

An Introduction to National Lutheran School Accreditation



PACIFIC SOUTHWEST DISTRICT – LCMS

National Lutheran School Accreditation



National Lutheran School Accreditation is a process of self-evaluation followed by a visit of objective observers designed to help our Lutheran schools improve the quality of their schools and early childhood centers.

NLSA helps schools evaluate not only the quality of their programs but most importantly to evaluate the spiritual dimension of the school.

The NLSA process is completely voluntary and is available to every Lutheran school.

The Purposes of NLSA



National Lutheran School Accreditation:

- Helps Lutheran schools and early childhood centers improve and become the “Schools of Choice” within their community.
- Helps Lutheran schools and early childhood centers to evaluate themselves based on their unique purposes and national standards.
- Gives appropriate recognition to those schools that complete the process.

Why is Accreditation is Important?



NLSA fosters excellence in education.

NLSA encourages improvement through a process of continuous self-study.

NLSA assures parents, the host congregation and the community that the school has a vision and clearly defined goals and a plan to accomplish those goals.

NLSA is a public acknowledgement of excellence.

An Overview of NLSA



The accreditation process involves:

- taking an in-depth and honest look at your program, meeting objective criteria.
- providing documentation that supports the criteria.
- validates areas of strength within the existing program.
- identifying areas in need of improvement.
- developing an on-going plan to implement the improvements.

Key Outcomes of Self-Study



- The involvement and collaboration of school community members in the self-study
- The clarification of the school's purpose and school-wide learning expectations
- The assessment of the actual student program and its impact on student learning with respect to the criteria
- The development of a school-wide action plan and correlated subject area/support action steps to address identified growth needs
- The development and implementation of an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the school-wide action plan

Am I ready for accreditation?



Are these items in place?

- † Church Mission Statement and School Philosophy Statement
- † Handbooks (parent/student, personnel/teacher)
- † Board of Education Policy Manual
- † Major areas of Curriculum
- † Budgets
- † Calendars
- † Staff records
- † Student Cumulative Folders or Portfolios

WASC Initial Visit



Your initial WASC visit will look at the following:

- School Purpose/Philosophy Statement & Goals
- Governing Authority
- School Leadership
- Qualified Staff
- School Environment is Safe, Healthy, Nurturing



- Student Assessment
- School Improvement Process
- Curriculum
- Teaching Methodologies
- Student Support Services
- Parent/Community Involvement
- Resources
- Admissions Procedures

The NLSA Process



Accreditation Applications are now located on the Lutheran School Portal. If you are not a Portal member, you can contact the NLSA office in St. Louis and you will be given a one-year trial membership. However, Portal membership is required after the first year. This is for first time applications only.

(Please note: An early childhood center and elementary school **MUST** go through the accreditation process together.)

The NLSA Process



FYI – The application provides for an elementary school and early childhood center to be considered ONE school. The principal will sign the application and all information, including the disc will be sent to him/her.

EC directors have the option of submitting their own application with the elementary school. The cost remains the same.

The NLSA Process



2. Print the application, acquire necessary signatures, and submit to the District Education Executive for signature along with the application fees. Current fees are \$350 to NLSA and \$200 to PSD.
3. Once the application is approved and received in the NLSA office, a letter will be sent to the school administrator(s) with full instructions to complete the process.
4. All NLSA materials are housed on the Lutheran School Portal. Portal membership is necessary for schools completing the NLSA process.



For WASC/NLSA joint accreditation the process begins with WASC. Contact WASC (www.acswasc.org) to begin the application process. After the initial visit the site visit date will be set. When you know that date you apply for NLSA.

Please use the WASC/NLSA integrated document found on the WASC website. This document incorporated NLSA standards of faith into the WASC Focus on Learning tool.



Schools that are ECE/Elementary may consider applying for NLSA earlier so that the early childhood center has ample time to complete their self-study. The two year window allows for this.

The NLSA Process



5. A trained consultant will be assigned to assist throughout the process. It is the administrator's responsibility to make contact with the assigned consultant.
6. You will have no less than 9 months and no more than two years to complete the self study document.

The SELF STUDY Document



There is an NLSA Self-Study tool for both early childhood and elementary/high school.

The tools contain required Indicators of Success for each section that **MUST** be in place before moving forward.

General Indicators of Success



Any indicator that is not met in full requires a comment. The comment will clearly state why the school does not meet full compliance. These comments will then serve as the basis for the on-going plan of improvement that will be developed.

It is best practice to comment on all indicators as to how they are or are not implemented in your school. Providing documentation and evidence for all areas.

Each section requires a designated number of points to successfully meet the indicators of success.

Accreditation Criteria



During the self-study process, you will evaluate:

1. Statements (Mission and Philosophy)
2. Relationships (Parents, ECE/Elementary School, Congregation)
3. Administration (Governing Board)
4. Personnel (Administrator, Staff)
5. Teacher-Child Relationships
6. Indoor/Outdoor Environments
7. Health and Safety
8. Curriculum

Required Documentation for NLSA



Each section requires certain documentation to assure that the criteria has been met.

Samples of documentation include:

Handbooks, budgets, newsletters, agendas for board and staff meetings, lesson plans, class schedules, calendars, etc.

(Documentation can be scanned and saved to a disc.)

Completing the Self-Study



As the self-study process progresses, the coordinator will submit the completed sections to the consultant. It is the job of the consultant to review each section, along with the required documentation. This ensures that the process is being followed as set forth by NLSA and provides for the necessary feedback.

Throughout this process administrators and consultants will keep track of a check list and sign-off page.

The Completed Self-Study



Once the self-study is completed and has been reviewed in its entirety by the consultant, the coordinator will create copies of the report as needed. At minimum one to be submitted to each Visiting Team member and one copy for the school.

For Early Childhood the copy to the Team Captain should be complete with documentation.

For Elementary/High School all documentation should be gathered and organized for the visiting team to access during the visit



Additional copies of the self-study report need to be submitted by the school to the District Office and to the NLSA office in St. Louis either electronically or in hard copy form. Evidence documentation isn't required with these copies.

The Visiting Team



The Visiting Team will spend 2 - 3 days at the school. One team for ECE Center and a separate team to Elementary school.

High School visits will take 3 – 4 days depending on size of school.

The role of the Visiting Team is to REVIEW the self-study and documentation prior to the visit and to CONFIRM that the self-study report is an accurate representation of the actual practices at the school.

They are not there to judge!

The Visit



The visit usually begins on a Sunday afternoon with a time of fellowship and introductions and a tour of the entire facility. This is for both ECE and Elem teams if applicable.

The visit continues on Monday/Tuesday with classroom observations, interviews, and various meetings. The Visiting Team members will be working on their report throughout the afternoons and evenings. Because of this teams are to be provided lodging at a local hotel.

The Visit



The visit concludes on Tuesday/Wednesday with final observations and an oral exit report for all interested stakeholders which will include a general recommendation for or against accreditation.

The written final report will be sent to the school within two weeks if it wasn't left with the administrator on the final day. This report should then be distributed by the school to all interested parties including the district office.

Terms and Levels of Accreditation



NLSA accreditation term is five (5) years

WASC/NLSA accreditation is 1 - 3 or 6 years

Within NLSA there are three (3) levels of accreditation:

Provisional – issued if there are major concerns that need to be addressed within a specific time period

Accredited in Good Standing – standard level of accreditation

Exemplary – evidence of “BEST” practices

NLSA Annual Reports



Annual Reports are submitted each year to assure progress is being completed on each of the recommendations outlined in the written report.

Schools are to use the Standards Based Annual Report found on the Lutheran School Portal.



Annual Report are due in an electronic format to the District Office no later than April 15 of each year with supporting documentation.

The annual fees are \$350 to NLSA (in October) and \$75 to PSD (in April with Annual Report).

Schools who submit fees or annual reports late are subject to an additional \$75 late fee.

The Value of NLSA – Why should I pursue accreditation for my school?



“Accreditation helped the Board of Ed and the congregation understand what it means to have a ‘good’ school. The best part of accreditation was having all the teachers involved and listening to their ideas. It has really helped them to understand that the school and church have the same mission – to share Jesus with young children.”

Darleen Lucht, Hacienda Heights

The Value of NLSA – Why should I pursue accreditation for my center?



“Accreditation has greatly benefited our school. Through the accreditation process, we were able to improve and revisit our mission and vision. We are re-focused on our mission to Nurture Seeds of Faith and Knowledge. We also use the process to align our Early childhood, elementary and middle school programs.”

Andrew Sielaff, Glendale, AZ

The Value of NLSA – Why should I pursue accreditation for my center?



“Accreditation helps us ‘stay on the right track’ to excellence. Parents are pleased to know their children are in an early childhood center/elementary school that meets the high standards of NLSA, especially in the areas of Teacher-Child relationships.”

Kathy Cavaness, Anaheim

Questions/Comments



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PSD Accreditation Commissioner