

National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) encourages and recognizes Lutheran schools that provide quality Christian education and engage in continuous improvement.

It is completely voluntary and is available for every school operated by a single congregation, by an association of congregations, or by a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod or the Lutheran Church—Canada.

NLSA serves a variety of levels of schools — early childhood, elementary and high schools and all combinations of the aforementioned. It helps Lutheran schools evaluate their academic quality and the spiritual dimension of the school. The standards and report forms are similar to other accrediting processes, both secular and religious.

Benefits of Accreditation

- Publicly acknowledges the quality of the school through an objective outside agency
- Employs the expertise of an objective site visit team
- Validates the mission of the school
- Measures a school with a set of objective national standards
- Examines the spiritual component of the school
- Identifies and celebrates the strengths of the school
- Pinpoints weaknesses for correction
- Provides a solid foundation for faculty professional development
- Provides accountability for the school, constituents, congregation, and school community
- Provides the “blueprint” for school improvement for the next five years
- Involves the support and involvement of a broad constituency
- Provides the opportunity for public acknowledgement and celebration
- Connects a school to a network of several hundred LCMS accredited schools

NLSA EVIDENCE-BASED ACCREDITATION



National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) has been accrediting schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod since 1978. Accreditation decisions are based on a school’s compliance with national standards for Lutheran schools.

Accreditation involves a school in a rigorous self-study process in seven distinct areas that are related to school quality:

- › Purpose
- › Relationships
- › Governance
- › Professional personnel
- › Teaching and learning
- › Student services
- › Facilities

The purpose of an NLSA self-study is to evaluate the actual conditions in place that are related to essential indicators of school quality. These are evaluated and measured in a yearlong self-study process that carefully examines conditions related to the seven standard areas listed above. In order to become accredited in good standing with NLSA, a school must comply fully with 30 required indicators of success.

Additionally, the school must evaluate itself on a scale of 1-4 (with “4” being the highest rating) using a variety of general indicators that quantify how well it complies with standards in each accreditation area. Ratings are established by the school based on evidence and practices that are in place at the time of the self-study. (This is where the name “evidence-based accreditation” comes from.) Ratings allow a school to identify and celebrate unique strengths and address concerns that need corrective actions.

As part of the process, each school is responsible for constructing a school action plan based on concerns identified in its self-study. Actions are required for all conditions that have received a “1” or “2” rating. The



actions that are planned by the school ensure continuous and ongoing improvement. Schools are accountable to their district accreditation commission for annual progress.

Evidence-based accreditation is objective rather than subjective in nature. It requires that schools identify evidence and practices in place at the school that pertain to each indicator. The significance of the evidence and its impact results in a high indicator rating by the school. This removes the subjective nature of what leaders hope to become in the future and requires realistic objective evaluation of where they are and what they are accomplishing today.

Upon conclusion of the self-study, an NLSA visiting team validates that the information prepared by the school accurately reflects the actual conditions that are present at the school. In a formal, two-day visit, the team examines evidence, interviews school stakeholders, visits classrooms and observes practices. If the evidence presented does not sufficiently support a school rating, the visiting team has the authority to change the school’s rating in its report.

National Lutheran School Accreditation encourages, assists and recognizes schools that provide quality Christian education and engage in continuous improvement. Evidence-based accreditation allows NLSA to fulfill this mission effectively, thereby providing a valuable service to Lutheran schools.

About NATIONAL LUTHERAN SCHOOL ACCREDITATION



How does NLSA allow for different levels of schools?

National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) has relevant and appropriate accreditation processes for all three levels: early childhood (including child care), elementary and secondary. However, adaptations and suggestions for evaluating and reporting plans and progress on some standards need to be made to allow for differences. Notes of clarification and special helps for early childhood directors, elementary principals and secondary administrators are available for schools that apply. The associated manuals assist administrators from all three levels to understand the fundamental differences in the processes that apply to their schools.



How does a school apply for NLSA?

1. The school administrator expresses initial interest to the district education executive. Contact options are:
 - a. See the listing of LCMS districts' NLSA commissioners;
 - b. Visit www.lcmsdistricts.com to find the address and/or phone number of the district office; or
 - c. Contact the NLSA office at school.ministry@lcms.org or 800-248-1930, Ext. 1294.
2. The district education executive or the NLSA office sends the initial information and an application form to the school.
3. The school reviews the initial information. If interested, the school administrator completes three copies of the application form (see below for the link to the document) and submits them, along with the application fee (\$450), to the district education executive for his or her signature. Additional district accreditation fees and forms may be required.

4. The district education executive signs the forms, keeping one copy, and sends two copies to the NLSA office along with the school's application fee. The district education executive suggests a trained consultant for the school.
5. Upon receipt of the application and fee, the NLSA materials associated with the accreditation process may be downloaded from the Lutheran School Portal (www.luthed.org). The school is now ready to begin work on its self-study process. The NLSA director affirms the trained NLSA consultant who will assist the school with the process. The NLSA office must receive the application and fee at least nine months before the site visit occurs, and the team visit must occur within three years from the time of application to NLSA or a second application must be filed and another fee paid.

Does NLSA have other accrediting partners?

NLSA has developed co-accrediting partnerships with many of the well-respected secular regional accrediting agencies. Reciprocity allows a school to gain accreditation from two agencies through the use of a simple process. Contact the NLSA national office to obtain more information about the benefits of co-accreditation.

NLSA has reciprocity with the following secular regional accrediting agencies:

- › AdvancED (representing schools previously accredited by NCA, SACS and NASCU)
- › Middle States (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools)
- › WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges)

Can Lutheran early childhood centers be accredited?

The accreditation needs of LCMS early childhood centers can be accommodated by using a process designed by early childhood educators specifically for early childhood centers. NLSA standards for early childhood centers are challenging, appropriate and relevant. Early childhood centers desiring co-accreditation with the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are encouraged to visit the NAEYC website for more information (www.naeyc.org/academy). When the center successfully completes the NAEYC accreditation process, it can become accredited by NLSA using an abbreviated process.

Are NLSA materials located on the Lutheran School Portal?

Current news and information about National Lutheran School Accreditation is located on the Lutheran School Portal at www.luthed.org. Follow the NLSA link on the “National” page. This site is updated frequently with important information for schools accredited by NLSA. The Lutheran School Portal is a membership site, and a username and password are required for access. For further information regarding access to the portal, contact school.ministry@lcms.org.

What standards are addressed in NLSA?

NLSA Standards for Accredited Schools:

- › The school is purpose-driven.
- › The school is governed and administered effectively following written policy.
- › A qualified and competent staff serves the school.
- › The school’s curriculum, instructional design and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.
- › Student services and activities are offered to meet the needs and foster the growth of each student in a safe and healthy environment.
- › Buildings, grounds and equipment provide a safe and healthy environment that serves to enhance student learning.

In order to become accredited in good standing with NLSA, a school must comply fully with the 30 required indicators of success.

NLSA Standards for LCMS Early Childhood Centers:

- › The center is driven by its Christian mission.
- › The center demonstrates its Christian mission through relationships with congregation, community, staff, students and families.
- › The center is governed and administered effectively according to written policy.
- › A qualified and competent Christian staff serves the center.
- › Teachers and staff members relate appropriately and effectively with all children.
- › The center maintains a safe and healthy environment that supports student learning.
- › The center implements a written curriculum that integrates the faith, is developmentally appropriate and is supported with the necessary materials and resources.

There are 220 specific indicators (practices and documentation) that quantify an early childhood center’s compliance with early childhood standards defined by National Lutheran School Accreditation.

Who oversees NLSA?

The National Accreditation Commission

The National Accreditation Commission, composed of representatives from various participating districts of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church—Canada, governs NLSA. The process is owned and operated by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a service of LCMS School Ministry.

NLSA Executive Committee

- › Trip Rodgers — Chairperson
- › Scott Schumacher — Chairperson Elect
- › Drew Gerdes — Secretary
- › Terry Schmidt — National Director

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