

National Lutheran School Accreditation

Early Childhood Team Captain Manual

Revised September 2018

MISSION, PURPOSE, VISION and VALUES

Mission

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

Purpose

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

Vision

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

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

Values

- Lutheran Culture
- Educational Excellence
- Continuing Improvement
- Innovation

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of National Lutheran School Accreditation.

Table of Contents

I. The Role of the Team Captain

A. Letter to the Team Captain	4
B. Role of the Team Captain	5
C. Team Captain Job Description	5

II. The Work of the Team Captain

A. Selection of the Validation Team Members	7
B. Preparation of Validation Team Members for Effective Service	7
C. Self-Study Process Requirements	8
D. Validating Required and General Indicators of Success	8
E. Opportunities for Special Recognition	9
F. Review of the School Action Plan	10
G. The Validation Team Report	10
H. Validation Team Report (Sample)	14
I. The Validation Team Exit Report	16

III. Addendums

Addendum #1: NLSA Conflict of Interest	17
Addendum #2: Team Captain Responsibilities	18
Addendum #3: Sample Letter to the Validation Team Members	20
Addendum #4: Team Member Orientation	21
Addendum #5: Sample Team Validation Visit Schedule	23
Addendum #6: Required Responses and Required Evidence	24
Addendum #7: Required Indicators of Success	30

I. THE ROLE OF THE TEAM CAPTAIN

A. Letter to the Team Captain

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

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

As the school's assigned Team Captain of the Validation Team Visit, your primary task is to lead the members of the Validation Team through a process to verify and provide an unbiased response to the school's Self-Study Report and School Action Plan. The school's work is to be accurate, truthful and reflect the actual practices present at the school. Verification of the work of the school is accomplished as the Validation Team members interview, observe and evaluate the written documentation of the school.

The responsibilities of the Team Captain include ensuring that the school complies with all Required Indicators of Success and have responded with documentation to the General Indicators of Success in the 10 Standard areas. Your purpose is not to criticize or find fault, but is to strengthen the school by making specific, helpful recommendations. The recommendations reached by consensus of the Validation Team are to accurately reflect the team's findings which leads to a process of continued improvement for the school.

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



Dr. Rebecca Schmidt
Interim Director, National Lutheran School Accreditation

B. Role of the Team Captain

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

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

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

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

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

C. Team Captain Job Description

Qualifications

- The Team Captain:
 - Has received specific NLSA Team Captain Training.
 - Is currently serving or is a recently retired educator or administrator in a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod school (early childhood, elementary or secondary).
 - Has successfully led a Lutheran school through an NLSA process.
 - Has served as a member of an NLSA Validation Team.
 - Is committed to the success of the school.

Responsibilities

- Confer with the school's NLSA Consultant to ensure that the school is ready for the visit. (If materials are not ready, reschedule the Validation Team Visit.)
- Confer regularly with the school administrator from the time of the Team Captain appointment through the Validation Team Visit and until the Validation Visit Report is given to the school. (Addendum #1)
- With the school accreditation leader, establish a tentative schedule and agenda for the Validation Team Visit.
- Contact Validation Team members after they have been appointed, informing them of the Validation Team Visit schedule and work assignments. (Addendum #2)

- Ensure that all Validation Team members receive the school's Self-Study Report one month before the scheduled visit.
- With the school accreditation leader, arrange Validation Team Visit details (housing, meals, mileage, team supplies, technology needs, etc.). The accrediting school is responsible for the costs of housing, mileage, and meals for the Validation Team members.
- Conduct an orientation meeting for Validation Team members before the Validation Team Visit to review tasks and train members for their work. (Addendum #3)
- Supervise the work of the Validation Team Visit.
- Be a model team member by leading the team in completing the Standard 1 report together.
- Ensure that all strengths, concerns and recommendations for each Standard are based on evidence.
- Instruct, encourage, challenge, support and advise team members throughout the process.
- Prepare the Validation Team Visit Summary, listing the team's recommendation for or against accreditation, outstanding strengths and major deficiencies.
- Determine if a designation of provisional status applies.
- Determine any Powerful Practices that are transformative and replicable. (Addendum #7)
- Consider the nomination of a candidate for the School Shepherd Award. (Addendum #8)
- Prepare the PowerPoint presentation for the exit report.
- Collect all final Standard area reports before dismissing the Validation Team.
- Edit the Validation Team Report and send it to the school within two weeks following the visit. Include the Validation Team Report Submission Form, General Information About the School located in the Self-Study Report and biographical information of team members in the final copy of the Validation Visit Report. (Locate the Validation Team Report at www.luthed.org/nlsa-visit-team-resources/)
- Instruct the school accreditation leader to send copies of the Validation Team Report to the LCMS District office and/or District Accreditation Commission.

II. THE WORK OF THE TEAM CAPTAIN

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

A. Selection of the Validation Team Members

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

The Validation Team consists of the Team Captain and three (3) to four (4) additional members. Serving as a member of a Validation Team is a highly professional undertaking. It is important to secure team members who are professional, cooperative, helpful and constructive. A minimum of two members of the Validation Team shall have previous experience with NLSA serving as a member of a Validation Team or as a faculty member of a school that has completed or is currently involved in the accreditation process. Additionally, team members have a minimum of two years of college training specific to early childhood, at least five years of experience with early childhood and/or a basic understanding of what constitutes a quality early childhood program. Attention is given to the selection of Validation Team members for competency and balance.

Team members may be selected using the following criteria:

- A minimum of teachers or administrators from another LCMS school.
- A teacher or administrator from a non-LCMS Christian school.
- A public school educator or administrator. (LCMS congregation member when possible).
- A pastor of another LCMS congregation with a school.

When the team is complete, the national NLSA director formally appoints each team member. No later than 4 weeks before the Validation Team Visit, the school administrator submits the list of Validation team members to the NLSA director for confirmation of the Validation team.

B. Preparation of Validation Team Members for Effective Service

The purpose of the Validation Team Report is to verify the accuracy of the Self-Study and move the center toward higher levels of quality. To prepare for the process, the work of the Validation Team is subdivided. Each team member is assigned to a major responsibility for some Standards and a minor responsibility for others. The report for each Standard is written by the team member with the major responsibility with support from the team member with the minor responsibility. The finished reports are discussed by the whole team, and by consensus, a recommendation for accreditation is determined.

Basic Tasks of the Validation Team Members

- Read the entire Self-Study Report with a focus in the assigned Standard areas.

- Review Required Evidence.
- Note specific questions and concerns about the Self-Study.
- Determine the ways the Self-Study reflects the philosophy of the center and NLSA Standards.
- Observe the center, visit all early childhood classrooms and view its program in full operation to determine the actual practices of the center.
- Conduct interviews with parents/guardians, church staff and congregation members. Formulate preliminary conclusions about strengths and weaknesses of the center.
- Use professional judgment and experience in developing commendations and recommendations in the assigned Standard areas.
- Prepare a specific, helpful written report that reflects the observations made during the visit.

The final Validation Team Report is prepared by consensus with careful review, discussion and editing of the individual Standard drafts.

C. Self-Study Process Requirements

NLSA requirements are established for each of the ten Standard areas. To be accredited in good standing, a school must provide **Required Resources** and **Documentation** (Addendum #5), respond “YES” to all **Required Indicators** (Addendum #6) and meet or exceed 80% of the points assigned to the Required and General Indicators of Success.

Required Responses and Required Evidence consist of what is kept on file to guide the school (documents, policies, schedules, meeting minutes, written curriculum etc.). Practices are what the school does to implement the documentation (training, teaching methods, supervision, building inspections etc.). Both must be evident.

A written curriculum is an NLSA Required Document. For many, it is typically one of the most challenging parts of the accreditation process. At a minimum, the NLSA expectations for curriculum design include:

- Written objectives and learning outcomes for the spiritual, social/emotional, cognitive, physical and creative domains for all age groups.
- Faith integration throughout the curriculum.

Accredited schools continuously use a variety of assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of their curricular outcomes, adjusting related teaching strategies and instruction when necessary. Therefore, the curriculum becomes a living document that guides and directs the instructive process.

The Validation Team assures that the school meets NLSA curriculum requirements and that documentation is complete.

D. Validating Required and General Indicators of Success

The **Required Indicators of Success** describe the practices that are essential for Lutheran schools seeking accreditation and provide evidence and practices to support each “YES” response. The Validation Team verifies that all Required Indicators of Success are met in full and have comments provided.

The **General Indicators of Success** are rated according to the actual practice in place at the school using one of the following ratings:

Met in Full (2) – The General Indicator of Success has been completely accomplished by the school. It is verifiable through evidence and documentation.

Partially Met (1) – The General Indicator of Success is moderately accomplished but additional detail, depth and written documentation is needed to meet the indicator in full.

Not Presently Met (0) – The General Indicator of Success is not present or is emerging (minimally present).

The Validation Team verifies that numerical ratings are accurate and comments are included for all General Indicators of Success.

E. Opportunities for Special Recognition

A Validation Team Visit assures that a school provides quality, Christian education and is committed to ongoing improvement. Occasionally a Validation Team observes a school that exceeds quality expectations and exhibits unique, replicable best practices and/or is led by a dynamic administrative team. When either of these occur, a Validation Team may nominate a school for a potential **Powerful Practice** and/or nominate a pastor for the **School Shepherd Award**.

A school's Powerful Practice is much more than an expectation that quantifies Standard compliance. It innovates and exceeds accreditation expectations. It is a calculated risk that results in significant reward for students. Therefore, it is a desirable condition that has significance for schools throughout the LCMS. NLSA seeks to identify and share Powerful Practices that set a school apart and distinguishes it as a highly respected educational institution in its community. Powerful Practices are carefully researched, collaboratively established and dynamically affect student learning and/or ministry opportunities in a Lutheran school. These are the practices that have the potential for replication in other Lutheran schools.

The School Shepherd Award is established by National Lutheran School Accreditation to honor a faithful pastor who provides outstanding encouragement, support and service to his school. This award allows NLSA to recognize an outstanding school pastor and identify the practices and tangible means of support that have positively impacted the school he serves. The Validation Team can nominate a pastor for the School Shepherd Award based on the following criteria.

The nominee:

- Has completed a minimum of three (3) years of service at the church and school (birth through Grade 12) where he serves
- Understands and articulates a clear philosophy of Lutheran education
- Values and supports school administrator(s) and actively participates in team ministry in the church and school community

- Engages and participates in school activities
- Works well with the governing body of the school and/or parent advisory associations
- Champions the school

One pastor is selected in July by an appointed committee of the NLSA National Accreditation Commission to receive the NLSA School Shepherd Award. District and Synod recognition follow later.

F. Review of the School Action Plan

A preliminary School Action Plan is developed by the school using the concerns identified during the Self-Study process. The Validation Team also adds recommendations to the School Action Plan during the Validation Team Visit. This process generates a blueprint for ongoing improvement. The resulting plan is designed to improve child outcomes, enhance ministry, develop and improve programs, facilities and/or services for the benefit of all children. The School Action Plan includes the following:

- Recommendations related to findings from the Self-Study process and the Validation Team recommendations.
- Strategies aligned with the recommendations that provide ideas, plans, actions and steps for accomplishing the recommendations within a prescribed timeframe.
- Strategies that are specific and measurable.
- The target school year identifying when each strategy is addressed in the School Action Plan.
- The representative group that is responsible for initiating, planning, coordinating and evaluating the progress of the School's Action Plan.

G. The Validation Team Report

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

Note: Some Validation Teams have completed the team report using Google docs or other electronic means. In these cases, be aware that formatting in Google docs and others is often altered when it is exported or converted to Microsoft Word.

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

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

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

- The Validation Team’s Overall Impression of the school – one or two paragraphs
- Outstanding Strengths – identifying six to ten significant strengths of the school
- Major Deficiencies – any conditions, based on an NLSA Standard, that have severe, negative effects on the quality of education, the ministry of the school and/or endangers the health and safety of the school population. Many schools will have no major deficiencies.
- Checklist
- Overall School Percentage Score
$$\frac{\text{Total Number of Points Earned for Rated Indicators}}{\text{Total Number of Points Possible for Rated Indicators}} \text{ divided by}$$
- Signature of the Team Captain
- Accreditation Recommendation – Accredited in Good Standing, Provisional Accreditation or Accreditation Denied*

*Most schools receive the recommendation for **Accredited in Good Standing** status. A school receiving this status reports progress on its School Action Plan yearly on a Cumulative Annual Report Form beginning the year following the Validation Team Visit.

Some schools receive the recommendation for **Provisional Accreditation** status. A provisionally accredited school fails to comply with the Required Standards or Indicators of Success and/or is cited with major deficiencies by the Validation Team. These schools must show progress on the identified concerns within a designated time frame, usually one year. The District Accreditation Commission reports the progress of provisionally accredited schools to the LCMS National Accreditation Commission, and failure to address the concerns cited for provisional accreditation may result in the loss of accreditation.

In rare instances, **Accreditation Denied** may be recommended when the Self-Study Report, required responses and/or evidence is incomplete.

Team Findings

The Team Findings section presents the Validation Team’s analysis of each of the NLSA Standards areas and indicators for each Standard. It includes an Overview and identifies Strengths and Concerns. Related Recommendations are identified by the Validation Team through review of the school’s prepared documentation, observations and interviews conducted during the visit.

The report for each Standard contains four distinct parts:

- A. Overview
- B. Strengths
- C. Concerns
- D. Recommendations

Overview

The overview is an objective statement of what is, devoid of any concerns or recommendations. It provides a brief, general description of the quality of the Standard present in the center.

Strengths

The strengths section includes specific aspects of the center which deserve commendation. It is vital that the report is balanced with strengths and concerns, when possible. The purpose of the report is to assist the school, not to criticize unduly.

For each strength, the source of information is documented with the following code:

- 1=Self-Study Report
- 2=Interview
- 3=Observation
- 4=Written Documentation

Concerns

It is appropriate that the report includes the concerns of the Team. This may be the most vital part of the report since it identifies areas for improvement. Focus on major issues rather than insignificant details. Identify concerns based on specific observations and relate each concern to an NLSA Indicator. Include the General Indicator of Success number with each concern.

For each concern, the source of information is documented with the following code:

- 1=Self-Study Report
- 2=Interview
- 3=Observation
- 4=Written Documentation

Recommendations

Recommendations are based on the Validation Team's professional judgment and experience. A minimum of one corresponding recommendation is provided for each concern. A report that lists only concerns does not assist with improvement. The school is required to carefully consider all recommendations as it develops the School Action Plan to address ongoing improvement that is to be completed during the accreditation cycle.

The Final Report

The report components, written by individual team members, are assembled in the final report format. Each component is then approved by the Validation Team as a whole.

Final Instructions to the Team Captain

- Complete the Validation Team sections of the Validation Team Submission Report Form, and give to the administrator for inclusion with the Validation Team Report that is forwarded to the district office.
- Remind the administrator to attach the General Information About the School section of the Self-Study Report to the Validation Team Report. This is a required element of the materials that must be received in the district and national offices.

- Forward the final edited copy of the Validation Team Report to the school within two weeks of the conclusion of the visit. Provide a copy of the final edited Validation Team Visit Report to each team member within two weeks of the conclusion of the visit.
- Remind the school administrator that the school is responsible for sending the Validation Team Visit Report to the district office. The school is not authorized to make any changes to the report.

H. VALIDATION TEAM REPORT (SAMPLE)

Standard 1: Purpose

Standard 1A: Mission and Ministry

The Lutheran early childhood program is an integral part of the congregation's ministry to young children and their families. The early childhood program commits itself to participate in the ministry of the whole church in order to fulfill its purpose as a Christ-centered early childhood program.

Overview: The written mission statement of **St. John's Lutheran Preschool** articulates the purpose, vision and core values of the preschool. The mission statement guides and direct the early childhood program and embodies the church's mission statement.

Strengths:

Strengths	Sources of Evidence
St. John's Preschool has developed a mission statement that reflects the ministry of the church.	1, 2, 4
The statement has been formally approved by the Preschool Committee.	1, 4
The statements guide and direct the work of the Preschool Committee and operational decisions of the preschool.	1, 2
The statements are published in the <i>Preschool and Pre-kindergarten Teacher's Handbook</i> , the church bulletin, preschool brochure, St. John's website and the <i>Ambassador</i> .	1, 4
The good news of Jesus Christ is shared with children and families daily.	1, 2, 3

(Note: Sources of Evidence are identified using the following: 1=Self-Study Report, 2=Interview, 3=Observation, 4=Written Documentation)

Concerns and Recommendations:

Concern	Recommendation	Sources of Evidence	Indicator
Concern: The mission statement is not reviewed on an annual basis.	Recommendation: Develop a procedure for reviewing the mission and philosophy statements on an annual basis with stakeholder involvement.	1, 2, 4	1A:03
Concern: The philosophy statement could be communicated more effectively	Recommendation: Explore multiple ways through print and social media to share the mission	1, 2, 4	1A:05

to staff, parents/guardians, the congregation and community.	and ministry statement with staff, parents/guardians, the congregation and the community. Consider posting the mission statement in the preschool classrooms.		
--	---	--	--

(Note: Sources of Evidence are identified using the following: 1=Self-Study Report, 2=Interview, 3=Observation, 4=Written Documentation)

Did the Validation Team change any ratings that were assigned by the school?

YES

NO

If YES, what was the justification for changing the rating?

1A:0 – The rating was changes from Fully Met (2) to Partially Met (1). Although the Mission and Ministry Statement was developed collaboratively with stakeholder involvement, it is not reviewed annually.

I. The Validation Team Exit Report

The final task of the Validation Team is to provide a brief oral exit report for the faculty and other individuals invited by the school. The content of the Report Summary is shared with the school administrator before it is shared with the school community by the Team Captain.

During the Exit Report, the Team Captain leads the report, and often, the team members participate in the presentation. Outstanding strengths of the school are highlighted as the report is general in nature and only serves to outline the forthcoming written report. The Team Captain shares the Report Summary.

When there is a major deficiency, the Team Captain contacts the district education executive and/or the district NLSA commissioner in advance of the Validation Team Exit Report. With the support of the education executive, the Team Captain shares the major deficiencies (conditions that may have a severe effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the school and/or endanger the health and safety of the school population).

The only specific recommendation given during the exit report is the overall recommendation for or against accreditation. The exit report is not to exceed 45 minutes and after that time, a brief question-and-answer period may be held.

A Validation Team Exit Report PowerPoint presentation can be used to guide the oral exit report.

A copy of the one-page Report Summary is left with the school. When questions are raised during the Exit Report, the school is advised that they are addressed in the fully-documented Validation Team Report that the school will receive within two weeks. The oral Exit Report concludes the Validation Team's work at the school.

Accreditation by National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) indicates that a school successfully completed the NLSA process of Self-Study, reporting, evaluation with a Team Validation Visit, and that the Team Validation Visit members recommended NLSA accreditation as a result of the visit. It is determined, through this process, that the school is worthy of NLSA accreditation. Neither NLSA, nor its authorizing agency, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, assumes responsibility for the school's quality (or lack thereof) or for variations from NLSA standards either at the time of initial accreditation or at any time during NLSA accreditation.

III. ADDENDUMS

Addendum #1: NLSA Conflict of Interest

The National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) *Conflict of Interest Policy* and *Code of Ethical Behavior* ensures the integrity of the entire accreditation process. Individuals interacting with the process (Validation Team, Team Captain, School Consultant, District Accreditation Commission, National Accreditation Commission, and NLSA National Office Staff) must not have any real or perceived financial, institutional, or personal interest(s) in the outcome of the Validation Team Report or overall Accreditation process that would impact their ability to be objective and independent throughout the entire process.

Prior to the appointment of a Validation Team, all members of the prospective team must complete an NLSA *Conflict of Interest Policy and Code of Ethical Behavior Agreement*. This is to be submitted, alongside the list of prospective Team member names for approval and appointment, to the NLSA director and will be kept on file in the NLSA National Office until the completion of the school's NLSA accreditation process.

Addendum #2: Team Captain Responsibilities

Prior to the Visit

- Contact the school administrator upon accepting the assignment as Captain. Confer with the administrator regarding the Validation Team selection.
- Establish and maintain communication with the school accreditation leader concerning the intended visit.
- Reschedule the Validation Visit if the Self-Study Report is not received one month prior to the scheduled visit.
- Ensure that all Validation Team members receive the Self-Study report one month in advance of the school visit to adequately prepare for the work at the school.
- Contact Validation Team members as soon as possible after they have accepted their assignment. Make cursory introductions and share an overview of the accreditation process.
- Make Standard area work assignments for each member of the Validation Team.
- Instruct team members to read the entire Self-Study Report focusing on their assigned Standards.
- Collaborate with the school accreditation leader to establish a detailed schedule for the Validation Team Visit.
- Work with the school accreditation leader to arrange for a suitable Validation Team meeting room.
- Arrange visit details with the school accreditation leader (meals, housing, supplies, technology needs, help, etc.).
- Prepare an agenda for meeting with the team. Include prayer and devotional opportunities.

During the Visit

- Spend time with Validation Team members reviewing visit purpose and procedures.
- Review team members' responsibilities and interview schedules. Establish classroom visit schedules, making sure to visit every classroom.
- Begin by reviewing *Standard 1: Purpose* with the entire Validation Team. Establish protocol and model the process of reviewing Standard areas.
- Lead (don't dominate) the team's discussion of the tentative Purpose report. Use it as a model for other discussions and reports.
- Provide guidance to individual team members as they carry out their tasks.
- Visit and observe. Be a model team member. Avoid long meetings behind closed doors. Be readily available at any time.
- Share notes with other team members and review their notes, as requested.
- Model questions, techniques, unobtrusive classroom observations, organized note taking and educational professionalism.

- Share high standards of report acceptability with the team. Hurried, inadequate reports are not acceptable.
- Write carefully, using complete sentences and correct grammar and spelling. The quality of the report conveys the importance of the accreditation process.
- Write the report objectively rather than personally.
- Advise, counsel and listen to and keep team members on task.
- Review the confidentiality of the report and all its parts with anyone involved with its development.
- Review the team's schedule daily.
- Validate that the school has met or exceeded all requirements for Accreditation in Good Standing.
- Lead the review of the rough drafts of individual Standard reports.
- Guide team members as they revise the rough drafts of the reports according to team discussions.
- Collaborate with all team members to gain consensus approval of final reports.
- Lead the team in identifying strengths and any major deficiencies. A major deficiency is any condition based on an NLSA Standard that has a severe negative effect on the quality of education, the ministry of the school and/or endangers the health and safety of the school population.
- Prepare the Validation Team Exit Report presentation.
- Collect all notes and final reports before the Exit Report.
- Lead the presentation of the oral Validation Team Exit Report. Strengths and major deficiencies are shared with the school in the Exit Report.
- Thank everyone for their cooperation.
- Complete the Team Captain's portion of the NLSA Validation Team Report Submission Form.

After the Visit

- Thank everyone associated with the visit: the team members, the schools that released team members for the Validation Team Visit, the school for its hospitality, etc.
- Edit the Validation Team Report as needed without changing its substance. Include the General Information About the School from the Self-Study Report Form and biographical information of team members.
- Within two weeks, send a final copy of the Validation Team Report and NLSA Validation Team Report Submission Form to the school for reproduction and distribution and to the Validation Team members.
- Instruct the administrator to send a copy of the final Validation Team Report and the NLSA Validation Team Report Submission Form to their District Accreditation Commissioner or to the district education executive.
- Remind the administrator of the responsibility of ongoing improvement and annual reporting.

Addendum #3: Sample Letter to the Validation Team Members

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

Dear Validation Team members or **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER NAME(S)>**,

Thank you for your willingness to serve as a member of the NLSA Validation Team for **<INSERT SCHOOL NAME HERE>**. Our work consists of verifying **<INSERT SCHOOL NAME HERE>**'s Self-Study Report by comparing NLSA Standards with on-site observations. Our work together begins on **<INSERT DATE, TIME AND PLACE>**. I have attached a tentative schedule to assist us with the visit.

To facilitate the process, the work of the Validation Team is subdivided. Each team member will have a major responsibility for some Standards and a minor responsibility for others. The report for each Standard is written by the team member with the major responsibility with support from the team member with the minor responsibility. The finished reports are discussed by the whole team, and by consensus, a recommendation for accreditation is determined. The assignments are listed below.

Standard 1 – Purpose: Major: **<INSERT TEAM CAPTAIN HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBERS HERE>**

Standard 2 – Relationships: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 3 – Leadership: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 4 – Personnel: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 5 – Staff / Child Interactions: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 6 – Facilities: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 7 – Wellness: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 8 – Curriculum: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 9 – Infants / Toddlers: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

Standard 10 – Continuous Improvement: Major: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>** Minor: **<INSERT TEAM MEMBER HERE>**

The community of **<INSERT SCHOOL NAME HERE>** worked hard to complete an extensive self-evaluation process. A copy of their Self-Study Report will be sent to you by **<INSERT DATE HERE>**. Please take time to carefully read through the Self-Study before the visit. Focus on your assigned major areas and list any questions you might have about the areas assigned to you.

Please send me the following Biographical Information by **<INSERT DATE HERE>**

Name:

Present Position:

Education:

Areas of Expertise:

Previous Experience on an Accreditation Team:

School, City, State

Plan to bring a lap top to the Validation Team Visit.

Feel free to contact me with any questions about the visit. Thank you for the gift of your time and expertise to serve on this team. **<INSERT SCHOOL NAME HERE>** will be blessed and I look forward to working with each of you.

In His service,

<INSERT TEAM CAPTAIN NAME HERE>

<INSERT TEAM CAPTAIN CONTACT INFORMATION HERE>

Addendum #4: Team Member Orientation

1. Pray for the school and the work of the Validation Team.
2. Be present for all Validation Team activities and do not schedule other business during the Validation Team Visit.
3. Focus on major issues and school improvement rather than minor issues or items that are impossible for the school to resolve.
4. Visit all assigned classrooms to observe activities and student engagement.
5. Interview teachers, parents/guardians, governing authority members, support staff and pastors to determine an overall impression of the school.
6. Watch and listen carefully when interviewees purposefully share information. Be aware of personal agendas.
7. Ask opening, not leading, questions. Do not reveal impressions or criticize the responses of the interviewees.
8. Verify the school's compliance with all Required Indicators of Success related to the assigned Standards.
9. Validate that the ratings provided by the school for all Required and General Indicators of Success in the assigned Standards are honest, accurate and supported by evidence and practices.
10. Verify that total points for each Standard are recorded and entered on the scoring summary correctly.
11. Identify questions or concerns related to the assigned Standards and seek specific information to verify initial impressions.
12. Be willing to modify tentative judgments by observing and asking questions.
13. Personal educational philosophies or practices are not to be imposed on the school nor should team opinions become part of the Validation Team Report. Evaluate the school based on the Standards.
14. Evaluate statements and actions in context to determine whether they are typical of the school's normal operation.
15. Do not evaluate individual teachers. Any rating of a teacher is inappropriate by an individual team member or collaboratively by the Validation Team.
16. Verify that all written material in the Validation Team Report is supported with evidence and is defensible. If there is any doubt, gather additional evidence. If there is still doubt, do not include it in the Visit Team Report.
17. Recommend realistic and attainable improvements.

Addendum #5: Sample Team Validation Visit Schedule

Day One

4:00 – 6:00 Team Meeting
6:00 – 7:00 Dinner
7:00 – 8:00 Team Meeting

Day Two

7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast
8:00 – 11:30 Interviews and Classroom Observations
Preschool Tour
Meet with director and accreditation leader
Focus Group – parents/guardians (6-10)
Classroom observations
11:30 – 12:30 Lunch
12:30 – 1:30 Team Meeting
1:30 – 3:00 Interviews and Classroom Observations
Meet with pastors
Classroom observations and/or Team Meeting
3:15 – 4:15 Meet with Preschool Staff (teachers, assistant teachers and staff)
5:30 Meet with Preschool Board
Dinner
7:00 – 9:00 Team Meeting

Day Three

7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast
8:00 – 9:00 Team Meeting
9:00 – 12:00 Team Writing
Classroom Observations
12:00 – 3:00 Working Lunch and Team Writing
3:15 – 4:15 Exit Report for Preschool Staff and Invited Guests

Addendum #6: Required Responses and Required Evidence

Required Responses

Standard 1: Purpose	
1A: Mission and Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how the early childhood center reflects a mission outreach purpose in its community. List the communication methods used to share the Mission and Ministry Statement with the governing authority, staff, parents/guardians and congregation. Describe how the Mission and Ministry Statement is implemented by the governing authority, staff, parents/guardians and congregation. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
1B: Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the communication of the Philosophy Statement to stakeholders. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 2: Relationships	
2A: Home / Family Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List family education programs presented during the past 12 months. List special programs for families. (i.e. Christmas service, Family Night, Literacy Festivals, service projects) Describe orientation methods for welcoming and engaging new families. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
2B: Congregational Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the ways children and families participate in congregational activities and ministries. List the ways the congregation participates in activities and ministries of the center. List the ways the director functions as a member of the congregational administrative team. List the ways the congregation supports the early childhood program. (i.e. regular prayer, tuition sponsorship, reading buddies, fundraising) List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
2C: Elementary School to Early Childhood Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List school-wide parent education programs and activities. Comment on the ways the shared vision is evidenced in the staff, school, church and community-at-large.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 3: Leadership	
3A: The Early Childhood Governing Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the major decisions the governing authority and / or direct supervisor has established for the early childhood program during the past three years. Describe the process used by the governing authority and / or direct supervisor for systematic needs assessment and development of short and long-term goals. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
3B: The Early Childhood Administrator / Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize the ways the administrator uses leadership skills in the congregation, community and professional organizations. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 4: Personnel	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List compensation package(s) paid to staff (i.e. salary scale, health care, vacation, sick leave, tuition assistance) List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 5: Staff / Child Interactions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the progressive steps followed by teachers and parents / guardians to address the needs of students who exhibit ongoing behavioral or developmental concerns. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 6: Facilities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the individuals / group responsible for the overall care and maintenance of the school and grounds. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 7: Wellness	
7A: Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how the indoor / outdoor facility is made secure against intruders. List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
7B: Food and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the meal / snack delivery system. Who is responsible? What procedures and protocols are in place? List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.

Standard 8: Curriculum	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the curriculum supports and reflects the philosophy of the program. • Describe how often the curriculum is evaluated and share who is engaged in the process. • Describe how the curriculum meets the anti-bias / cultural / social / economic needs of the church and community. • Describe the type of curriculum used for faith development of children. • Describe the methods of assessing children’s growth and individual needs. • List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 9: Infants / Toddlers	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.
Standard 10: Continuous Improvement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the processes used for collecting, analyzing and using data from staff, parents / guardians, director and governing authority to identify needed program improvements. • Identify program goals based on parent / guardian, staff and governing authority input and student assessment data. • List the significant changes that have been made by the school in this area during the past three years.

Required Evidence

Standard 1: Purpose	
1A: Mission and Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congregation's Mission and Ministry Statement • Mission and Ministry Statement for the early childhood program
1B: Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood program's Philosophy Statement • Documents where the Philosophy Statement is present (i.e. handbook, brochure)
Standard 2: Relationships	
2A: Home / Family Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five (5) forms of communication used to share information with parents / guardians (i.e. school newsletter, classroom newsletter, emails, blogs, personal notes) • A copy of the written NLSA Family Survey questions • NLSA Family Survey summary • Family handbook
2B: Congregational Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written copy of the evangelism approach (i.e. activities, strategies, methods) used by the congregation with early childhood families • Completed NLSA Church Ministry Staff Survey(s) • Current budget(s) for the congregation and the early childhood program
2C: Elementary School to Early Childhood Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agendas for meetings that include administrators from all school levels
Standard 3: Leadership	
3A: The Early Childhood Governing Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagram of the governing structure of the early childhood / school / church • Governing authority policy manual • Governing authority grievance and due-process resolution procedures • Governing authority minutes from the past three meetings • Short- and long-range goals for the program • Evaluation form used to assess the director • Director's Supervisor Survey, if applicable
3B: The Early Childhood Administrator / Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrator completed profile form(s) • Administrator diplomas and proof of professional organization membership • Administrator proof of early childhood coursework • Administrator job description • Administrator evaluation form used by the staff • Most recent statistical report submitted to the National office. • Orientation checklist used with new staff members • Policy for ensuring adequate staff / child ratios at all times

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile of each class showing the staff / child ratio with the age, number of children and number of adults • Enrollment materials (i.e. written admission procedures, waiting list process) • Completed Director’s Survey
Standard 4: Personnel	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff profiles • Schedule of staff meetings and three meeting agendas • Description and / or checklist used for new teaching staff orientation • Job descriptions, personnel policies, calls or contract agreements • Current salary and benefit scale • In-service training program / schedule provided by the center in the last 12 months • Staff Survey for Teachers and Assistant Teachers Summary • Support Staff Survey for Non-Teaching Members Summary • Employee handbook • Biblically-based code of ethics for staff
Standard 5: Staff / Child Interactions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood discipline policy
Standard 6: Facilities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floor plan of the early childhood facility, including indoor and outdoor areas and square footage of each area used by students • Plans for further development of the early childhood facility • Daily, weekly and monthly cleaning / maintenance plan
Standard 7: Wellness	
7A: Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written policy for storing and dispensing children’s medications • Written communicable disease policy • Written accident and injury policy • Written policies regarding smoking, alcohol, illegal drugs and drug testing • Written procedures for the safe arrival and departure of children • Written disaster and evacuation procedures
7B: Food and Nutrition (ALL SCHOOLS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written policies related to food storage and food service • Health inspections • Food service license or license exempt documentation • Food preparation area / kitchen cleaning schedule
7B: Food and Nutrition (FOOD PREPARED ON SITE OR VENDED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of the individual who participates in food service training and a copy of the current certificate, according to state licensing • Menus

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vendor contract (if applicable) assuring that the business, food handlers and premises are inspected and approved by the local health department
Standard 8: Curriculum	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One week of lesson plans for each classroom • Center’s written curriculum guide, goals and early learning state standards • Daily and weekly class schedules from each teacher • Forms used for student assessments
Standard 9: Infants / Toddlers	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms used to communicate with families • Curriculum framework • Daily schedules • Assessment materials • Diaper changing procedure • Documentation that staff working with infants / toddlers are trained in “safe sleep” practices and “shaken baby syndrome” • Child care license / certificate indicating the program is certified to provide infant / toddler care in accordance with state licensing regulations • Policies regarding sanitation
Standard 10: Continuous Improvement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NLSA surveys used to solicit input from stakeholders about the overall early childhood program

Addendum #7: Required Indicators of Success

Standard	Required Indicators of Success
1A:01	The early childhood program has a Mission and Ministry Statement designed specifically for the center that reflects the congregational Mission and Ministry Statement.
1B:06	The written philosophy is Bible-based and reflects a Christ-centered approach to learning.
1B:07	The written philosophy includes reference to spiritual, social/emotional, cognitive, physical and creative development of young children with an emphasis on the importance of play.
2A:01	A Statement of Nondiscrimination is evident in school printed materials and assures that students are admitted without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.
2B:18	The school is operated by one or more congregations of The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod (LCMS) or maintains an active Registered Service Organization (RSO) status with the Synod.
2C:32	The school’s mission and ministry statement reflects a unified school.
3A:01	The operating organization designates the governing authority and has written policies clearly defining lines of governing authority, responsibilities, limitations of the governing authority and membership.
3B:31	The director demonstrates a personal Christian faith, a commitment to Lutheran education and a dedication to the teaching ministry.
4:01	All staff members demonstrate agreement in writing with the stated school mission.
4:02	All staff members in licensed and license-exempt centers meet the state’s requirements for criminal record checks including documentation regarding any history of substantiated child abuse, neglect or physical and psychological conditions that might adversely affect a child’s health or safety.
5:01	The school promotes positive, Christ-centered relationships among all children and adults.
5:02	Staff members provide a safe and nurturing environment free from negative verbal interaction, physical punishment, psychological abuse, coercion and threats as forms of discipline.
6:01	The center complies with all federal, state and local building, health, safety and disaster preparedness facility requirements and maintains documentation of the requirements including certificates, licenses and records of violations or deficiencies with documentation of resolution.
7A:01	The center complies with all federal, state and local building, health, safety and disaster preparedness requirements.
7B:60	The center complies with all local and state food safety requirements and inspection records are kept on file.

8:01	The center implements a Christian curriculum that promotes learning and development in each of the following domains: spiritual, social / emotional, cognitive, physical and creative growth.
9:01	Teaching staff members supervise infants and toddlers by sight and sound at all times.
9:02	To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, infants are placed on their backs to sleep on a firm surface that meets the standard of the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, unless otherwise ordered by a physician.
9:03	At least one teaching staff member who has a certificate showing satisfactory completion of pediatric first aid training and satisfactory completion of pediatric CPR is always present with each group of children.
10:01	The center collects and analyzes data from stakeholders (i.e. parents, staff, congregation members and leaders).