



Inspire

**Inspiring Schools to Flourish
Through Accreditation**

Chair & Team Handbook

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Letter of Introduction

School improvement through [accreditation](#) is a significant commitment for a school, and it must be done well. The [self-study](#) process requires the involvement of all members of the [staff](#) and a considerable amount of time. However, it would be incomplete without the review, follow-up, and feedback from peers that you, the visiting team, will provide. **The contribution of the team will determine how well the visit goes and how effective it will be in providing lasting impact for the school.**

This handbook has been written to provide the team with the overall concepts, specific advice, and practical tools to accomplish your mission. In conjunction with the training provided by ACSI, this handbook will prepare you to come alongside the school and walk through the school improvement journey with them.

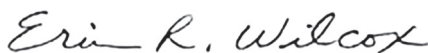
The information that follows and various support documents found on ACSI's website have been developed by many experienced educators as a result of their accreditation experiences over the years. Chairs and teams have served in both large and small schools and those in the United States and around the world. They have found, as you will, that not everything applies the same way in every situation. As you become more familiar with the *Inspire* protocol, you will gain an appreciation of the required elements and you will also learn that some things, like schedules, are a little more flexible and may have to be adjusted based on the situation. Please feel free to reach out to your divisional accreditation director for advice or help when an unusual situation arises.

Crucial to the success of a good team is the spirit of its members. The chair sets the tone for the team as they present themselves as peers or colleagues to the school. First, their job is to prepare well with the materials the school has sent so they can verify what the school has said about themselves. That will put the team in a good position to validate that ACSI's [standards](#) are being met. With those things in mind, the team will be able to focus on the school's goals for improvement and collaborate with the school on how those goals could be developed into a plan.

While on-site, the team will need to demonstrate a humble listening posture and genuine teamwork. Your goal is to measure the school against its own [mission](#) and student outcomes rather than those the individual members may be more familiar with from their own schools. The team will take their cues from the chair when it comes to professionalism, confidentiality, and work ethic.

When you leave the school with commendations and recommendations, we hope that they have heard words that both encourage them and *Inspire* them toward improvement. We also pray that you seek the Lord's wisdom during this process so that your words may be the very words the school needs to hear (James 1:5).

Your willing service will be a tremendous blessing to a sister school. Each team member will experience professional growth as he/she invests time and talent in the worthy work of [accreditation](#). This process invigorates and inspires a school and its people to move beyond compliance to increased effectiveness. Christian schools bear the Lord's name, excellent in all the earth (Psalm 8:9), and [accreditation](#) encourages them to be worthy of that name in all that they do. Thank you for serving the Lord and ACSI in this way!



Erin Wilcox, EdD

Assistant Vice President, ACSI



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Accreditation Overview

[Accreditation](#) is primarily focused on school improvement. Throughout the process, the school demonstrates the effectiveness with which it meets established educational [standards](#) of quality, determines goals for improvement, and creates a plan to fulfill those goals.

In Christian schools, these standards genuinely align with the school's [mission](#) and philosophy of education. Visiting team members bring an understanding of the accreditation standards and culturally competent insights to the school under review.

The culmination of the process is the status of being accredited. Your work as a chairperson or team member is critical in providing a report that is of such quality that the [commission](#) can make a well-informed decision about the granting of accreditation. In addition, the report becomes a tool for the school and its [stakeholders](#) to utilize in planning for its future. ACSI accreditation should mean the school is actively seeking to be a God-honoring educational institution in every aspect of its educational program and operations. Your work as a chairperson or visiting team member will assist them in that pursuit.

The work of the team members, individually and corporately, is to thoroughly read the [self-study](#) from the school and validate both the process used to develop it and the insights and conclusions it reached. Your goal is to provide additional objective understandings for the

school, which are expressed in commendations and recommendations in the team report.

ACSI partners with many secular accreditation agencies to provide the recognition and credibility schools may need to serve their students as they move beyond school and into the next step of life. In many of these partnerships, the ACSI *Inspire* accreditation protocol is recognized for its quality and, therefore, serves as the lead protocol and basis for the school's accreditation by both groups. ACSI has similar processes to many of the other accreditation agencies.

ACSI differs from secular accreditation groups by ensuring that the Christian mission and ethos of the school is viewed and evaluated as integral to all aspects of accreditation. The school is to be as focused on its [discipleship](#), character, and faith development as it is with its academic rigor and achievement.

The team is expected to demonstrate a Christian testimony as well as integrity, collaboration, and humility. In addition, each team member must sign an ethics statement to honor these qualities and ensure their agreement with professionalism, confidentiality, and the decision-making process.

The ACSI [Commission on Accreditation](#) takes seriously their responsibility to provide schools with a program of recognition that is consistent with our Christian faith, serves schools as responsible stewards, and gives honor to those who should be honored.

Timeline for Chairs

The role of chairperson is highly significant in a school's successful completion of the accreditation process. The checklist below is a general guide for use in keeping track of each of the chairperson responsibilities. It is organized by timeline with the duties that typically fall within each of the noted periods. Situations with specific schools may cause the chair to make modifications, as needed.

1. When assigned as Chairperson (usually 12-18 months prior to the [team visit](#), but this can vary)

- Review the candidacy or previous team report for the school.
- Verify with the divisional office if this is a joint accreditation (establish if ACSI is the lead agency)
- Review the school's Standards/Indicators checklist.
 - o Note any [indicators](#) not currently marked by the school as being effectively met.
- Develop questions for the school administrator.
 - o Contact the school administrator and school coordinator, get acquainted, and review questions.
 - o Become familiar with their progress to date and organization of the school's [self-study](#).
- Review timeline and [team visit](#) dates with school administrator/school coordinator.
 - o Back plan from team visit dates.
- Plan a pre-visit to the school. (On-site visits are at the school's expense.) If this is a renewal visit, a virtual pre-visit may be approved by the divisional office. The pre-visit would enable the chairperson to tour campus, build a relationship with the school coordinator and other

[school leaders](#), provide an overview of the process and required elements of the [self-study](#), and review progress on previous visit recommendations (if applicable). Some schools appreciate if the chairperson provides an orientation for [faculty](#) and/or the [steering committee](#) to help them get the process started.

- If joint accreditation, identify which additional elements may be needed.
 - o Clarify if team member(s) from another association will be on the team.
- Establish a communication update schedule with the school. Most chairs establish a schedule of what documents they want to review at what dates, and how often they will meet to assess progress.

2. Four to six (4-6) months before the scheduled visit

- Confirm the [team visit](#) dates and team members with the divisional office. The number of team members is dependent upon the total enrollment within the school, number of campuses, and other accrediting agencies (if applicable), with additional considerations for EE and other programs at the school. Please contact your divisional accreditation office for the required team size for each visit.
- Obtain team member application information from the divisional office.
- During regular update meetings with the school administrator and/or school coordinator: (by video conference)
 - o Review team member names with school as those become available
 - o Let the school know what the team will need in terms of housing, workroom, meals, etc.
 - o Contact the divisional accreditation office if the school does not approve the team members.

- o Discuss status of any [indicator](#) issues as the school finalizes its ratings.
 - o Notify the divisional accreditation office if there are areas of concern.
 - o Review status of self-study report and evidence periodically.
 - o Request a sample of self-study narrative writing and provide feedback.
 - o Review team visit dates and general schedule.
 - o Establish the date for the self-study to be completed and submitted through the ePlatform.
 - o Review of the online access to the self-study, evidence, and data.
 - Send a welcome email and general information to team members.
 - o Establish reporting assignments with team members.
 - o Provide details of the visit when available.
 - Contact team member(s) from the other association if required by the joint accrediting agency.
- o Complete the *Standard 11 Checklist*. Note items that will need to be reviewed by the visiting team.
 - Confirm with the division office that the school is prepared for the visit. Determine if the visit is a “GO” and allow team members to purchase airline tickets if those are involved.
 - Finalize team logistics with the school including:
 - o Hotel, transportation, and meal arrangements
 - o Campus layout, bell schedules, rosters, etc.
 - o Team workroom, including technology setup
 - o Finalized schedule
 - Communicate with the visiting team
 - o Confirm travel plans for each team member
 - o Review team member assignments for the visiting team report (Set earlier)
 - o Provide sample of commendations and recommendations
 - o Set up team meeting (see Section D below)

3. Eight (8) weeks before the scheduled visit

- Conduct the pre-visit/visit readiness check to the school. If you have not previously visited campus, this should be an on-campus visit. Remember, all visit expenses are paid for by the school. (Any exceptions to an on-site visit would need to be approved by the divisional accreditation director.)
 - o Ensure that the [self-study](#), evidence, and data are substantially complete.
 - o Complete the *Visit Readiness Checklist*, ensuring the school effectively meets the items contained on the checklist.

4. Four to six (4-6) weeks before the scheduled visit

- Ensure that the [self-study](#), evidence, and data are complete and posted for team access. (Most chairs use a Google Drive rather than the ePlatform for their working documents. They enter the edited final copy into the ePlatform.)
 - o Create a Google Drive (or other collaborative workspace) for the team to have access to self-study and team documents.
 - o Provide a template for team members

- o to enter their written work
 - o At 6 weeks prior to the visit, the self-study needs to be posted in the ePlatform.
 - o Notify the division office after contacting the school if the documents are not ready.
 - o Discuss any last details of the visit with the school.
 - o Review the final team schedule with the school.
 - o Confirm any last-minute details for accommodations, travel, workroom.
 - Conduct a brief (approximately 1-hour) team meeting (typically 4 weeks out)
 - o Ensure that all team members have accessed the self-study (and Google Drive, or other collaborative environment) and all team documents.
 - o Review team member assignments, with each team member completing the following prior to the visit:
 - Initial rating for each [indicator](#) for all [standards](#).
 - Draft commendations and recommendations.
 - Draft of any additional sections team members have been assigned.
 - o Let team members know that once their drafts are ready, the chair will review to determine if the draft meets quality writing expectations or accreditation policy.
 - o Review final visit schedule
 - o Confirm final travel arrangements and other logistics.
- 5. During the visit**
- Approach the visit as the most prepared member of the team.
 - Conduct a tour of the school as soon as possible and review the details of the schedule.
 - Be sure that campus maps, rosters, and schedules are available before or during the organizational meeting and understood by the team so they can plan observations.
 - The afternoon/evening of arrival (generally a Sunday), there is often a time for an organizational and orientation meeting (90 minutes). Take time to remind the team of the following:
 - o Necessity to focus on validating the school's [self-study](#), locating evidence for commendations and recommendations, and verifying data. Ratings are made on evidence that the team can confirm.
 - o Review the schedule and especially coordination of observations and interviews. Importance of being on time.
 - o Purpose for the team is to provide objective insights with clear, concise writing. Cooperate with other team members in reaching consensus.
 - o Review ethics, professionalism, and demeanor for the team.
 - Review the team report document.
 - o Contribute to the report template with a collaborative mindset.
 - o Set daily goals for the team.
 - o Provide extra support to team members as needed. Check with less experienced members.
 - o Debrief with the [school leadership](#) daily (but do not provide the school with a current draft copy of the report). Especially for new team members, it is important for the chair/team to review the draft of new work

before the school sees it.

- o Manage the team for effectiveness and efficiency.
- o Review goal accomplishments, issues, and concerns daily. Refocus as needed.
- The ratings should result from a consensus-building process. They should be completed once prior to the visit and one or two times during the visit, with team members able to revise their scores as they find out more information from interviews, observations, and additional evidence. Once a section is completed, the whole team should review the ratings, commendations, and recommendations to make sure they are in agreement. This team conversation will bring up questions and comments that might inform what should be added in the comment section of the domain in the final report.

6. Near the end of the visit: Collaborative Goal Setting

- Early the last morning or the afternoon before, (see schedule for suggested time), along with selected members of the team, meet with the [head of school](#) and other members of [school leadership](#) to collaborate on the prioritized goals from the school's [self-study](#) in conjunction with the general findings of the accreditation team. This discussion will help the team finalize the Accreditation Action Items recorded in the [visiting team report](#), and they will assist the school in creating their [Accreditation Action Plan](#) for ongoing improvement.

7. Concluding activities of the visit

- Engage the team in coming to consensus on Major Commendations and Accreditation Action Items, and the recommendation to the [commission](#).
 - o Establish a final rating for each of the indicators using the *Team Indicator*

Ratings Spreadsheet. The chair can share these ratings with the school if these are finalized prior to the team's departure.

- o Ensure that Accreditation Action Items are related to the [standards](#) and [indicators](#).
- Come to consensus on the overall accreditation recommendation to the commission. Use the appropriate ballot(s) for the team recommendation. If an individual team member does not agree with the rest of the team, the dissenting team member has the option of writing an explanation of their point(s) of disagreement and attaching it to the ballot.
 - o Team members sign the ballot(s).
- Review and edit, as much as possible, all sections of the report. Assign team members to read sections for other team members as they finish their own.
- Complete supplementary documents needed by the partner organization.
- The chair and assistant chair meet with the [head of school](#) and [school leadership](#) (as determined by the school) to review the team's final commendations and recommendations (this can be a time for clarification and discussion). The collaborative discussion of the goals most likely occurred prior to this. (See: 6. Near the end of the visit: Collaborative Goal Setting, above.)
- Depending on what the school requests, the team will share an exit report using the PowerPoint template (optional). The school can choose to limit the exit report to just [school leadership](#) or invite other [stakeholders](#) as desired.
 - o Briefly review major commendations and Accreditation Action Items.
 - o With team consensus, share the team's accreditation recommendation to the commission

- o Remind the school that the commission makes the final decision on accreditation.

8. Final team meeting

- Remind the team that the [visiting team report](#) and recommendation are confidential.
- Remind the team they will be asked to evaluate the chair electronically.
- Distribute reimbursement checks to the team for those who were able to turn in receipts (if available). Thank the team for their service.

9. Upon return home

- After returning home, the chair reviews the report for thoroughness and a preliminary edit (working with the assistant chair).

- o Review for clarity, proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- o Review for consistency with ACSI report template and guidelines.
- o Finalize the [visiting team report](#) and work with the divisional accreditation office to provide a DRAFT copy of the report to the school coordinator and team members for review of accuracy (understanding that it has not been through a final edit).
- Within four weeks (after receiving feedback from the school) provide a final edited report to the ACSI division office. Division offices may do additional edits to the report before submitting it to the commission.

Visiting Team Members

As a team member, you are one of a select group of educators representing ACSI with the responsibility to conduct a thorough site evaluation of the school and make an accreditation recommendation to the appropriate ACSI accreditation commission. The school's [stakeholders](#) have spent hours conducting a [self-study](#) and developing goals focused on improving student learning and the school's ability to foster that improvement through the conditions that support learning. The visiting accreditation team serves as evaluators and peers with the goal of leaving the school poised to better achieve its [mission](#), [expected student outcomes](#), and plan for school improvement.

1. Purposes of a [Team Visit](#)

- To verify that the [self-study](#) accurately reflects the school's program—its strengths as well as its areas for improvement
- To examine the school's goals for addressing its identified areas for growth, and collaborate with the school around those goals
- To commend the school in those areas in which it excels
- To make recommendations for improvement within the instructional, operational, and spiritual programs of the school and identify those areas that the school must address
- To make a recommendation via a written report to the divisional commission relative to the school being accredited
- To serve as an encouragement to fellow Christian educators

2. Expectations for an Accreditation Chairperson or Team Member

- A current or former Christian school educator (For standalone [early education](#) programs, a chairperson must have experience teaching in or directing a

Christian [early education](#) program.)

- A servant's heart with a [biblical worldview](#)
- Able to be away from work/school for three to four days, including evening work sessions
- Able to make unbiased observations and conclusions based on evidence, documentation, observations, interviews, and other data
- Able to work intensively and cooperatively with other team members in meeting the expectations for the team
- Discerning about needs and expectations of the school based on the ACSI *Inspire* accreditation protocol and the mission of the school being visited (as opposed to comparing with other Christian schools)
- Able to analyze the school's [self-study](#) and prepare a visiting team report based on analysis
- Know or be willing to learn the process of accreditation (including being up to date on current ACSI accreditation training)
- Excellent writing and communication skills, including ability to use a computer for writing reports
- ACSI policies state that no more than two people from the same school may serve on the same visiting team. No relative or spouse may serve on the same team; a team member may not be from the school, either past or present, being accredited. (Contact Office of Academic Services for any exceptions)

3. Role of the Visiting Team Member

- Verify that the school effectively meets accreditation [standards](#)
- Validate that the [self-study](#) is accurate, complete, and reflects the "what is" of the school
- Review data, documents, and evidence

for each assigned [standard](#)

- Review the statements of strength considering the [indicators](#) for the [standards](#)
- Assess and provide insights to the school’s self-identified areas for improvement
- Develop high quality, insightful statements of commendation and recommendation for each assigned standard
- Assist in developing major commendations and Accreditation Action Items
- Participate in developing the exit report to the school
- Evaluate the team chairperson

While serving on the visiting team, you will be representing ACSI, your own institution, and the Lord. Therefore, it is important that you understand the expectations for the professional conduct of team members.

1. You are a guest of the school; respect the time, effort, and expertise the school has put into their [self-study](#).
2. It is your duty to identify if there are indicators not being met, but it is not your responsibility to recommend specific solutions.
3. Be gracious, considerate, respectful, and professional with the school and your fellow team members.
4. Questions should be open-ended and give the [stakeholders](#) the opportunity to share how they meet the standards and about their improvement plan. Listen more than talk (James 1:19).
5. Make insightful judgments without voicing personal bias or criticisms.
6. Remember, you are appraising the school and its goals in terms of its own [mission](#), beliefs, core values, and objectives and not your own ideals. The team verifies the

accuracy of the self-study and observes the standards being met.

7. If you have a conflict of interest with the school, discuss this with your chair prior to the visit, if possible.

Your deliberations and those of your teammates on the visiting team are to be held in confidence during and following the visit. When you leave the host school, your role and your responsibilities as a validator come to an end, but your obligation to maintain professional confidentiality remains with you as you resume your duties at your school/work. The team’s report itself remains confidential among the team, the school, the divisional accreditation office, and the accreditation commission.

8. Expectations Prior to the On-site Visit

Since the report will be drafted during the visit, it is essential to bring a laptop computer. It is expected that you will do some work before arriving on site. This would include reading the school’s self-study, reviewing evidence, providing a preliminary rating of the indicators, writing the initial response(s) for the sections you have been assigned, and drafting potential commendations and recommendations, etc.

9. The Work of the Visiting Team

Your visiting team chair will familiarize you with the protocol, the team’s schedule, the purposes and expected outcomes of the visit, and his/her expectations. This will usually be completed about a month prior to the visit, with a brief review completed at an organizational and training meeting when you first arrive on campus.

You will spend time during the visit interviewing representative groups of [stakeholders](#) from the faculty, students, school leaders, parents, etc. You will also spend time observing in classrooms. No more than one visit by a team member per classroom is necessary and time does not permit lengthy stays.

You may be asked to write a paragraph on one or more general areas (e.g., school profile) or a reflection question along with commendations

and recommendations for specific sections of the report. The chair is responsible for preparing and submitting the final report with the team's input. The team will do its work during the day and potentially in the evenings.

10. Organizational and Logistical Functions

Your lodging as well as your meals during the visit will be arranged and paid for by the host school. The school will also reimburse you for your travel costs. Travel expenses can include mileage, tolls, airline tickets, etc. Car rental would only be included if you are asked to rent a car by the chair or school. All travel expenses should be discussed with the team chair prior to the visit. Please retain all receipts to submit for reimbursement. Personal expenses are not reimbursable while on the visit. You will be given an expense reimbursement form by the chair before the end of the visit. Normally, the school will have a reimbursement check ready before you leave the school. Professional dress is expected for the daytime, and comfortable casual clothes may be worn for evening work sessions. No honorariums are to be taken.

11. Arrangements with Your Own Institution

It is vital that you contact the head of your school immediately upon receiving an invitation to gain approval to serve on an accreditation team and to make arrangements for your absence.

Remember, serving on an accreditation visiting team is voluntary. Therefore, you will not receive any financial compensation from either ACSI or the host school. If a substitute is required during your absence, the cost of the individual will need to be covered by your school.

12. Changes to Your Availability to Serve on a Team

If an emergency arises that makes it impossible to serve on this team, notify the chair of the team and/or the ACSI division office immediately.

13. Continuing Education

By serving on a visiting team, you are not only contributing your professional experience to the school and to ACSI, but you are also sharing in a very valuable professional development experience. ACSI offers professional CEU credits for your service. The divisional accreditation office will contact you regarding your CEUs.

14. In Conclusion

ACSI greatly appreciates your willingness to further the quality of education and the process of school growth and improvement by serving on the visiting accreditation team. Thank you!

Sample Team Visit Schedule

(available in Word for use by the chair)

SUNDAY EVENING, Date

- 2:00-3:00PM** **Check into hotel**
Address
- 3:30PM** **Initial team meeting**
Hotel conference room (reserved each Evening)
- 5:00PM** **Tour of campus with school leadership**
Meet at main school entrance
- 6:30PM** **Dinner (Team with governing body)**

MONDAY, Date

- 6:15AM** **Meet in hotel lobby** (breakfast provided)
- 7:00AM** **Team sets up in Workroom**
Tech support meets the team
- 7:25-8:00AM** **Observe opening of school** (main entry)
- 8:30/9:30AM** **Parent Groups** (meet separately)
EE – Room
ES – Room
MS – Room
HS – Room
- 9:45AM** **Begin observations in classrooms**
- 12:00 Noon** **Lunches with ES, MS, and HS students separately**
ES – 12:00-12:30 informal, in Cafeteria
MS Student Leadership – 12:30 Room
HS Student Leadership – 11:15 Room
- 1:00PM** **Meet with Steering Committee**
Select Team members—Room
- 2:00PM** **Continue with observations**
- 4:00PM** **Meet with EE, ES, MS, and HS teachers**
without school leaders, including Domain 3
Discussion
EE – Room
ES – Room
MS – Room
HS – Room
- 5:30PM** **Team Dinner** (team only, may choose to have ordered into the hotel)
- 7:00 – 9:00PM** **Team work**

TUESDAY, Date

- 7:00AM** **Meet in hotel lobby**, leave for school
 - 7:20AM** **Observe opening of school**,
conduct interviews
 - 8:30AM** **Final observations**
artifact collection and review
 - 9:00AM** **Meet with Head of School**
– small group, Head of School’s office
 - 10:00AM** **Meet with Principals/EE Director**
in small groups – respective offices
 - 11:00AM** **Meet with support staff**
or complete interviews as needed (Room TBD)
 - 12:00 Noon** **Lunch at school**
(order from menu)
 - 1:00PM** **Accreditation Action meeting**
Chairperson and designated team member(s)
meet with HOS and designated school leaders
to collaborate on the school’s prioritized goals
along with the team’s general findings.
 - 2:30PM** **Team meeting** in workroom
 - 5:45PM** **Team dinner**
(dinner out or brought to hotel)
 - 7:00-9:00PM** **Team work**
- ### WEDNESDAY, Date
- 7:30AM** **Check out** of hotel, leave for school
 - 8:00AM** **Team meets for report work**
 - 11:30AM** **Working lunch** for team, on campus
 - 12:00 Noon** **Initial team report finalized**
 - 12:30PM** **Team chair/Ass’t chair review draft**
of report with the Head of School, EE Director,
etc.
 - 1:30PM** **Final revisions to team report**,
team balloting for accreditation term, prepare
exit report
 - 3:30PM** **Exit Report - optional**
Format decided ahead of time by chair/school
(whether just leadership team, or broader group
of stakeholders)
 - 4:00PM** **Team departs** (airport and driving)

— PILOT —

The Visiting Team Report

The [visiting team report](#) is a succinct, insightful, and focused document designed to assist a school in its commitment to ongoing school improvement. It identifies and comments on how the school is fulfilling its required commitment to the [standards](#) as well as how it has implemented and will implement an improvement plan. The team uses the school's [self-study](#) and supplied evidence to identify strengths and areas for improvement to inform their report writing. They will also use information gleaned during the on-site visit through interviews and observation. For each domain section of the report, the team will provide commendations and recommendations and indicate how effectively the school is addressing each [indicator](#).

After the visit, the school will incorporate the Accreditation Action Items into their [Accreditation Action Plan](#), develop the plan with additional information, and update the plan annually.

Outline of Team Report – specific prompts are supplied in the ePlatform

1. Introduction to the [Visiting Team Report](#)

- Introduction/Profile - This section will be imported from the school report and contains the school's basic information, demographics, history and [mission](#); significant changes; response to previous recommendations; and survey information. There will be a place for the team to comment on the information provided by the school, specifically significant changes and the school's response to major recommendations.

2. Standards and Indicators Assessment

- [Indicator](#) effectiveness ratings - collected on the *Team Ratings Spreadsheet*, are marked in the ePlatform
- Each domain section has:
 1. Commendations identify strengths directly related to the indicators

2. Recommendations identify areas for Improvement directly related to the indicators
3. Narrative which allows for comments. A textbox is provided for explanation or context. (See page 18 for more details.)

3. Major Commendations (Standards-Related)

4. Accreditation Action Items These are based on the school's self-identified goals, team indicator ratings, and the resulting Accreditation Action meeting with [school leadership](#). The school will more fully develop these in their [Accreditation Action Plan](#) with the details of people responsible, resources needed, timeline, and metrics for success. The *Accreditation Action Plan* is submitted with the school's annual accreditation report.

5. Conclusion – reflective summary which could include:

- Themes
- Overall distinctions
- General direction of the school
- Responses to the school's reflective questions
- Indication of how the accreditation process helped the school (how the school has used the accreditation process to improve)
- Statement of appreciation to the school

NOTE—A signed ballot with the recommended status and term of accreditation is prepared separately from the team report and is not provided to the school.

6. Good practice:

- Complete your work, including editing, in WORD, then copy and paste to the e-platform.
- Review the report AFTER it has been inserted into the e-platform and converted

to a pdf. The e-platform may throw off spacing, replace a special character, etc. Not all punctuation transfers well.

- If you call something by one name in one area of the report, be consistent throughout.

7. Formatting the Report

Follow standardized rules of written English. The chair and assistant chair should ensure the report is grammatically correct before submitting to the division office. Edit for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.

- **Rules for Capitalization**
 - Capitalize school subjects if they are names of languages, specific numbered courses, or specific courses (French, Algebra I, algebra classes, World History, history class, mathematics curriculum, etc.).
 - Capitalize the names of particular departments (Language Arts Department, Social Studies Department, the department head, etc.).
 - Words describing roles (school leadership, the faculty, the governing body, the pastor, the visiting team) are not capitalized. If these nouns are used as part of a title, they are to be capitalized (Pastor Brown, Principal Doe, etc.).
 - Do not capitalize “school” unless in a title.
 - Do not capitalize adjectives such as biblical or scriptural but do capitalize Bible.
 - Names of grade-level classes are not capitalized. Example: The school leadership includes freshmen on the student planning team.
 - Only capitalize Spring 2023 when it is referring to a specific term only (like

Spring Term 2023). Use spring of 2023 when it is more general.

- **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

- Use few abbreviations. Use the full name of a course or program before referring to it by use of an acronym or initials. Not all readers of the report may know what they mean.
- For acronyms, spell them out the first time, put the acronym in parentheses (like the school name) then use the acronym through the report. Do not use apostrophes when you make them plural. (MKs, ESOs)

- **Numbers and Lists**

- Use numerals for numbers 10 and over.
- A number at the beginning of a sentence is written out. If it is a long number or if writing it out is awkward, rephrase the sentence, changing the position of the number.
- Use bullets for lists unless numbering is important, no double spacing between lists.

- **Punctuation**

- Use a hyphen:
 - between a prefix and a proper noun or adjective, as in “pre-Columbian.”
 - between a prefix ending in *i* and a root word beginning with *i*, as in “semi-independent”.
 - There is no simple rule for hyphenating most compound nouns. When in doubt about hyphens, consult a dictionary. For example, “a well-built roof” is correct but “a roof is well built” is also correct. The first one combines words to be used as an

adjective. Hyphenate in-service, self-assessment, and self-study. If the dictionary does not list a particular word (either as one word or with a hyphen), write it as two words.

- o End punctuation goes inside quotes. (George called, “Is anybody home?”)
- o Use a comma to separate words, phrases, and clauses in a series. Use a comma after the next-to-last item in a series (He had many cows, pigs, and dogs).
- o Form the possessives of nouns ending in “s” by adding only an apostrophe (Jesus’ coat).

• **Verbs**

- o Use active voice whenever possible. Try to write sentences in a way that states who took what action. “The athletic association disqualified the school from participating...” is active and it identifies who took what action. A passive sentence may read, “The school was no longer in the athletic league...”
- o A verb must agree with its subject in number and person. Phrases or

clauses between the subject and the verb do not affect the subject-verb agreement.

• **General Formatting**

- o Use one line of space between paragraphs, no indentations.
- o Justify content to the left.
- o Italicize most publications like book titles. Put quotes around short items like articles.
- o Use personal pronouns as little as possible.
- o Word usage – Use “insure” when speaking of insurance. Use “ensure” when conveying “to make sure, certain.” The word “data” is plural. Avoid using “datum” or “data are” if possible. “Farther” is for distance.
- o Time periods – AM and PM are correct.

For any other grammar questions, we suggest using the free www.grammarly.com.

Make sure at least two people have edited the final report BEFORE it is submitted for review.

Observations and Interviews

Classroom Observations:

The purpose for the visiting team observing classrooms is to gain an understanding of what the teaching and learning process is like at the school. The visiting team should observe a sampling of all grade levels and subject areas. Visit as many classrooms as possible; however, it should be noted with the school that the team may not be able to visit every classroom. It might be best to discuss with school leadership if there are specific classes the team should be sure to see. Each classroom observation should last approximately 15-20 minutes.

Observations should focus on the following areas:

1. Student engagement/instructional practice
2. [Instructional resources](#)/technology
3. Support for learning
4. Classroom management
5. Teacher/student relationships
6. [Biblical integration](#) and worldview development
7. [Assessment](#) strategies

It is the observer's goal to enter and leave the classroom without affecting what is going on in the class. Remind the school coordinator to tell their faculty to provide a chair with the lesson plan available near the door.

1. Please refrain from asking questions to students or teachers unless a clarifying question is absolutely essential to understanding what is going on. However, the focus of an observation is to observe what is happening during a regular class period.
2. Feel free to walk around the room to observe students doing individual or small group work if it is not disruptive.
3. Note any highlights or glaring deficiencies from any [indicator](#). These will give evidence

for strengths and weaknesses in subjects or grade levels if noted in multiple classrooms and may even lead to major commendations or Accreditation Action Items.

Interviews/Focus Groups:

Interviews are primarily used to confirm what has been noted in the [self-study](#) and supporting evidence and to fill in missing or unclear information to help answer questions raised by the information presented. Groups of 8-10 work well and everyone is able to contribute. In large schools, there may be multiple groups.

Interviews usually take place for the following groups:

1. [Faculty](#)—EE, ES, MS, and HS; although it may be in a different configuration (school leaders should not be included)
2. Individuals—one-on-one or small groups as needed (the school leadership, guidance counselors, athletic directors and support staff such as nurse, registrar, transportation director, and admissions each need to be interviewed)
3. Non-instructional Staff—a group interview usually includes teacher aides, administrative assistants, etc.
4. Parents—EE, ES, MS, HS; these may be combined differently
5. Students—ES, MS, HS; these may be combined differently
6. [Governing body](#)—It is best if this meeting takes place early in the visit. If this meeting takes place at a dinner, often members of the team are interspersed with the board members. It is helpful for everyone to have the same set of questions. School leaders are not in attendance.

Each time a person or interviewer starts to talk with an individual or group of people, it is important to do the following (assuming it hasn't been done before with this particular group):

1. Introduce yourself and provide a brief

overview of the purpose of accreditation. (Stress the school improvement aspect, not the “inspection” model.)

2. Put the individual/group at ease letting them know that there are not any “right answers.” It is important for them to be honest about how things really are. Explain that it is the job of the team and the school together to identify areas of strength and areas where the school most needs to grow. (You’re on the same team!)
3. Generally, each interviewer should ask the interviewee the following:
 - How long have you been involved at the school and in what capacities?
 - In general, what are some of the outstanding strengths of the school?
 - What would you consider areas most in need of improvement?
 - What are a couple of the greatest challenges facing the school in the next year or two?

Additional questions for those involved in a specific [subcommittee](#):

- What sections did you work on? How did you contribute to the completion of that section of the report?
 - What documents or evidence did you analyze that led you to those conclusions?
 - Other than these specific strengths and needed improvement, was there anything else about this area that you found interesting, or helpful, or provided insight to you?
4. Assure [staff](#) members that comments will not be attributed to individuals. They may feel more free to contribute if they know they will not be quoted.
 5. Do not give the impression that you are rushed. Listening to the teachers and staff is

important. They need to know they can trust you with the information they are about to share.

6. If [staff](#) members ask questions that cannot be answered by the interviewer, remind them of the team’s purpose. Be careful not to be drawn into criticizing or prescribing what should be done at their school to fix some of their problems. Keep answers from the visiting team short as the focus of this time should be allowing school staff to answer questions.
7. As you ask your questions, REMEMBER:
 - The best questions are open-ended and non-threatening. It is best not to ask Yes/No questions.
 - If the answer you get isn’t very informative, ask a follow-up question such as “Tell me more about how that works here.” “Could you give me an example of that in your classroom?” or “How often does that occur?”
 - Make sure you note the nonverbal responses as well as what is said. If you note confusion or some nonverbal cues going around the room (in a group), then stop and ask another question to discover more about what isn’t being said.
 - Do not let two or three vocal people dominate a group conversation. Sometimes it is helpful to ask for a show of hands after you have asked a question. You may do that by saying, “How many of you do _____ on a regular basis?” Then choose someone who hasn’t responded and ask for more details or an example. It will help some participants begin talking.
 - It is always good to work with a partner so that one of you can ask the questions and listen actively while the other one takes notes.
 - Be thoughtful about starting and ending on time.

8. You may need to arrange an interview with representatives from the committee that worked on the domain you are covering if there is missing or unclear information. When you prepare for those meetings, develop specific questions to address what you need to know.
9. If the group is large, it is often better to break into a couple of smaller groups. If your team decides to separate and interview smaller groups of parents or students, make sure that each interviewer has a copy of questions that all members are planning to ask.
10. Even young children can be interviewed. Be sure to brainstorm with the team members who work with those age groups as to how the questions should be worded. No matter how young the children are, it is still best to ask for descriptive words, or “What do you like best about ___?” rather than yes/no answers.
11. It is important to note that some schools have a policy that anyone who spends time with their students must have a background check. Many schools are willing to accept a written statement from another ACSI school that he/she has a background check on file. The chairperson should check with the school in advance for their policy on this issue and help coordinate the process for team members if needed.

Appendix A – Commendations and Recommendations

As the team visits classrooms, interviews the various [stakeholders](#), and reviews the [self-study](#) and the evidence provided, strengths and areas for improvement of the school will become evident. Each member of the team will write commendations and recommendations from the domains to which he/she is assigned. Also, commendations and recommendations may be suggested by a team member about any aspect of the school. If the school’s [self-study](#) is an accurate reflection of the overall school program, there should be consistency between strengths and areas for improvement noted by the school and the commendations and recommendations prepared by the visiting team. The following explain how commendations and recommendations should be written. Examples for each are provided.

Commendations:

1. Commendations should only be written if the activity or initiative is clearly above average and has a positive impact on something that is identified in the *Inspire standards* and [indicators](#). In other words, schools may have unique programs, but if they do not result in demonstrable gains or achievements in areas directly related to the accreditation indicators, then the program should not be commended.
2. Commendations typically come from areas that either the school or team has rated as *Highly Effective*. However, there are exceptions. The rating for an area might be *Effective*, but the school may have an outstanding program within that area that still deserves a commendation. A commendation would rarely be written for an area that receives a rating of *Somewhat Effective* or below. (An example might be that a school is doing an outstanding job with connecting to, involving, and surveying their alumni but the rest of their data collection for the school, home, and community does not meet expectations.)
3. Major commendations can be general

statements that are a compilation of more than one area of strength. If so, they will reference more than one indicator.

4. The construction of a commendation is as follows:

Statement and Description:

Part 1 is a one to two sentence statement of fact that describes a program or initiative at the school and the result of that initiative in terms of the outcomes for students (followed by the indicator number in parentheses).

Part 2 is a brief description of what the team saw which explains why this commendation was warranted (followed by the evidence the team used in making the decision in parentheses, items separated by semicolons).

Example #1:

All students and faculty have access to an exceptional collection of media and information resources at the SCS campus, enhancing student research and instruction by faculty. (Indicators 17.1 and 17.2)

Students and faculty have access to a wide range of up-to-date materials and resources through the two on-site media centers as well as online resources, free and subscription-based, and from nearby colleges. Sufficient qualified personnel are available to provide the necessary training and assistance of materials and resources. (Media center observations; interviews with students and staff.)

Example #2:

SCS has developed a robust system of assessing its expected student outcomes and using the information gained from those assessments to improve the overall school program ensuring that individual students make annual gains on the attainment of those outcomes. (Indicator 1.3)

The faculty of SCS has developed and tracked progress of its students on the expected student outcomes by linking key assessments to its curriculum. Data from these assessments regularly influences program improvements. (Staff and school leadership interviews; self-study Domain 1)

Recommendations:

1. Recommendations should only be written if the area of improvement is directly related to an [indicator](#). It should be clear that if the school deals positively with the recommendation, then they would be likely to improve their rating for that indicator. This should reduce the recommendations that would simply reflect improvements that would be “nice to have” or something that a team member would like.
2. Recommendations typically come from areas that either the school or team has rated as *Somewhat Effective* or *Ineffective*. However, just like the commendations, that isn’t always the case. The overall rating for an area might be *Effective*, but the school may have a particular area for improvement or some aspect that is missing. (An example might be that the school’s overall security plan is generally adequate, but they might not quite be meeting state guidelines for frequency of performing fire drills.)
3. Recommendations are to be written using active verbs (ACSI has a recommended [Action Verb List](#)). They are not to start with “continue to” or “consider.” If it is clear that some action needs to be taken but it is not clear what action that is, a suitable verb may be “review” or “research” and then followed with something like “develop a strategy” to address the situation. Using two verbs is acceptable when one logically follows the other such as “research possible strategies and implement a plan to address the needs of the struggling students...” (This would be appropriate if the school, students, and team identified that this population was not being served by the current instructional strategies.)
4. Teams should be careful not to specify solutions to the problems they have identified. They should not say how the school will solve a particular problem by prescribing certain programs, an increase in staff, or other particular initiatives. The focus should be on the standards and the indicators and what in particular is keeping that from being marked as *Effective*.

5. **Accreditation Action Items** may be generated from (a) major recommendations/ Accreditation Action Items that were not resolved from previous accreditation visits (b) non-compliance of governmental requirements such as safety violations, (c) issues comprehensive enough to affect the mission/future viability of the school.
6. Typically, schools receive no more than three to four Accreditation Action Items. Exceptions are made if the school (a) did not address all the previous major recommendations/ Accreditation Action Items from the last visit or (b) receives less than a full term for accreditation.
7. The construction of a recommendation is as follows:

Statement and Description:

Part 1 is a one to two sentence statement that starts with an active verb (see ACSI’s list) specifying what the school is supposed to do to more fully meet the standard or indicator. This may include a second verb if those two are related sequentially or the second more fully describes the first (followed by the indicator number in parentheses).

Part 2 is a brief description of what the team saw, which explains why this recommendation was warranted (followed by the evidence the team used in making the decision in parentheses, items separated by semicolons).

Example #1:

Create a curriculum review process that details what possible factors, changes, and revisions will be considered throughout the process and outlines a regular schedule for evaluating each subject area. (Indicator 8.3)

SCS changes its curriculum in response to course evaluation comments and teacher input from time to time. However, there does not seem to be a documented review process, consistent between campuses, with a curriculum review cycle in place. (Interviews with teachers and school leaders; faculty/staff handbook.)

Example #2:

Develop a formal teacher evaluation process with which to conduct annual reviews to promote improved teacher effectiveness in the classroom. (Indicator 10.3)

A system of teacher evaluation exists but it is not apparent how the current system connects to best practices or increased student achievement. (Staff handbook; self-study Domain 3; school leader and teacher interviews.)

The following apply to both commendations and recommendations:

1. Commendations and recommendations must relate to indicators. The indicators are to follow the statement (Part 1), in parentheses, and there can be more than one listed.
2. Make sure that commendations and recommendations are written in full sentences. Part 1 is often the only part shared with the school community or included in annual reports.
3. Part 2 of the commendations and recommendations are followed by at least two examples of evidence. Examples are “student interview,” “classroom observation,” “student exemplars,” or “Governing Body Handbook.” If you are referring to the school’s Self-study report, refer to “Self-study, Domain 3.”
4. The description (Part 2) may be 1-3 sentences. It provides detail, context, or rationale for the commendation or recommendation. This should not list specific people or actions that you think will remedy the situation. The description may explain how the school is doing part of what is required as well as what more they need to do.
5. Be sure to check each commendation and recommendation for spelling, grammar, and tone. The chair and assistant chair will be the final editors for the entire report. Using a collaborative document, like Google Docs, makes editing one another’s work easy.
6. The focus of the commendation or recommendation should be identified as an action of the school and not as that of an individual or group. Even if the action identifies a department of one person, it should still target the program or initiative, not specific people.
7. Very rarely should a recommendation and a commendation cover the same area. If a need for that becomes apparent, be sure to explain why one is a strength and the other a weakness. (For example, data assessment and analysis may be strong at one level and very weak at another level because of the leadership at each level. In that case, it would be important to note the specific deficiency that caused that discrepancy.)
8. It should also be rare for the school and the visiting team to find themselves with opposite ratings, with one commending an aspect of the program and the other recommending improvement in that same area. If that seems appropriate, the description should explain why that has occurred, what specifically is missing, and list specific evidence that justifies the difference. This would be an example where an explanation would be necessary in the domain textbox.
9. Commendations and recommendations need to be agreed upon by the entire visiting team. If the team cannot agree on one, consider rewording it or removing it altogether. When the report is complete, all the commendations and recommendations stand as a reflection of the entire team’s opinions. As teams work to develop recommendations that fit the school, it is very easy for them to become too prescriptive. Sometimes, the team is simply trying to make a suggestion based on their own experience, but it comes across as telling the school to solve the problem in a certain way. Avoid providing specific means/tools for answering the problem identified in the recommendation, and/or writing a recommendation that only matches the Highly Effective level in the [universal rubric](#). (See example below).

Here is an example of a recommendation that is too prescriptive.

Develop more regular communication procedures regarding assessment and student achievement with online programs such as FACTS and ACSI's DataOnline as well as weekly electronic progress checks in the elementary school. (Indicator 9.1)

Parents have indicated that they are unhappy with the out-of-date online grading program the school is currently using. The leadership has indicated that it is open to considering other options, but it has not budgeted for an upgrade at this time. (Parent and staff interviews; budget review; survey results)

This one is better. Notice that it is not prescriptive as to how the problem will be solved.

Develop regular communication regarding assessment and student achievement. Both formative and summative assessments should be utilized, and parents should receive information in a timely fashion. (Indicator 9.1)

Parents have indicated that they are unhappy with the out-of-date online grading program the school is currently using. The leadership has indicated that it is open to considering other options, but it has not budgeted for an upgrade at this time. (Parent and staff interviews; budget review; survey results)

Appendix B – Writing the Response to the Domain

One member of the visiting team is usually assigned as the leader for each domain and is responsible for completing the written section of the report for that domain. First, the ratings for each [indicator](#) will be completed. At the end of each domain, there will be a textbox in the ePlatform allowing for comments about the indicator ratings. There is no requirement for the comment box to be filled in, nor a minimum amount of text, if it is used. These are some of the types of comments the team member may wish to include in that comment box to help the school or commission understand the ratings:

1. Context – Is there anything that the reader should know that would help them understand these ratings? For example, was the program new? Did the staff recently change? Has this area improved since the previous visit? If any indicator is rated as *Somewhat Effective* or *Ineffective*, an additional statement is necessary to provide context and specific areas for improvement.

2. Details – Are there any additional details that the reader would benefit from knowing? For example, “The student test scores from the previous year were an anomaly because (state the reason).” Or, even if an indicator rating is *Effective*, are there discrepancies between the various grade levels (such as elementary vs. secondary) in that area? If the school is *Highly Effective* in an area, additional details could be provided.
3. Explanation – Is there any information needed to shed light on a particular recommendation or even commendation? This might be helpful when the team’s score and the school’s score vary significantly.

Next, the team member will write the commendations and recommendations that come out of the domain. (See section on how to write commendations and recommendations.)

There is no required number of commendations or recommendations per domain. Although it is good to compliment a school on what they are doing well, it is important to be genuine in identifying strengths as well as those areas in which a school should improve.

Appendix C – Determining Accreditation Action Items

While there are no “critical indicators” as there were in previous versions of the ACSI protocol, there are still some indicators that are so important that if they are not met, it should encourage the team to consider writing an Accreditation Action Item.

1. Team members should review the items on the *Visit Readiness Checklist*. These items should have been completed before the visit was allowed to take place. However, there are times when the school claims to have these in place and even sends evidence to substantiate these important items but when the team arrives on-site, it may become obvious that these are not adequate. They may exist on paper but not in practice. If that is the case, then deficiencies in these areas should probably rise to a major recommendation.

In some situations, only one minor aspect may be missing, and the visiting team may decide to leave them as a recommendation at the domain level. That is appropriate if it is just a minor aspect such as documentation of the training, when in fact, the training did occur.

2. Another reason that a recommendation may be moved up to an Accreditation Action Item is when a recommendation from the previous report was not completed. If it has been adequately addressed but is ongoing and not likely to ever be “completed” then there is no need to make it an Accreditation Action Item. If, however, it has not been adequately addressed and the reason it is not completed is a lack of progress, then this is an example of a recommendation that should become an Accreditation Action Item (assuming it is still an indicator in *Inspire*.)
3. One of those *Visit Readiness Checklist* items is the issue of having qualified staff. That is considered essential for ACSI schools. Over the years, we have recognized that this can be accomplished through a variety of means.

- **School-Based Professional Development (SBPD).** Schools that have applied (and are accepted) to do SBPD, or have received Exemplary School status, have shown ACSI that they have well-developed professional development with the essential elements. This includes ensuring professional qualifications for their staff as well as Christian Philosophy and Bible, as well. These schools are not required to give evidence of individual certificates. If the school has a program/software that tracks individuals professional development, they may use this for reporting, or use the tracking tool that ACSI supplies.

- **ACSI and/or State Certification.**

- o [Faculty](#) and professional staff may hold a state, national, or provincial teacher/administrator credential. The school must ensure that they have Christian Philosophy of Education and Bible, as well. This is usually tracked on the Certification Spreadsheet.

OR

- o [Faculty](#) and professional staff may choose to demonstrate their preparation for teaching through an ACSI certificate. This route ensures that the teacher starts with a bachelor’s degree and adds appropriate professional development toward a certificate that matches their teaching responsibility. These certificates include Christian Philosophy of Education and Bible requirements. This is also tracked on the ACSI Certification spreadsheet.

For either system, the requirement is for 80% of the [faculty](#) and 100% of administrators to be certified OR meet their professional development goals. (All schools will need to provide periodic updates of their teachers’ qualifications on [annual](#) or [midterm](#) reports to the divisional office of ACSI.) If the visiting team arrives on-site and the school is not successfully using

one of the methods described, teacher/leader qualifications could become an Accreditation Action Item. If some minor aspect were out of compliance, like minor record keeping, then the team could decide to keep it at a domain level recommendation.

For more information on the School-Based Professional Development or Exemplary School programs, contact the ACSI divisional office.

4. ACSI Administrator Certification

The educational leaders of the school must be appropriately certified as administrators or be properly documented as participants in the school's approved SBPD program. (See indicator 12.2) This includes the head of school, superintendent, executive director, and campus principals.

In situations where the school has a non-educationally trained person serving as the head of the school (e.g., a pastor,) the school must demonstrate that the instructional program is led by a trained educational leader who is properly certified for that role.

Newly hired administrators do not need to be certified the first year and do not count against the 100 percent-requirement for certification. This is true even if they have been at the school and recently promoted into that role. ([Early Education Directors](#) are not required to be certified but must meet the educational qualifications for that position.)

5. The final category of items that the team might consider for Accreditation Action Items would be those issues critical enough to be serious threats to the health and safety of the students and staff, or legal and financial viability of the school. For example, if the school doesn't have a child safety plan that is appropriate, or realistic, that would rise to the level of a major. Another example could be if the school is engaging in financial practices that are technically not illegal, yet not financially ethical. Those are the types of issues that would be of such great concern that they would need to be fixed immediately. In fact, the visiting team may recommend that some actions be taken within the year or even a period of months, depending on how serious they are.

Appendix D – Glossary

Academic Counseling: Service to parents and students who are in need of advice or assistance with course selection, graduation requirements, college entrance examinations, college acceptance requirements, and general readiness for the next academic level.

Accountability: Any number of ways the school ensures continued fulfillment of its own mission and other stated objectives. Through open communication and transparency, regular feedback from stakeholders can help the school identify ways to improve in meeting their own mission, policies, goals, and/or objectives.

Accreditation: The status granted to a school after standards have been met, a self-study has been written, a team has completed a peer-review process, and the commission has approved the school for accreditation. Accreditation is granted for six years or a period commensurate with that of another agency in a joint accreditation.

Accreditation Action Plan (AAP): A school’s annualized plan for improvement created as a result of the areas for improvement identified through the accreditation self-study and visit process. Creation of the AAP is a multi-step process: the school establishes goals as part of the self-study, the school and the visiting team collaborate on those goals and the team’s findings, and the school formalizes the written plan after the conclusion of the visit. The completed plan includes instructional, operational, and/or programmatic goals; strategies and timelines for reaching these goals; and assessment, personnel, resources, analysis, and reporting procedures to determine whether the goals have been achieved.

Administration: See School Leadership

Advisory Board: In church-sponsored schools that are governed by a church board, or in proprietary schools that may be led by an individual or team of founders/owners, an advisory board would function as an expert team of outside voices that lend experience and qualified input into various governance-related issues at the school. Though perhaps non-voting members of the governance structure, this group would serve as a sounding board for school leadership and as a liaison between school leadership and the church governing body or founder/owner of the institution.

Annual Report: A report submitted by the school to the appropriate Divisional or Global office wherein the school provides an update on demographics, gives notice of any substantive changes, and affirms ongoing progress on the Accreditation Action Plan.

Assessment (elementary/secondary): Methods of evaluating student performance and achievement – the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. Schools should implement both assessment of learning, as well as assessment for learning (formative, summative, objective, subjective, formal, informal, etc.).

- **Authentic Assessment:** A form of assessment that requires students to complete projects or perform skills which are tied to real-world tasks. Typically, students are graded with rubrics for the evaluation of these tasks rather than pencil and paper assessments.
- **Range of Assessments (also Varied Assessments):** Used to indicate that schools should implement several different forms and methods of assessment. Assessments utilized to meet the requirements could include standardized (multiple types), authentic, teacher-created, objective, subjective, formal, informal, summative, formative, and/or measures that utilize a combination of any of the above, as well as differentiated assessments based on learners’ needs and interests.

Biblical Integration (or Biblical Worldview Integration): The weaving of God’s truth—in precept, principle, and practice—into teaching and learning in such a way that a unified, God-centered view of life is presented in order to promote authentic application into the lives of students.

Biblical Worldview: Recognizing the authority of Scripture as the source of truth and using it as the lens through which we attempt to understand and respond to our world.

Board: See Governing Body

Candidate Status: The status of a school when it is deemed able to complete the accreditation process in a three-year maximum time frame. Candidate status requires an application, candidacy visit, and approval. Candidate status is effective up to three full school years.

Certification: The status granted to teachers and administrators who meet specified academic requirements for an ACSI teacher/administrator credential.

Code of Ethics: An identified set of guidelines that each individual commits to upholding in his/her role. This may be a formal document, or a less formal list of expectations.

Continuous Improvement: A consistent effort to improve the school’s processes, procedures, and practices that focus on teaching, learning, and student achievement. Ongoing efforts may also be warranted in other areas that contribute to the overall student experience.

Commission on Accreditation: The commission established by the ACSI Board of Directors to establish policy, create structure, and provide oversight for all accreditation activities of the Association. The commission also hears and adjudicates appeals from the divisional commissions and serves as the primary commission for specialty protocols and international schools.

Curriculum: The planned instructional program to be delivered to the students. Though a school’s choice in textbooks and resources for any given grade level and subject area is an important consideration, the school’s curriculum is much broader than a textbook series.

Curriculum Documentation: A written description of what is taught throughout the school that 1) describes the school’s instructional program, 2) helps ensure continuity between grade levels and subject areas, and 3) provides a basis for evaluation of the school’s instructional program.

Curriculum Guides/Maps: See Curriculum Documentation

Discipleship: To train another, through instruction and modeling, to follow Christ and practice spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, and faithful living.

Digital Citizenship: Using technology in safe, effective, discerning, and responsible ways that affect student learning and the community at large.

Divisional Accreditation Commission: The commission made up of representatives from ACSI-accredited schools in each division, or subset of the division. The commission meets, usually twice a year, to review and monitor accreditation activity in the division and to make decisions on school accreditation.

Early Education (EE): The care and the education of children before kindergarten. Kindergarten may be included if the program is a standalone early education program.

Equitable Compensation: Impartially determined salary ranges based on objective criteria such as years of service, credentials, experience, and/or performance. Compensation information should be available to employees for review.

Expected Student Outcomes: What the school intentionally targets for all students to know, believe, understand, and/or be able to do in academic and non-academic areas after their tenure in the school. Outcomes are based on the mission and philosophy of the school.

Executive Leadership: See School Leadership

Facilities: All buildings and grounds on school property or utilized by the school.

Faculty: Generally referring to the instructional staff of the school, especially in instances where it is pertinent to make a distinction between instructional staff and non-instructional staff.

Fidelity: The manner in which assessments are conducted in accordance with their original intent and with the same degree of accuracy every time.

Governing body: A group of elected or appointed individuals who come together to act as one for the purpose of establishing policies that will enable the school to achieve its established desirable ends and to avoid results it considers unacceptable. These individuals are “trustees” who have authority when sitting as members of the governing body. (See [reference the proprietary school doc].)

Head of School: The chief administrator/officer of the school. Titles for this role vary significantly from school to school (e.g., principal, administrator, headmaster, head of school, director, president, superintendent).

Indicators: Descriptions of essential practices, processes, and procedures that elaborate and explain how schools can effectively meet the standards of accreditation.

Instructional Methods: The techniques that a teacher uses (e.g., hands-on activities, peer tutoring, discussion, experimentation, learning centers, debates, role-play, drill, and practice) and adapts to the learning styles of the students.

Instructional Objectives: Statements that describe the skills or concepts the student will have attained when instruction in a particular subject, grade, unit, or lesson is completed.

Instructional Resources: The physical and digital resources that are available to support the instructional program. Instructional resources could also include supplemental materials that are used in the instructional program and are identified in the curriculum documentation.

Leadership: See School Leadership

Mentoring: To intentionally train another through relationship, instruction, and modeling.

Mid-term Report: A report provided by the school to the appropriate Divisional or Global office at or near the midpoint of a school’s accreditation term, wherein the school provides more detailed updates on the AAP, faculty qualifications, and other applicable accreditation expectations. The Divisional or Global office will notify the school if a mid-term visit is required.

Mission: A brief statement of why the school exists and what the school seeks to accomplish.

Outreach: The action or activity of seeking to serve or otherwise connect with individuals or organizations outside of your own school in order to provide opportunities for students to develop Christian character.

Philosophy of Education: The philosophy that articulates the program’s beliefs about how children learn and how they should be instructed and assessed. The statement guides the instructional methods and classroom practices deemed appropriate considering the program’s view of the nature

and needs of children. A Christian school's philosophy of education would also articulate the place of faith in Christian education as well as how to integrate biblical truth into the overall curriculum planning and daily instruction.

Referral: A procedure by which a teacher, counselor, or other school personnel suggests school or community resources to assist a student who has learning, emotional, physical, or other needs.

School Leadership: The on-site, day-to-day leader(s) of the school, often referring to the administrative or leadership team that may include directors, principals, assistant principals, curriculum directors, deans, non-instructional leaders, etc. Leadership may include department heads or lead teachers.

Scope and Sequence: Included as part of the curriculum documentation, a scope and sequence indicates the breadth of the content and the order in which it will be taught within and across grades.

Self-Study: The document produced by the steering committee and the various subcommittees of the school as they respond to the standards, indicators, and other prompts of the accreditation protocol. This document is a collaborative effort of school groups and must represent the combined input, analysis, and consensus of all those involved, with sufficient evidence to demonstrate the school's effectiveness with regard to standards and indicators.

Spiritual Formation: The teaching and nurturing of students in the process of spiritual growth toward maturity in Christ. This includes the development of a biblical worldview and Christian character.

Staff: All personnel employed by the school unless otherwise designated (e.g., "instructional staff," "non-instructional staff," etc.).

Stakeholder(s): A person or group with direct interest, involvement, or investment in the realization of the mission of the school (e.g., staff, students, parents, governing body, community, and donors).

Standards: The 20 established qualitative criteria for school accreditation.

Steering Committee: A group of individuals at the school that is responsible for the development and completion of the self-study. The steering committee works with each of the subcommittees to train, advise, and hold them accountable for completing tasks.

Subcommittee: A group of stakeholders at the school that is responsible for a section of the self-study. Subcommittees report to the steering committee.

Team Visit: A visit to the school by peer educators wherein they validate the accuracy and thoroughness of the self-study. The team engages in observations and interviews, collaborates with the school around future goals, and constructs a team report. This visit is generally three to four days long.

Universal Rubric: The chart that defines or describes four levels of effectiveness as applied to all indicators in the *Inspire* protocol. Schools and visiting teams should use the universal rubric with the overall standard in mind as they review each indicator and provide evidence.

Visiting Team Report: A report written by the visiting team, in accordance with ACSI accreditation standards and policies, wherein the visiting team articulates their findings in the form of indicator ratings, commendations, recommendations, accreditation action items, and overall analyses.



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