



ACSI
Florida Approval Program Manual (FAP)
(for new programs and new directors not familiar with FAP)

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ACSI's Florida Approval Program (FAP) is designed to assist Christian childcare and after school care programs the option of gaining religious exempt status provided they are an integral part of the mission of a Protestant church or parochial school (Florida Statute 402.316) and meet and maintain the FAP Standards. A letter is required from the pastor of the church stating the childcare program is a ministry of the church. The director and staff must be professing Christians and sign a statement of faith.

ACSI's mission is to provide support, advice, and encouragement with on-going communication to the director and staff and conduct quality inspections that ensure compliance with the standards, competency of personnel and completeness of records.

The advantage of being religious exempt under ACSI, affords programs the opportunity to work with like-minded Christian early educators who embrace a Christian philosophy of early childhood education and support a program's biblically based mission and vision. ACSI employees and program inspectors provide mentoring and encouragement to directors while maintaining high-quality standards.

Being trusted by the state of Florida to provide quality inspections for programs in membership, ACSI has the responsibility to be thorough and diligent to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and staff in the programs.

Steps Toward **Florida Approval Program Certification**

1. Programs must maintain annual membership in ACSI and FAP. These are two separate registration processes and must be renewed each year.
 - a. Apply for [ACSI membership](#). Membership benefits include teacher and leader resources, collaboration and community groups, as well as legal/legislative updates.
 - b. Apply online for Florida Approval Program membership. Read and prepare all documents listed in this manual. ACSI FAP Approval Certificates are good for one year from October 1 to September 30. Details to follow.
2. Read, review, and become familiar with the *ACSI Florida Approval Program Standards*.
3. Check off the FAP standards that are currently being met and make a list of the standards that are currently not being met. Devise a system to track all standards to ensure they are being met before applying for FAP.
4. Use the FAP Approval Checklist to guide in securing the required documents

prior to applying for FAP.

5. Check with local zoning regulations to ensure the church has proper zoning for a childcare/after school care program. Obtain a copy of your Certificate of Occupancy and/or approval letter from the local building department or zoning board stating the church has been given approval to have a childcare program on the property. This may come in the form of a “special exception” or “variance” and may have been handled during the original establishment of the church.
6. Determine the board or committee that will have govern and have oversight of the childcare program. Establish who will be responsible for the policies and overall existence of this program. Is this a ministry of the church? Schools governed by something other than a church cannot participate in the ACSI Approval Program.
7. Determine student capacity by measuring the classrooms and drawing a floor diagram including dimensions to calculate the total square footage. This will be a preliminary estimate and ACSI will assist in determining the final capacity.
8. Plan the number of staff according to your student enrollment.
9. Begin background screening for staff as soon as possible. The ACSI office will contact the Department of Children and Families in Tallahassee to request a Live Scan “OCA” number and an “ORI” number for your program. Both numbers are necessary to complete the Live Scan process.
10. Check to determine the current certification of CPR /First Aid for all teachers and staff. New hires must have a certificate within 12 months of the hire date.
11. Once the ACSI office receives the Approval Program Application and documents including a floor plan with measurements, the director will be contacted for a pre-inspection appointment.
12. Once ACSI grants approval, the Approval Program Certificate is emailed to the program director. The Approval Program Certificate must be sent to the Department of Children and Families along with other required documentation. The program’s religious exemption is complete once an email with a “Notice of Confirmation” for religious exemption is received from the Florida Department of Children and Families or the local DCF licensing office for the program’s county. (For the counties requiring local licensing, see the [DCF Religious Exemption web page](#) for more information on these requirements. **A center MUST receive from DCF the “Notice of Confirmation” for religious exemption PRIOR to operating.**

The Inspection Process

Each member program will be assigned a FAP Inspector. The inspector’s role is to

serve as an advisor and mentor to the program director. The inspector will also validate the ACSI FAP standards. Unannounced visits to the program will be made by the inspector each year and an Inspection Report will be submitted to the program director no more than one week after the visit.

If there are one or more areas of non-compliance with the FAP standards, a Non-Compliant Report will be completed by the inspector and sent to the program director. He/she will have a designated time to correct the violations. The inspector will complete a Corrective Action Report listing the standard corrections that were made after the visit. If there are one or more areas of non-compliance that are significant, a follow-up visit by the inspector may be warranted.

Violations of the FAP Standards may include corrective action requirements, a written warning, fines and or suspension of approval status resulting in the dismissal from FAP. See page 53-54 in the ACSI Florida Approval Program Standards for more details.

Getting to Know Your Inspector

Each year you will be assigned an FAP Inspector. Most years you will have continuity by being assigned the same inspector, but occasionally inspectors may be reassigned due to need and availability.

Once you apply for FAP and are emailed your Approval Certificate, you will be assigned a FAP Inspector. The inspector will contact the new program director to introduce him/herself and get to know details about the program. ACSI is encouraging zoom meetings to take place between the inspector and program director to establish a relationship before the inspections take place. The inspector serves as a mentor to answer questions and suggest resources if needed.

Preparing for the Visit

Inspections may occur at any time during the fall and spring semesters. Usually, two visits are required for a new program. If programs have visits where all standards are compliant, the program may receive one in person visit and one on-line or zoom visit while providing certain paperwork, etc.

Modes of Visits

The Walk-About

The inspector will ensure the classrooms are communities of learning where the children are safe and secure, engaged in age-appropriate activities, and have the proper ratio of adults to children.

Review the *Florida Approval Program Inspection Form* for details on the items the inspector will be checking.

The inspector's visit will include (but may not be limited to):

1. Viewing of posted ACSI Approval Program Certificate, director credentials and fire drills log
2. Head counts – teacher ratio to children
3. Safety – exits marked with evacuation routes posted, outlets covered, clean and accessible restrooms, chemicals stored appropriately, mats and space for napping with cleared exits, access to drinking water, proper toileting, diaper changing and hand washing
4. Educational– biblical integration, schedules posted, age-appropriate materials/toys/centers
5. Outdoor play space- appropriate fencing (min. 4 ft high), ground covering, appropriateness/condition of play equipment (gate on playground may not be locked)
6. Storage of medication and first aid supplies
7. Proper food storage, menus posted, labeled cups and bottles

Viewing of Records

1. Transportation logs and records including driver's training, insurance, and inspections
2. Student Records
 - a. Enrollment forms
 - b. Physical Health Form 3040 – date checked as must be current within last 2 years
 - c. Immunizations Form 680 – process of monitoring to keep parents' current
 - d. Birth Certificate – not a requirement of DCF but a requirement of ACSI
 - e. Flu-Flyer – MUST be in child's folder with parent signature
 - f. Distracted Adult Flyer – PROOF of distribution to all families in the months of September & April must be provided.
 - g. Policies and Procedures Handbook and discipline and expulsion policies signed by parent
 - h. Emergency Care Plan
 - i. Documentation of food allergies
 - j. Daily attendance records
3. Personnel Records
 - a. All staff are professing Christians
 - b. Background screenings complete
 - c. Attestation of Good Moral Character on file
 - d. Child Abuse Acknowledgement on file
 - e. 1st Aid/CPR/Blood Borne Pathogen w/in 1 yr.
 - f. Fire Extinguisher training w/in 30 days of hire

- g. Safe Sleep/Shake Baby Syndrome training
- h. Adult on premises with 45-hr DCF training
- i. Staff on schedule to receive 45hr
- j. Staff instructed on all policies & procedures
- k. Annual 10-hour in-service training on file
- l. CDA requirement (# staff w/CDA on file - _____)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can a church operate a childcare facility without a license from the Department of Children and Families?

Yes. Florida Statute 402.316 gives local counties and districts the ability to grant religious exemptions to ministries that comply with the standards of an accrediting organization, such as ACSI, who monitors these standards.

2. Will I receive a license number under the ACSI Approval Program?

Technically, no. What you will receive is an ID number that can be used by parents for various applications, etc. The State of Florida through the various counties and districts is the only entity that can issue a license number.

3. Does my staff need to meet the same qualifications as secular programs?

Yes, and more. The minimum standards regarding background screening, 45-hour training, director credentials and child abuse training must all be met. In addition, the ACSI Approval Program requires that all staff members profess to be Christian.

4. Under the ACSI Approval Program, do directors have to meet the Director Credential requirements?

Yes. All directors must meet the director's credential requirements. Directors must receive their certificate prior to being issued the ACSI Approval Certificate for their center.

5. What do the membership and renewal fees pay for?

As a member of ACSI, your school may not only participate in our ACSI Approval Program, but will also have access to member benefits, collaboration and community groups and legal/legislative updates. Renewal fees help to offset the operating costs of the approval program in the Florida region. It pays for inspectors and office staff needed to handle the approval applications and monitoring of all early education activities and services.

6. Is it possible to be licensed by both the state and ACSI?

Usually only one organization is given the responsibility of monitoring the activities of a childcare program. In some counties, a “substantial compliance” relationship exists that permits the ministry to be “registered” by the county or district and approved by ACSI. The “licensing” responsibilities would belong to the approval organization.

7. How do I get my staff fingerprinted?

ACSI will contact the Department of Children and Families in Tallahassee to secure a Live Scan “OCA” number and an “ORI” number for you. Both numbers are required for Live Scan background screening.

8. What is an “OCA” and “ORI” number, and why do we need them?

The “OCA” and “ORI” numbers are assigned by the DCF office in Tallahassee to complete the required Live Scan background screening.

9. How do ACSI standards compare with Florida Department of Children and Families standards?

ACSI standards are comparable in that they meet the minimum state standards in most areas and include additional requirements regarding the spiritual background of all staff members. Bible instruction is also required on a regular basis.

10. Why do some counties have different standards than others?

The State of Florida is divided into 15 licensing districts and 5 individual county licensing agencies. Each agency has been authorized by the state to publish minimum standards as long as they do not fall below the minimum standards set by the State of Florida. The difference is in the number of standards that are perceived as higher than the minimum standards. These differences are minor and are not disruptive to the approval activities of ACSI.

11. What qualifications do inspectors have?

The inspectors have experience in the administration of childcare programs and are or have been the director of a program in FAP membership. There is a training program for new inspectors.

12. Does the ACSI Approval Program require a certain curriculum?

No, a certain curriculum is not mandated; however, a balance of activities that are age-appropriate and include Bible instruction are required. Many of our programs use published curriculums that focus on the developmental needs of children. ACSI does publish a Bible curriculum that is available for review at www.acsi.org

13. How often will we be inspected?

You can expect to be inspected in the late fall/early winter and again in the spring. In a few situations only one inspection will be conducted. All inspections are unannounced and take between 2 to 4 hours to complete.

14. Can a childcare program be fined by ACSI?

Yes. There is a system of fines established for violations that are serious in nature and/or repeated. Non-compliance issues that are not promptly addressed following inspections or complaints will lead to the school being placed on either warned status or probation. Non-compliance issues that are left unresolved will be grounds for removing the Approval Certificate from the facility and contacting the local office of the Department of Children and Families.

15. Why must our center be a part of a church?

The “religious exemption” language of the Florida Statutes allows for only these types of schools to be granted an exemption. ACSI requires a notarized letter from the Pastor of the church verifying church affiliation on church letterhead which is signed and dated by the head of the church official affirming that the childcare facility is an integral part of the church.

16. What types of churches will ACSI accept?

Churches that are classified as Protestant would be accepted into membership by ACSI. Other churches and their ministries may seek membership in other organizations that provide similar services.

17. How often must our Approval Program Certificate be renewed?

All ACSI Approval Certificates expire on September 30 of each year. The online Approval Application should be available in July of each year in order for schools to prepare for the new approval year.

18. Does our program have to meet the Staff Credential requirement?

Yes. Directors must have a director credential, and the ratio of one staff credentialed teacher per twenty children is an ACSI standard. Proof of registration into a staff credential program and active participation will meet this requirement.

19. Does participation in the ACSI Approval Program qualify me for participation in Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten?

No. Participation in Voluntary Pre-kindergarten is determined by the Early Learning Coalition in your county or district. Either licensing through DCF or through approved ACSI INSPIRE accreditation program as well as our ACSI Approval Program must be

completed to be eligible for the VPK Program.

20. Is there a difference between Approval and ACSI Accreditation?

Yes, ACSI INSPIRE accreditation is a separate process that involves a detailed self-study and compliance with specified standards.

Reasons for Not Receiving Your Approval Certificate

The following is a list of reasons why your program may not receive the ACSI Approval Certificate:

1. Current fire inspection (within the past 12 months) was not submitted.
2. No current employee has a current CPR / First Aid Certificate.
3. Background screening is not complete.
4. Dates not filled in on Staffing Form for 45-hour training or Childcare Attestation of Good Moral Character.
5. Your ACSI membership fees have not been received by our national office in Colorado Springs, Colorado.
6. Failure to submit current certificate of liability insurance with ACSI address:
Association of Christian Schools International, 731 Chapel Hills Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920
7. Director has not earned a Director Credential recognized by the State of Florida – Department of Children and Families.

