the School Action Plan to ensure that all items requiring actions have been targeted in school goals (with a completion date) and assigned. A narrative overview of the School Action Plan should be the concluding portion of the Validation Team Report. This overview should include:

- An evaluation of the realistic attainability of the plan as a whole;
- The inclusion of any items not addressed in the school action plan that were identified by the school in its self-study; and
- The inclusion of additional items targeted for required action as determined by the team during its visit.

The school's Action Plan becomes its roadmap to continued improvement. It serves to provide evidence of improvement to District Accreditation Commissions as goals are completed. The School Action Plan becomes the basis for the Cumulative Annual Reporting document that holds schools accountable for their progress.

The Validation Team Report

The Validation Team's written report reflects its findings and is the most important product of the Validation Team Visit. Preparation of the Validation Team Report is a collaborative effort involving all members of the team. Standard areas prepared by individual team members are reviewed and approved collaboratively where consensus is reached before the report is finalized. The report is reflective of the overall quality expected of schools in the NLSA process and is the basis for the activities of the School Action Plan that will guide the school throughout the course of its coming accreditation cycle.

All Validation Team Reports begin with the following introductory information prepared by the Team Captain:

- **Title Page** (School Name, Location, Date of Visit, List of Team Members)
- **Foreword**
- **Disclaimer**
- **Validation Team Member Biographic Information**

A one-page **Report Summary** follows the introductory information and contains the following:

- Overall School Performance Level – the average of the seven Standard area performance level ratings
- The Validation Team's Overall Impression of the school – one or two paragraphs
- Outstanding Strengths – identifying six to ten significant strengths of the school
- Major Deficiencies – any conditions, based on an NLSA standard that have severe, negative effects on the quality of education, the ministry of the school and/or endangers the health and safety of the school population. Many schools will have no major deficiencies.
- Accreditation Recommendation – Accredited in Good Standing or Provisional Accreditation
- Signature of the Team Captain

The **Team Findings** section presents the team's evaluation of each of the NLSA Standards areas and their indicators. In addition, the team is charged to verify and review copies of all required evidentiary pieces.

Report findings must provide a rating for each General Indicator and list sources of evidence that have led to the assignment of the rating. Finally, a team must identify strengths and concerns related to each standard area. All items listed as concerns will need to be addressed in the required school action plan. The team must also validate that the school fully complies with Required Indicators in each Standard area.

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.

The following are specific suggestions related to writing the Validation Team Report:
- Clearly indicate the team's recommendation for or against accreditation in the report summary.
- Many accreditation teams complete their entire accreditation process electronically. Standard reports are saved individually, and the Team Captain brings the report together.
- Some Validation teams have completed the team report using Google docs or other electronic means. In these cases, be aware that formatting in Google docs and others is often altered when it is exported or converted to Microsoft Word.
- Within each section of your report, number and list strengths and concerns as well as make recommendations.
- Write carefully, using complete sentences and correct grammar and spelling. The quality of the report helps convey the importance of the accreditation process.
- Make your report format objective rather than personal.
- List sources of evidence that led you to arriving at your performance level rating.
- Ensure that the Report Summary includes the team's recommendations about accreditation and any outstanding strengths of the school.
- A school is not required to have a major deficiency.
- Complete your portion of the Validation Team Submission Report Form, and give the form to the administrator for inclusion when reports are forwarded to the district office.
- Remind the administrator to attach the General Information section of the self-study report that was prepared as a part of the school's self-study document. This is a required element of the materials that must be received in the District and National offices.
- The final edited copy of the report must be given to the school within two weeks of the conclusion of the visit. Additionally, the Validation Team Captain will share a copy of the final edited report with other visiting team members within two weeks of the conclusion of the visit as well.

Note: The *Validation Team Report* template can be accessed for use and modification from the NLSA tab on LuthEd.org.

The Validation Team Exit Report

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 outlines 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.

Note: the format for the Validation Team Exit Report PowerPoint presentation can be accessed from the NLSA tab of LuthEd.org.

A one-page report summary will be left with the school at the conclusion of the Exit Report. If there are questions related to specific recommendations or concerns, indicate that these may be answered in the fully-documented report that the school will receive within two weeks. The Validation Team Exit Report concludes its work at the school.

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.

Such interests may include, but are not limited to:

- Existing or potential financial or other interests in the school
- Service as a board member, administrator or staff member of the school
- Employment or consulting relationships with the school
- Clients or vendors where the individual is positioned to gain directly or indirectly from the school
- Close family relationships, such as spouse, child or close friend who have any of the listed interests

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: Team Captain Responsibilities

Prior to the Visit

- Contact the school administrator upon accepting the assignment as Captain. Confer with the administrator regarding the Validation Team selection.
- Contact Validation Team members as soon as possible after they have accepted their assignment. Make cursory introductions and share desired outcomes for the visit. Instruct team members to assign a preliminary rating for their assigned Standard area based on the evidence provided in the school's Self-Study Report.
- Collaborate with the school accreditation leader to establish a detailed time schedule covering the visit in terms of the school's daily schedule.
- Establish and maintain communication with the school accreditation leader concerning the intended visit.
- Work with the school accreditation leader to arrange for a suitable Validation Team meeting room.
- If you have not received a copy of the Self-Study Report one month before the scheduled site visit, you must reschedule the visit. All Validation Team members must receive the report at least one month in advance of the school visit to adequately prepare for their work at the school.
- Arrange visit details with the principal (meals, supplies, technology needs, help, etc.).
- Arrange for, with the school accreditation leader, suitable housing for team members when necessary.
- Instruct Validation Team members to read the school's Self-Study Report carefully and establish a preliminary rating for their assigned area.
- Make Standard area work assignments for each member of the Validation Team.
- Carefully read and review all parts of the school's Self-Study Report.
- Prepare tentative agendas for your meetings with the team. Be sure to include prayer and devotional opportunities.

During the Visit

- Spend time with Validation Team members reviewing visit purpose and procedures.
- Review team members' responsibilities and interview schedules. Establish classroom visit schedules, making sure to visit every classroom.
- Discuss initial Standard area ratings assigned by team members.
- Begin by reviewing *Standard 1: Purpose* with the entire Validation Team. Use your work to establish a protocol model for the process of reviewing other Standard areas. Establish how ratings are assigned.
- Provide guidance to individual team members as they carry out their tasks.
- Visit and observe. Be a model team member. Don't have long meetings behind closed doors. Be readily available at all times.
- Share your notes with other team members and review their notes as requested.
- Model questions, techniques, unobtrusive classroom observations, organized note taking and educational professionalism.

- Lead (don't dominate) the team's discussion of the tentative philosophy report. Use it as a model for other discussions and reports.
- Share high standards of report acceptability with the team. Hurried, inadequate reports are not acceptable.
- Advise, counsel, listen to and keep team members on task.
- Review the confidentiality of the report and all its parts with anyone involved with its development.
- At the beginning of each day, review the team's schedule for that day.
- Arrange for either the whole team or appropriate team members to meet briefly with the pastor(s).
- Validate that the school has met or exceeded all requirements for Accreditation in Good Standing.
- Review rough drafts of committee reports before they are considered by the team.
- Lead the discussion centered on each Standard area.
- Assist team members as they revise tentative reports according to team discussions.
- Collaborate with all team members to revise reports and gain consensus approval.
- Lead the team in identifying any major deficiencies. A major deficiency is any condition based on an NLSA Standard that has a severe negative effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the school and/or endangers the health and safety of the school population. Major deficiencies are shared with the school in the Exit Report.
- Collect all final reports before dismissing the team.
- Prepare the Validation Team Exit Report presentation.
- Lead the presentation of the verbal Validation Team Exit Report.
- Personally thank everyone for their cooperation.
- Provide the copy of the Team Report Submission Checklist after completing the Team Captain's portion of the form.

After the Visit

- Thank everyone associated with the visit: the team members, the schools that released team members for the site visit, the school for its hospitality, etc.
- Edit the Validation Team Report as needed without changing its substance. Be sure to include pages 5–8 of the Self-Study Report Form and biographical information on team members.
- Within two weeks, send a final copy of the Validation Team Report to the school for reproduction and distribution.
- Instruct the administrator to send a copy of the final Validation Team Report to each team member and to their District Accreditation Commission or LCMS District office. It is no longer necessary to send copies of the Validation Team Report to the national office in Saint Louis.
- Remind the administrator of the responsibility of ongoing improvement and the annual reporting.

Addendum #3: Sample Letter to the Validation Team Members

Sample of a letter to team members from the Team Captain that can be modified to meet local needs.

Dear Friends:

Congratulations! Thank you for agreeing to serve as a member of our NLSA Validation Team Visit team. There is no doubt, we are asked to perform an important task as we visit **Trinity Lutheran School** on **April 17-20. Trinity Lutheran School** has completed an extensive self-evaluation process and you will soon receive their Self-Study Report which represents the essential element of the school's preparation. I look forward to undertaking this important work with you and our team of skilled evaluators.

During the Validation Team Visit, each team member is given the responsibility to review, rate and respond in writing to the school's materials in one Standard area. Additionally, members prepare a draft of the report form of their assigned area to share with the entire team. The Validation Team Visit team's final report is a response collaboratively prepared after careful review, discussion and editing of the individual Standard drafts as a team.

Your assigned area is **Standard 3: Relationships.**

In order to prepare for the upcoming visit, your most important work prior to the Validation Team Visit is to read the Self-Study Report paying close attention to your assigned area(s). Come to the Validation Visit prepared to verify that NLSA requirements are met and ensure that the Required and General Indicators of Success are supported with evidence and practices that reflect the actual condition at the school.

Before the Validation Team Visit, I ask that you assign a rating to your Standard area that is a reflective of your initial impression of the school's compliance with the Standard (the average of the ratings expressed in a whole number of the General Indicators of Success). This initial rating serves as a starting point for your work during the Validation Visit. Everything accomplished during the Validation Visit serves to confirm, enhance or diminish the initial rating and contributes to the final rating in each Standard area. Please come to the school prepared to share your initial rating in your assigned area with the other Validation Team members.

Feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about our work during the Validation Team Visit. Thank you for giving of your time and of yourself to serve on this team. I hope that I can be of assistance to you and that together we can facilitate the work of the team as effectively as possible.

Serving the Master Teacher,

Team Captain

Addendum #4: Team Member Orientation – Suggestions to Guide and Direct the Work of the Validation Team

1. Pray for the school and the Validation Team's role of evaluation of the Self-Study Report.
2. Determine significant questions or concerns related to the assigned Standard and seek specific information to verify initial impressions.
3. Be present for all Validation Team activities and do not schedule other business during the Validation Team Visit.
4. Be concerned with major issues focused on school improvement rather than minor issues or items that are impossible for the school to resolve.
5. Verify that all written material in the Validation Team Report is supported with evidence and is defensible. If there is any doubt, gather additional evidence. If there is still doubt, do not include it.
6. Visit all classrooms to observe activities and student engagement.
7. Do not evaluate individual teachers. Any rating of a teacher is inappropriate by an individual team member or collaboratively by the Validation Team.
8. Trust your judgement as a professional educator. God has gifted each team member with specific skills and abilities. Determine what is effective and what is not. Be confident.
9. Evaluate the school based on national Standards. Personal educational philosophies or practices are not to be imposed on the school nor should team opinions become part of the Validation Team Report.
10. Informally interview teachers, parents, governing authority members, support staff and students. Interviews and observations outside of the workroom contribute to the overall impressions of the school.
11. Be willing to modify tentative judgments by observing and asking questions.
12. Review all General Indicators of Success rated "4" (Highly Functional) with a thorough review of the evidence and practices identified by the school to verify that the "4" rating is warranted.
13. Ask opening, not leading, questions. Do not reveal judgments, impressions or criticize the responses of the interviewee.
14. Watch and listen carefully when interviewees purposefully share information. Be aware of personal agendas.
15. Evaluate statements and actions in context to determine whether they are typical of the school's normal operation.
16. Recommend realistic and attainable improvement goals for the school.

Addendum #5: Sample Validation Team Visit Schedule

Day One
1:00 – 1:30pm	School Orientation with Administrator
1:30 – 3:00pm	Team Orientation – Review *Section 1: Purpose*
3:00 – 3:30pm	After School Meeting with Faculty
3:45 – 5:00pm	Team Meeting
5:30 – 6:30pm	Reception with Board or Governing Authority Members and Steering Committee
6:30 – 8:30pm	Dinner Together

Day Two
8:00 – 11:30am	Interviews and Classroom Observations
11:30 – 12:30pm	Lunch with Students and Faculty
12:30 – 1:30pm	Team Meeting
1:30 – 3:00pm	Interviews, Classroom Observations and Team Meeting
3:00 – 3:45pm	Interviews with Faculty Members
3:45 – 5:00pm	Team Meeting
5:00 – 8:00pm	Initial Report Writing

Day Three
8:00 – 9:00am	Team Meeting
9:00 – 11:00am	Verify Concerns and Legitimacy of Recommendations
11:00 – 12:00pm	Write Reports
12:00 – 3:00pm	Catered Lunch for Team, Write and Share Reports
3:00 – 4:00pm	Exit Report with Faculty, Staff and Invited Guests

Addendum #6: Required Indicators of Success

Standard	Required Indicators of Success
1:01	The school's written purpose embraces a Lutheran identity that is rooted in Holy Scripture and is committed to faith formation, academic excellence and Christian service.
1:02	School leadership and staff members understand and accept the purpose of the school.
2A:01	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.
2B:01	A statement of nondiscrimination is evident in school-printed materials and assures that students are admitted without regard to race, color or national origin.
2C:01	The climate of the school flows from and supports the school's purpose.
3A:01	The operating organization designates the governing authority and has written policies clearly defining lines of authority, responsibilities and/or limitations of the governing authority.
3A:02	The operating organization has written policies clearly defining governing authority membership.
3A:03	The governing authority establishes written policies or administrative limitations that empower the administration in operating the school.
3B:01	The administrator demonstrates a personal Christian faith, a commitment to Lutheran education and a dedication to the teaching ministry of the governing authority.
4:01	All school personnel express and demonstrate agreement with the stated school purpose.
5:01	The teaching of the Christian faith is recognized as the major purpose of the school, is allotted appropriate time in the daily schedule and is integrated intentionally throughout the curriculum and instruction.
5:02	The written curriculum is developed and is implemented for religion, mathematics, science, reading, language arts, social studies, art, music, physical education and any other subject taught by the school. (Early childhood centers need not segment learning outcomes into specific subject areas.)
6:01	Services offered by the school meet or exceed federal, state and local requirements.
7:01	Facilities are well maintained and free from hazards, providing a safe and productive learning environment.
7:02	Facilities conform fully to all applicable laws, including health, safety and building codes.

Addendum #7: Required Evidence and Documentation

Standard	Required Evidence or Documentation
1	• The written purpose/philosophy/mission statement
2A	*No evidence or documentation required*
2B	• Nondiscrimination policy
2C	• School discipline code
3A	• Governing board handbook or policy manual, including policies relating to roles of board, administrator and pastor
3B	• The administrator's job description
4	• Staff development plan • Non-discriminatory salary and benefit scale or policy
5	• Written curriculum for every grade level for religion, mathematics, science, reading, language arts, social studies, art, music, physical education and any other subject taught (Early childhood centers need not segment learner outcomes into specific subject areas) • A current schedule for each classroom, indicating clearly which subjects (activities) are taught at which times • A chart illustrating the percentage of each school week allocated to each subject (activity) at each level, including a comparison with state guidelines • An analysis of the results of standardized tests administered for each grade level for the past three years, including a description on how this information is used to evaluate and improve student learning
6	• Enrollment/admission policy • Crisis emergency plan
7	• School floor plan

Addendum #8: NLSA Weather and Other Emergency Situations Procedures for NLSA Validation Teams

Question: Who is responsible for the decision to postpone a National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) school visit should there be hazardous road conditions and/or should team members decline to make the trip out of concern for poor road conditions and safety?

Answer:

- The Team Captain stays informed of potential weather or emergency situations that may impact the school visit. The Team Captain is encouraged to maintain contact with the school/system to be aware of local conditions.
- The Team Captain contacts the District Education Executive and NLSA Commissioner by email or phone to decide to postpone, reschedule or delay the start of the view. The Education Executive and/or District Commissioner will work with the school/system and Team Captain to make the final decision regarding the school visit.
- If the Team Captain is unable to reach the Education Executive and/or District Commissioner, he/she will need to make this decision in conjunction with the school/system administrator.
- The Team Captain will communicate with the validation team members to keep them informed of the decision and the next steps. It is recommended that Team Captain ensure that they have the appropriate cell phone contacts for their team members in addition to school/system contact information.

Question: Can the school/system collaborate with the Team Captain to adjust the schedule or make modifications to the team's activities should schools close during part of the school visit or travel become hazardous due to weather conditions?

Answer:

- The Team Captain is authorized to adjust the schedule as necessary to conduct the visit, keeping in mind that the quality of the school visit and maintaining the integrity of the accreditation protocol are important.
- Examples of modifications include the following:
  - Use of conference call or video conferencing to conduct interviews with stakeholder groups.
  - Conducting interviews at the hotel location if the school is closed.
  - Delaying the start time of the school visit by a few hours to allow for travel situations and adjusting the schedule accordingly.
  - Delaying the Exit Report so that school visits, interviews, and other activities take place to ensure a quality review.
  - Never complete a Validation Team Report or conduct the concluding meeting on a school visit until an on-site visit is completed and the team has some way to collaborate on all the findings. The exit meeting with the institution may have to be completed via video or conference call at a later date.

Question: Who pays for the costs incurred when a school visit must be canceled and rescheduled?

Answer:

- The school/system is responsible for all costs related to NLSA Validation Visits.
- Flight reservations, if applicable, and hotel reservations may need to be rebooked if a school visit is postponed and rescheduled. Rescheduling a school visit is very expensive, especially when flights are involved. If the team is on-site, the interviews and review of evidence can usually be completed, and observations can be conducted through the direction of NLSA at a later time.
- The school/ system is responsible for the cost of changes due to extenuating circumstances that are outside the control of NLSA, such as bad weather and emergency situations.

Question: Who is responsible for contacting team members?

Answer:

- The Team Captain must contact team members regarding any cancellation or delay of the school visit. This may be done via email, phone or text message. Team Captains are strongly encouraged to be proactive in alerting team members to any potential delays or postponements.
- In case of rescheduled school visits, the Team Captain will work with the District Education Executive and District Commissioner to update the NLSA National Office regarding revised visit dates and in replacing team members who may be unavailable for the rescheduled visit dates.

Addendum #9: Sample NLSA Interview Questions

Student Interviews:
- Record number of students interviewed
- Open with prayer
- Give time for everyone to introduce themselves:
  - Name
  - How many years you have been a student at <insert school name>

Add questions that the team needs to validate the Self-Study Report, observations, or information gleaned through other interviews during the visit. Below are some possible questions for the team to consider.

1. What do you like best about your school?
2. Do you feel that you have an adult here at school that you can talk to?
3. Where do you get help when you are struggling in a class?
4. How do your teachers teach?
5. How does your teacher integrate the faith?
6. Do you feel safe when you are at school?
7. What does your teacher do if you misbehave?
8. How do you know you are learning?
9. Is school hard?
10. How do you get help when you have questions?
11. Is there something you would like to see improved, changed, or a future desired outcome that would make <insert school name> better?

Parent Interviews:
- Record number of parents interviewed
- Open with prayer
- Give time for everyone to introduce themselves:
  - Name
  - How many years children have attended <insert school name>

Add questions that the team needs to validate the Self-Study Report, observations, or information gleaned through other interviews during the visit. Below are some possible questions for the team to consider.

1. What are some of the strengths of <insert school name>?
2. How does <insert school name> communicate with you?
3. What do you love about <insert school name>?
4. Describe how technology is being used.
5. What are the favorite parts of the school day for your child?
6. What kind of discipline issues do your children talk about?
7. Are school personnel approachable and receptive to parental questions or concerns?
8. Do you feel welcome at <insert school name>?
9. Is there something you would like to see improved, changed, or a future desired outcome that would make <insert school name> better?

Staff Interviews:
- Record number of staff interviewed
- Open with prayer
- Give time for everyone to introduce themselves:
    - Name
    - How many years each staff member has been at <insert school name>?

Add questions that the team needs to validate the Self-Study Report, observations, or information gleaned through other interviews during the visit. Below are some possible questions for the team to consider.
1. What are some of the strengths of <insert school name>?
2. How were you involved with the accreditation process?
3. Describe how new teacher orientation/mentoring programs.
4. Describe a typical staff meeting. (How often do you gather and what do you talk about?)
5. How are you evaluated and how frequently?
6. Describe how test data is analyzed to improve teaching and student learning.
7. Are you given the flexibility and the support to teach the various standards to your students in creative ways?
8. How do you collaborate?
9. Is there something you would like to see improved, changed, or a future desired outcome that would make <insert school name>?

Board Member Interviews:
- Record number of board members interviewed
- Open with prayer
- Give time for everyone to introduce themselves:
    - Name
    - How many years each have served as a Board member at <insert school name>?
    - Are you a member of the congregation, parent, grandparent, etc.?

Add questions that the team needs to validate the Self-Study Report, observations, or information gleaned through other interviews during the visit. Below are some possible questions for the team to consider.
1. What are some of the strengths of <insert school name>?
2. Describe a typical board meeting.
3. Describe the governing process; how are decisions made?
4. What is your role?
5. How are the teachers evaluated? The principal?
6. What kind of training does the board do? How frequently?
7. Describe the audit/financial review process.
8. What does the community say about <insert school name>?
9. Is there something you would like to see improved, changed, or a future desired outcome that would make <insert school name> better?

Pastor Interviews:
- Record number of pastors interviewed
- Open with prayer
- How many years have you served as the pastor at <insert school or church name>?

Add questions that the team needs to validate the Self-Study Report, observations, or information gleaned through other interviews during the visit. Below are some possible questions for the team to consider.
1. What are some of the strengths of <insert school name>?
2. Describe your role at <insert school name>.
3. How do you and the administrator communicate?
4. Is there something you would like to see improved, changed, or a future desired outcome that would make <insert school name> better?

Administrator Interviews:
- Record number of administrators interviewed
- Open with prayer
- Ask the administrator to share a brief personal background

Add questions that the team needs to validate the Self-Study Report, observations, or information gleaned through other interviews during the visit. Below are some possible questions for the team to consider.
1. Does the pastor/church support the school? Give examples.
2. What is the process <insert school name> follows when new staff members are hired?
3. What are some of your biggest challenges?
4. How can this accreditation document help you to accomplish your goals?
5. Is there something you would like to see improved, changed, or a future desired outcome that would make <insert school name> better?