

National Lutheran School Accreditation
Evidence-Based Accreditation
Consultant Manual

Revised September 2020



MISSION, PURPOSE, VISION and VALUES

Mission

NLSA 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 those 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 (NLSA) 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

The Role of the Consultant

A Letter to the Consultant	4
Evaluating School's Purpose	5
The Role of the Consultant	5
Consultant Job Description	5
Characteristics of an Effective NLSA Consultant	6
Consultant Timeline and Checklist	7
Consultant Dos and Don'ts	8
Clarification of Consultant and Team Captain Roles	8

The Work of the Consultant

Sample Initial Consultant Visit	10
Working with the Steering Committee	10
Starting with the School's Purpose	11
The Self-Study Report	12
Self-Study Process Requirements	13
Reacting to a Self-Study Report Draft	15
School Curriculum Requirements	16
Determining Readiness for the Validation Team Visit	16
Requesting an Extension	17
Substantive Change Form	17

Addendums

Addendum #1: NLSA Conflict of Interest	19
Addendum #2: Benefits of Accreditation	20
Addendum #3: Checklist of Consultant Duties	21
Addendum #4: Required Indicators of Success	23
Addendum #5: Required Evidence and Documentation	24
Addendum #6: NLSA Classroom Observation Tool	25
Addendum #7: Levels of Accreditation	26
Addendum #8: NLSA Powerful Practices	27
Addendum #9: NLSA School Shepherd Award	28

THE ROLE OF THE CONSULTANT

A Letter to the Consultant

Congratulations! The National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) director, in consultation with the district education executive, has appointed you to this important responsibility. As the school's assigned Consultant, you play a critical role in the accreditation process. Your selection is based on your previous NLSA experience, communication skills and leadership ability. Your primary task is to help the school improve. To accomplish this task, you are to assist the applicant school to successfully complete its Self-Study process and prepare for a Validation Team Visit of outside educators representing NLSA.

From the time of application, the Consultant informs, assists, directs, encourages and oversees the applicant school. Your mission as a Consultant is to assist school leadership to ensure that the accreditation process is successful. You are an advocate of the school and represent NLSA to ensure that the school, with integrity, completes the process. Within this role it is your responsibility to determine the school's readiness for a Validation Team Visit and later work with the Team Captain who will lead the visit.

Perhaps your greatest concern for the process is "acceptability." As the school Steering Committee and subcommittees conduct their work and prepare their reports, they typically ask, "Is this acceptable?" As a Consultant, you will view each Standard of the Self-Study Report and accompanying evidence through the eyes of the Validation Team members who are the primary audience. It is the responsibility of the Consultant to determine when the school has completed the Self-Study satisfactorily and have assembled the required evidence.

A school should not be visited if a successful Validation Team Visit is not expected. Thus, it is vital that the Consultant alert the school in advance to potential problems and ensure that the school has successfully completed the accreditation process before the Validation Team Visit is scheduled. It is far better for the school to delay or stop the process than to put effort, resources and emotion into the process only to result in failure.

NLSA is the most dynamic when schools use the process to effect changes that result in school improvement. Accreditation does not end with the Validation Team Visit and the awarding of the accreditation certificate. Plans that result from an NLSA process (the School Action Plan) become the blueprint for changes in the school that help make it become a school of choice in its community. An effective NLSA Consultant helps the school understand and accept the challenges associated with an ongoing process.

I commend you for sharing your skills and experience with a school seeking accreditation through NLSA. Ultimately you are making an impact for eternity in your service to the school. May God bless you as you complete this important ministry of helping a school succeed through the National Lutheran School Accreditation process.



Dr. Rebecca Schmidt
Interim Director, National Lutheran School Accreditation

Evaluating the School's Purpose

The accreditation Self-Study begins with the evaluation of the school's mission, including a careful review of the documentation and practices that support and reflect the school's purpose. The school must present a scriptural rationale for its existence, clearly state its purpose and define the preferred future condition of its organization. Documents that define and support the school's purpose are to be presented clearly, concisely and not conflict with the mission statement of the sponsoring congregation or organization.

In evaluating the relevance of a school's purpose, it is necessary to determine how the stated purpose is reflected in the overall operation of the school, including administration, instruction, co-curricular activities and learner outcomes. Given that these concepts guide and direct all programs and activities of the school, they are to be well-defined and clearly understood by all stakeholders. Therefore, it is critical that the consultant understand the mission, purpose and values of NLSA and internalize them within their work with schools.

The Role of the Consultant

Mission: The consultant informs, encourages and assists school leaders to ensure that the accreditation process is successfully completed.

Role: The Consultant serves as the NLSA representative and is an advocate for the school. The Consultant collaborates with district accreditation officials and the Team Captain.

Key Concern: The responsibility of the consultant is to determine the readiness of the school for the Validation Team Visit by viewing each Standard of the Self-Study Report and accompanying evidence for its acceptability to the Validation Team members who validate the work of the school during the Validation Team Visit.

Consultant Job Description

Qualifications

- The Consultant:
 - Has completed NLSA Consultant Training.
 - Is currently serving or is a recently retired educator or administrator in a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod school (childcare, early childhood, elementary, middle or secondary).
 - Has successfully led a Lutheran school through an NLSA process.
 - Is committed to the success of the assigned school.

Responsibilities

- Contact the school administrator immediately after the appointment as consultant to offer assistance and become acquainted.
- Contact the school regularly throughout the school's Self-Study process.
- Visit the school at least once, preferably twice, at the school's expense, during the first four months of the Self-Study process.
 - Meet with the school administrator.
 - Meet with the faculty and the pastor.
 - Meet with the NLSA Steering Committee.
 - Observe the school in action for several hours.
 - Review a tentative timeline, with deadlines for the entire process up to the date of the Validation Team Visit (the tentative date listed on the application form).
 - Review the method of assigning ratings to indicators based upon a preponderance of evidence and practices.
- Throughout the process the consultant should:
 - Review and react to all preliminary versions of the Self-Study document.
 - Answer specific questions, make suggestions and encourage the school's progress.
 - Maintain contact with district accreditation officials and report the school's progress.
 - Provide recommendations of qualified Team Captains for the Validation Team. The selection of the Team Captain must be supported by district accreditation officials and approved by the NLSA Director.
 - Consult with the school administrator about adding members to the Validation Team.
 - Direct the school administrator to send the list of proposed Validation Team Visit members to the NLSA Director for approval.
 - Determine that the school complies with accreditation requirements related to documentation and indicators.
 - Determine that the school's report indicators reflect the actual practice at the school.
 - Notify district accreditation officials that the school is ready to host a Validation Team Visit. Reschedule the visit if the school is not prepared or the outcome of the visit is uncertain.
 - Inform the Administrator of the Levels of Accreditation (Addendum #7).
 - Inform the Administrator of the potential for Powerful Practices (Addendum #8).
 - Inform the Administrator of the potential for a School Shepherd Award (Addendum #9).
 - Remind the school of its responsibility to submit required documentation to the District Accreditation Commission (DAC) and their LCMS District office.

Characteristics of an Effective Consultant

An effective consultant is:

- **Knowledgeable:** The consultant is familiar with NLSA materials and processes.
- **Positive:** The consultant reflects a positive outlook and an optimistic view of the future. The focus is on what can be done and what is possible, rather than on negatives or obstacles.
- **Humble:** A humble spirit is evident; arrogance or a condescending nature negates the effectiveness of an NLSA consultant.
- **A Leader:** An effective consultant provides leadership without being the decision-maker.

- **A Model:** The consultant models the quality of the work expected. When the school is advised to be accurate in written materials, then the written correspondence from the consultant should be flawless. The credibility of the consultant's recommendations is enhanced by demonstrating what is recommended.
- **A Good Listener:** Listening is necessary to ensure that accurate and complete information is received. School leaders are more receptive to advice when they are confident that the consultant has listened and understood their concerns.
- **A Catalyst:** Effective consultations result in school improvement. The successful consultant maximizes involvement, validates decisions and serves to initiate people's assistance in support and completion of plans for improvement.
- **A Planner:** Skills are necessary to help schools develop plans that have a dynamic impact on school improvement and student learning.
- **Future-Oriented:** The consultant's view directs the school toward the future. Although a study of the past and present is an essential element of a Self-Study, the consultant's focus is on future direction, goals and plans that are essential to the school's success.
- **Time-Oriented:** The accreditation process is planned in order for the school to become accredited within its chosen time frame. District and national deadlines are incorporated into the timeline and overall planning process.
- **Enthusiastic:** It is the consultant's task to bring an atmosphere of enthusiasm for the accreditation process when the preparation of the Self-Study is cumbersome. A consultant's leadership and enthusiasm is encouraging for the school leaders.
- **Affirming:** The consultant affirms the ministry of each member of the school staff and the Team Captain who leads the Validation Team Visit.
- **Realistic:** The consultant provides a realistic assessment of the likelihood of success for the school. Assessment is based upon a thorough examination of written materials and documentation provided by the school.
- **A Prayer Warrior:** The consultant upholds the school, staff, children, families, congregation, pastor, and lay leaders in prayer.

Consultant Timeline and Checklist

The Checklist of Consultant Duties (Addendum #3) is a sample timeline for a 12-month accreditation process. It provides approximate times for the completion of the various steps of the process. Experienced NLSA consultants recognize that no two schools are exactly alike and that schools may take two years or longer to complete the process. It is the responsibility of the consultant to assist the school in determining the amount of time necessary to assure success. Most schools are able to conduct a process including the Self Study and Validation Team Visit in one year. It is helpful to share the completed checklist with the Team Captain.

Consultant Dos and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Use a variety of communication methods	Rely solely on verbal communication
Be specific in writing	Write in generalities
Know current NLSA materials and processes	Use outdated materials
Establish deadlines collaboratively	Require rigid and uncompromising deadlines
Be open and honest	Say one thing and mean another
Become acquainted with the campus	Judge only on appearances
Become acquainted with school leadership	Rely on input from one person
Respect the school's unique nature	Try to remake the school
Share examples from a variety of sources	Tell them how to do it
Be their advocate	Be their taskmaster
Give "hard" advice when needed	Value being liked at any cost
Respond promptly to questions and material	Be the reason for delays
Assist the Steering Committee	Become identified with a committee individual
Facilitate school improvement	Tell them specifically how to improve
Encourage quality work	Accept the unacceptable

Clarification of Consultant and Team Captain Roles

The Consultant and the Validation Team Visit Team Captain play significant and distinctive roles in the school's pursuit of accreditation. Both have an important role in evaluating the school's processes related to compliance with the Required Standards and the Indicators of Success, in addition to identifying improvements for the benefit of students and families.

The roles of Consultant and Team Captain are complementary rather than competitive. Thus, each has a unique and distinctive responsibility to guide the school. The Consultant helps the school achieve success with its Self-Study process. The Team Captain helps the school by directing the activities of the Validation Team members.

In consultation with the district executive, the Consultant selects a Team Captain for the school. The Team Captain assists the school in the selection of the Validation Team members. All prospective Validation Team members must be approved by the NLSA director. Ensure that the list of Team members and their completed *Conflict of Interest Policy and Code of Ethical Behavior Agreement* statements are submitted to the NLSA director no later than four (4) weeks prior to the Validation Team Visit, although earlier submission for approval is recommended. Once approved, the school administrator is to send a letter of appointment to all Validation Team members welcoming them to the Team and providing any details pertinent to the upcoming visit.

The Consultant's responsibility is to educate the faculty, the Steering Committee, the governing authority and other stakeholders in the school about the NLSA process. The Team Captain's responsibility is to educate the Validation Team.

The Consultant helps to determine whether the school is ready for a successful Validation Team Visit. The Team Captain, with team members, collaboratively provides an unbiased evaluation of the school's

accreditation status and verifies whether the school is ready for a recommendation for accreditation to the district and national commissions.

The chart below illustrates differences in the relationship of the two roles.

CONSULTANT		TEAM CAPTAIN
HELPS SCHOOL THROUGH		
Self-Study Process		Validation Visit
HELPS SELECT		
Team Captain		Validation Team Members
HELPS SCHEDULE		
Self-Study Work		Validation Team Work
HELPS EDUCATE		
Faculty and Stakeholders		Validation Team Members
HELPS DETERMINE		
Readiness for the Validation Visit		Accreditation Qualifications

THE WORK OF THE CONSULTANT

Sample Initial Consultant Visit

An early task of the school consultant is to schedule an orientation visit with the faculty and governing authority. This can be accomplished in a half-day visit. The schedule below suggests topics and the approximate time to schedule for the orientation visit.

Arrival at School: 12:30pm

- School Walkthrough (30 min.)
- Meet with Pastor(s) and Other Church Staff Members (15 min.)
- Meet with Administrator (2 hours)
 - Review NLSA Process and the Role of the Consultant
 - Costs of Accreditation
 - Organization—Steering Committee and Subcommittees
 - Review Required Evidences
 - Clarify Standards and Ratings
 - Confirm NLSA Materials are Current
 - Review Levels of Accreditation and Powerful Practices
 - School Shepherd Award
- Meet Briefly with Teachers and Staff (15 min.)
 - Encourage, Offer Assistance, Get Acquainted and Assure of Benefits
 - Review Process and the Role of the Teachers and Staff
 - Review Required Evidences
 - Clarify Standards and Ratings
 - The Importance of a Written Curriculum
- Meet with Governing Authority (30 min.)
 - Commend the Governing Authority for Pursuing Accreditation
 - Review Accreditation Benefits and Process
 - Review the Roles of the Consultant and the Governing Authority
 - Review Required Evidences
 - Clarify Standards and Ratings
 - Review Costs and other Plans Made with School Administrator
 - Assure the Support of the Consultant

Working with the Steering Committee

The Steering Committee consists of five to eight individuals who represent various segments of the community. It is recommended that the Steering Committee (and subcommittee) membership include parents, teachers, administrator(s), pastor(s), church staff members and governing authority members.

The primary task of the Steering Committee is to plan, guide and coordinate all activities related to the Self-Study process. Its responsibilities include appointing the subcommittees, overseeing the preparation of the Self-Study Report, reviewing the Validation Team Report and making final

recommendations for continued school improvement. (See the *Administrator Manual* for additional information.)

The tasks of the Steering Committee include but are not limited to:

- Appointing the members of all subcommittees.
- Establishing a schedule for the Self-Study process.
- Establishing a method and schedule for subcommittees to report to the faculty and Steering Committee.
- Insuring that surveys are administered to the appropriate groups.
- Securing materials and supplies for the subcommittees.
- Editing and approving the final written work of all subcommittees.
- Submitting written reports to the consultant as soon as they are completed.
- Assuring that the school complies with all Required Indicators of Success of the Self Study Report.
- Assuring that the Standards section of the Self-Study Report is complete per NLSA directives.
- Directing actions that bring the school into compliance with accreditation standards before the Self-Study process is completed.
- Determining the school's readiness for a Validation Team Visit based upon compliance with the required NLSA Standards and Indicators of Success.
- Coordinating the development of the school action plan with recommendations from the subcommittees prior to the site visit and the Validation Team members after the site visit.

Starting with the School's Purpose

Every accredited Lutheran school must be able to present a scriptural rationale for its existence, clearly state its purpose and define the preferred future condition of its organization. Documents that define and support the school's purpose are to be presented clearly, concisely and not conflict with the mission statement of the sponsoring congregation or organization.

In evaluating the relevance of its purpose, a school must determine how the stated purpose is reflected in the overall operation of the school, including administration, instruction, co-curricular activities and learner outcomes. Clearly defined documentation and evidence provide additional support and direction for the accomplishment of the school's purpose. Given that these concepts guide and direct all programs and activities at the school, they must be well-defined and clearly understood by all stakeholders.

The accreditation Self-Study begins with the evaluation of the school's mission including a careful review of the documentation and practices that support and reflect the school's purpose. The process of completing *Standard 1: Purpose* is undertaken with the entire teaching staff, the school board or governing authority and the Steering Committee. The work with the "Purpose" Standard establishes a tone for the accreditation process and models the procedure for completing the rest of the Standard sections in the Self-Study Report.

The Self-Study Report

The Self-Study Report Form is used as a tool for self-evaluation and overall school improvement and is the culmination of a school's Self-Study process. A required component of the Self-Study Report is a summary of general information describing the school. This information is usually assembled by the school accreditation leader and reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee.

A second component of the Self-Study Report involves the seven Standards. Each of the Standards are addressed and considered independently with the understanding that all Standards are guided and directed by the school's purpose. The findings of the subcommittees are compiled into a single Self-Study Report which reflects the actual conditions found at the school at the time of the study.

The seven Standard areas follow a consistent reporting format that includes:

Potential Evidence

The determination of each rating is based on the actual condition of the school related to the evidence and practices in place. Potential evidence documents provide support as the subcommittee determines the rating for each General Indicator of Success. The list of potential evidence included in the Self-Study Report provides suggestions but is not all-inclusive. Schools are to review the list of potential evidence and determine those present at the school. Evidence found in addition to the list may be presented. This evidence, or lack thereof, will assist the subcommittee in reaching an agreement on a rating. Potential evidence does not need to be included with the Self-Study Report but should be available for the Validation Team to review.

Potential Practices

Like potential evidence, potential practices are identified to demonstrate how well the school is meeting the Indicators. A practice describes something that is being done at the school. It is often supported with written documentation, but it can be observed in classroom activities or daily routines. Schools are to identify the practices currently in place. A list of suggested practices is included in the Self-Study Report, but it is not all inclusive. The identification of practices allows the subcommittee to arrive at a rating that reflects the condition currently in place at the school. It is the combination of evidence and practices that provide the support for an Indicator rating.

Respond to the Following Questions

Narrative responses are to be written for every question at the beginning of each Standard area. The answers to these questions provide a school with the opportunity to communicate how it meets the needs of students. This also allows the school to list activities, programs and practices that are unique to the school's learning environment.

Required Evidence

Required Evidence must be attached to the Self-Study Report and used to assign a rating and complete the written comments for each General Indicator of Success.

Required Indicators of Success

The school must respond "YES" to Required Indicators of Success to be accredited in good standing.

General Indicators of Success

General Indicators of Success help the school to quantify its compliance with the Required Standards. The assignment of a rating for each General Indicator of Success is determined by the evidence and the practices that support the rating. Each General Indicator is to be rated by the subcommittee, using the criterion below with the corresponding point value. A written response is required for every Indicator in the “Comments” section.

Highly Functional (4) — This is an area of outstanding strength of the school. It not only meets ALL the benchmarks related to the General Indicator of Success but is supported by extensive documentation and/or observable practices that exceed expectations related to the indicator. This indicator establishes practices for other Lutheran schools to consider. The Validation Team verifies that these practices and/or documentation exceed the Operational (3) level.

Operational (3) — This is the expected rating for a strong Lutheran school. ALL benchmarks must be met completely for this indicator to be considered Operational. The condition is supported with documentation and/or observable practices that support the rating.

Emerging (2) — Improvement is required in this area. If one or more benchmarks are not fully met, the rating must be Emerging. This indicator is recognized as important by the school but is inconsistently applied. Any benchmark not fully met must be addressed in the School Action Plan.

Not Evident (1) — There is observable conflict or deficiency with this indicator at the school. A majority of the expected benchmarks are not met or addressed with sufficient practices, evidence or documentation. This rating may result in the assignment of Provisional Status. This must be addressed in the School Action Plan.

Summary and Response Actions

Subcommittees carry on the primary work of evaluating the school’s compliance with the assigned Standards through a thoughtful and purposeful evaluation of each of the General Indicators of Success. The Summary and Response Actions are determined from the results of the evaluation and are related to the school’s strengths and the items needing improvement.

Self-Study Process Requirements

NLSA has established requirements associated with each of the seven Standard areas. The **Required Indicators of Success** describe the practices that are essential for Lutheran schools seeking accreditation. To be accredited in good standing, the school must be able to answer “YES” to all required indicators and provide evidence and practices to support the answers.

To be accredited in good standing, **required evidence** and **documentation** must be present and engaged in the school. The school's assigned accreditation Consultant is charged to verify that required evidence and documentation is in place. Conducting a Validation Team Visit without required items in place may result in the denial of an accreditation award. It is essential that all required evidence and documentation is well-prepared and reflects the actual condition at the school.

During the NLSA process, it may become apparent that some facets of the school need to be improved. The desirable improvements that can be done quickly should be done as part of the process, not just delayed for future action. School improvement is to be intentionally pursued, not just discussed, as part of the NLSA process.

Potential Evidences and Practices: Evidence and practices build a case of support for how well a school engages the **General Indicators of Success**. The Self-Study Report provides a list of suggestions of potential evidence and practices for a school to consider as it evaluates its compliance within each Standard area. The more significant the evidence and practices, the higher the school can rate its accomplishments.

Evidence consists of what the school has on file to guide the school (documents, policies, schedules, meeting minutes, written curriculum, etc.). Practices are what the school does to implement the evidence (training, teaching methods, supervision, building inspections, etc.). A compliance rating for each General Indicator of Success is determined by subcommittees through careful evaluation of the evidence and practices that are assembled in support of the indicator. Schools are not limited to the items of evidence and practices listed in the Self-Study Report and are advised to list all practices and evidence present at the school.

Determining Indicator Ratings: Subcommittees start their work by securing the **Required Evidence** and evaluating the school's compliance with the **Required Indicators of Success**. All required items must be present for the school to be accredited in good standing. If "NO" is marked for any Required Indicator, it is strongly suggested that the school develop the Required Indicator and correct the deficiency before moving forward with the accreditation process.

Next, a careful analysis of the school's status using the **General Indicators of Success** is conducted. The General Indicators are specifically designed for each Standard and are written, not only for clarification, but to stimulate thought, reflection and self-evaluation by the subcommittees.

The work of the subcommittee is to assemble the evidence and practices that support the overall rating of the Standard that aligns with the actual condition of the school. The more significant the practices and their impact related to the attainment of the indicator, the higher the rating. After gathering evidence and citing practices and the results, the subcommittee arrives at consensus about the correct benchmark rating for each General Indicator of Success.

The Operational rating of "3" is defined for each General indicator of Success. To comply with the Standard, the expectation is that a school will average "3" (Operational) for all General Indicators of Success assigned to the Standard. General Indicators of Success ranked as "2" (Emerging) or "1" (Not Evident) are required to be addressed in a well-developed School Action Plan that is implemented over the course the school's accreditation cycle.

Reacting to a Self-Study Report Draft

A Validation Team Visit cannot be scheduled until the Self-Study Report and accompanying documentation materials have been reviewed and approved by the Consultant. A key responsibility of a Consultant is the acceptability of all written reports and documentation related to the Self-Study process. It is critical that the Consultant review drafts of all written materials prepared by the school.

Many Consultants prefer receiving drafts of Self-Study documents electronically. Others desire to review drafts in a paper format. Either method is acceptable. After the documentation is received, the Consultant must evaluate whether the materials are clear, accurate and truthful. The Consultant also determines whether the school has complied with all requirements and rated itself accurately.

Reviewing the drafts can be summarized into four tasks: Review, Check, Look and React.

1. Review

- Read each Standard from the viewpoint of a Validation Team member.
- Provide notes similar to an editor (partially).
- Ensure each Standard area includes:
 - Narrative responses in the “Respond To:” section of each Standard.
 - Attached required documentation and exhibits.
 - Comments associated with each General Indicator of Success.
 - Answers to the summary questions at the end of each Standard.
 - Items of concerns as noted from the Standard area assessment.
 - Suggestions for addressing concerns identified in each Standard.
 - Each concern (rated as 1 or 2) is noted and has an associated plan for correction.
 - A comprehensive school action plan related to the entire Self-Study process

2. Check

- Accuracy
- Logic
- Clarity
- Completeness
- Exhibits Recently Prepared

3. Look

- Grammatical and Spelling Accuracy
- Documented School Improvement Plans Related to Identified Concerns
- Clarity of Information for Team Members

4. React

- Be Positive and Encouraging
- Be Specific
- Suggest Helpful Alternatives
- Be Honest
- Use Tact
- Point out Successes as well as Problems
- Keep the Process Moving with Few Delays

- Return Drafts with Inserted Comments, Readable Scribbles or Post-It Notes and Accompanying Correspondence
- Provide Feedback in Writing
- Keep a Copy of all Correspondence for Future Reference
- Speak with the Administrator or Steering Committee (in Addition to the Written Response)

School Curriculum Requirements

A written curriculum is an NLSA Required Standard. Curriculum development is an ongoing process for schools, and for many, it is typically one of the most challenging parts of the accreditation process. Accredited schools continuously use a variety of assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the curricular outcomes and make the necessary adjustments in teaching strategies and instruction based on the assessment data. The curriculum becomes a living document that guides and directs the instructive process. Teachers are continuously engaged with the curriculum as it establishes the direction for teaching and learning.

Schools have options related to curriculum development. Many LCMS districts have taken the lead on curriculum development for schools, several other districts are involved with joint curriculum mapping projects and regional associations of Lutheran schools are also involved in curriculum work. Curriculum mapping and the Concordia Curriculum series (Concordia Publishing House) are also acceptable resources for curriculum development.

Schools are advised to confer with the assigned NLSA consultant to determine whether the written curriculum meets the NLSA requirement for submission as evidence for the Standard. At a minimum, the NLSA expectation for curriculum design includes written objectives (learning outcomes) for every grade level in every subject area designated by the Standard and faith integration is a required expectation related to curriculum development in Lutheran schools.

Determining School Readiness for the Validation Team Visit

After careful examination of all Self-Study documentation, the NLSA consultant determines the school's readiness for the Validation Team Visit. In addition to a careful analysis of all written documentation the consultant must consider the following:

1. Are the ratings supported with sufficient evidence and practices?
2. Did the school follow all instructions associated with the Self-Study process?
3. Based on what the consultant has received and observed, is the school eligible for accreditation?

If, in the Consultant's judgment, the school has met the requirements associated with NLSA and is eligible for accreditation, the Consultant shall provide formal approval of school readiness for a Validation Team Visit. The Consultant notifies the Team Captain and the district accreditation officials that the school is ready a minimum of 30 days before the Validation Team Visit.

Requesting an Extension

If there is a risk that the school may not be eligible for accreditation he/she may suggest that the school delay the Validation Team Visit. An extension for one year may be requested using the following procedure:

1. School's must complete the *Extension Application Form* found on LuthEd.org.
2. Requests for extension must be in writing and include a complete description of the circumstances that have resulted in the request.
3. Requests must be endorsed in writing by the District Education Executive or District Accreditation Commissioner and submitted to the NLSA Director.
4. The school's *Extension Application Form* and the District endorsement of the school's extension application must be sent together with the applicable extension fee to:
National Lutheran School Accreditation
1333 South Kirkwood Road
Saint Louis, MO 63122
5. The NLSA Executive Committee will consider all extension requests and its decision is final.

Substantive Changes in Accredited Schools

For a variety of reasons during an accreditation cycle, a school may choose to make substantive changes in its offerings that significantly alter the status of its school. A school must initiate a substantive change procedure with NLSA if the school experiences a change in any of the following:

- Physical location of school
- Addition of or transfer of programs to new or different buildings
- Grade level configuration
- Type of school
- Change in ownership and/or control
- Change in legal status or form of control of the institution
- Opening a branch or classroom extension
- Change in established mission or objectives
- Addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, in terms of either the content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when NLSA most recently evaluated the institution.

If a substantive change occurs in an accredited school, continuation of accredited status shall require:

- Reporting the changes, in writing, to the respective district office;
- Approval by the district office of the changes and submission of the written changes to the NLSA National Office;
- Approval of the change by the Director of NLSA and;
- A one-day onsite visit by a District Accreditation Commission representative confirming continued standard compliance.

All changes should be reported, in writing, by the school within one month of the established change, to its local district office for review and submission to the National Office. The required visit by the District

Accreditation Commission representative must occur within 90 days of the implementation of the change. The district is responsible to report any findings related to their visit to the NLSA National Office within two weeks of the conclusion of their visit.

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: Benefits of Accreditation

1. Allows a school to identify and celebrate its strengths.
2. Exposes weaknesses that can be corrected.
3. Provides validation for the school's existence.
4. Prepares a "blueprint" for improvement during the next five years.
5. Provides accountability for school improvement.
6. Engenders support from individuals who might not be involved.
7. Builds cohesiveness among staff members.
8. Strengthens the school's image in the community.
9. Provides the school with a positive public relations tool.
10. Connects the school with the greater community of accredited LCMS schools.
11. Provides an objective set of eyes to endorse the Self-Study (Validation Team Visit).
12. Provides accountability with the congregation, constituents and community.
13. Compares the school program to a set of objective national standards.
14. Provides opportunity to evaluate the spiritual component of the school.
15. Helps establish an image for the school.
16. Provides motivation for staff development.
17. Validates the credibility of the school through an objective outside agency.
18. Publicly acknowledges the quality of the institution.
19. Provides opportunity for public acknowledgement and celebration.
20. Is something every Lutheran early childhood, elementary and high school can attain.

Addendum #3: Checklist of Consultant Duties

The steps listed below guide the work of the consultant and are designed to be checked off upon completion. This checklist is not intended to be comprehensive and should be modified according to the specifics of each school and process.

Month 1

- As soon as appointed, contact the school administrator to offer assistance.
- Review the Getting Ready for Accreditation document with the school administrator.
- Advise the school as to the formation of a Steering Committee and subcommittees
- Establish an orientation date for a visit with faculty, pastor(s) and the governing authority to discuss the purpose and process of accreditation.

Month 2

- Assist the school in establishing a tentative timeline with deadlines for the entire process up to the date of the Validation Team Visit.
- Visit the school.
- Consult with the administrator regarding the organization of the accreditation process.
- Discuss accreditation requirements and review the method of assigning ratings to indicators based upon a preponderance of evidence and practices.
- Advise the administrator that the school's Self-Study Report is to accurately reflect the current practices in place at the school.
- Establish the process for sharing information between the school and the consultant.

Months 3 – 6

- Advise the school of its responsibility to share drafts of all material as they are prepared.
- Review drafts of the Self-Study Standards that are prepared by the school. React and make recommendations within one week of the receipt of the information in writing.
- Advise the school leader and ensure that the Self-Study document accurately reflects conditions in place at the school.
- Consult with district accreditation officials for a list of Team Captain candidates.

Month 7

- Report the school's progress to district accreditation officials.
- Consult and assist in the final collaborative selection process of a Team Captain.

Month 8

- Verify that the Self-Study Report is nearing completion and that the Standard ratings are based upon evidence and practices that are currently in place at the school.
- Validate that a variety of school constituents have participated in the process.
- Alert the administrator to any concerns you have about the quality and process of the process.
- Assess readiness for the Validation Team Visit.
- Outline the process related to securing members for the Validation Team Visit.

Months 9 – 10

- Consult with the administrator about the selection of Validation Team members. Ensure the recruitment and commitment of the members to follow established NLSA protocol.
- Remind the school accreditation leader that the Self-Study Report must be distributed to all Validation Team Visit members no later than one month before the visit. Electronic submissions are acceptable.

Month 11

- Review the final copy of the school's Self-Study report with narratives before it is distributed to Validation Team members. Ensure that requirements related to the Self-Study have been met.
- Inform the school of its readiness for the Validation Team Visit. Postpone the visit if success is uncertain.

Month 12

- Remind the administrator to send copies of the Self-Study Report to Validation Team members and the District Accreditation Commission (DAC) or LCMS District office. Verify that copies are received.
- Inform the school administrator of the completion of consultant responsibilities to the school and offer ongoing assistance as needed.

Addendum #4: Required Indicators of Success

Standard	Required Indicators of Success
1:01	The school's written purpose embraces a Lutheran identity that is rooted in Holy Scripture and is committed to faith formation, academic excellence and Christian service.
1:02	School leadership and staff members understand and accept the purpose of the school.
2A:01	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.
2B:01	A statement of nondiscrimination is evident in school-printed materials and assures that students are admitted without regard to race, color or national origin.
2C:01	The climate of the school flows from and supports the school's purpose.
3A:01	The operating organization designates the governing authority and has written policies clearly defining lines of authority, responsibilities and/or limitations of the governing authority.
3A:02	The operating organization has written policies clearly defining governing authority membership.
3A:03	The governing authority establishes written policies or administrative limitations that empower the administration in operating the school.
3B:01	The administrator demonstrates a personal Christian faith, a commitment to Lutheran education and a dedication to the teaching ministry of the governing authority.
4:01	All school personnel express and demonstrate agreement with the stated school purpose.
5:01	The teaching of the Christian faith is recognized as the major purpose of the school, is allotted appropriate time in the daily schedule and is integrated intentionally throughout the curriculum and instruction.
5:02	The written curriculum is developed and is implemented for religion, mathematics, science, reading, language arts, social studies, art, music, physical education and any other subject taught by the school. (Early childhood centers need not segment learning outcomes into specific subject areas.)
6:01	Services offered by the school meet or exceed federal, state and local requirements.
7:01	Facilities are well maintained and free from hazards, providing a safe and productive learning environment.
7:02	Facilities conform fully to all applicable laws, including health, safety and building codes.

Addendum #5: Required Evidence and Documentation

Standard	Required Evidence or Documentation
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The written purpose/philosophy/mission statement
2A	<i>No evidence or documentation required</i>
2B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nondiscrimination policy
2C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School discipline code
3A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governing board handbook or policy manual, including policies relating to roles of board, administrator and pastor
3B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The administrator's job description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff development plan Non-discriminatory salary and benefit scale or policy
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written curriculum for every grade level for religion, mathematics, science, reading, language arts, social studies, art, music, physical education and any other subject taught (Early childhood centers need not segment learner outcomes into specific subject areas) A current schedule for each classroom, indicating clearly which subjects (activities) are taught at which times A chart illustrating the percentage of each school week allocated to each subject (activity) at each level, including a comparison with state guidelines An analysis of the results of standardized tests administered for each grade level for the past three years, including a description on how this information is used to evaluate and improve student learning
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrollment/admission policy Crisis emergency plan
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School floor plan

Addendum #6: NLSA Classroom Observation Tool

The NLSA *Classroom Observation Tool* has been developed to assist school leaders and Validation Team members to observe, identify and document evidence of classroom environments that are conducive to student learning and growth. Each section of the *Tool* is designed to specifically review the following classroom areas:

- Planning and Preparation
- Classroom Environment
- Instruction
- Faith Integration
- Technology

Currently, NLSA does not require a school to use the *Classroom Observation Tool* as evidence or in classrooms prior to a Validation Team Visit. Also, a Validation Team may choose not to use the *Tool* based on time constraints or other individual circumstances. However, NLSA strongly encourages a school and the Validation Team to implement the *Classroom Observation Tool* in order to improve student learning and reflect upon classroom environment and practices.

If a school chooses to utilize the *Classroom Observation Tool*, the documentation of such implementation can be used as evidence in the Self-Study process to demonstrate the reflective and growth processes adopted by the school.

If used by the Validation Team, ratings from the *Classroom Observation Tool* will not impact the overall accreditation rating of the school at this time. However, the *Classroom Observation Tool* ratings will be included in the final Validation Team Report so that school administrators and other stakeholders are aware of the observations of the Validation Team at the time of the school visit.

Addendum #7: Levels of Accreditation

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.

Addendum #8: NLSA Powerful Practices

Practices associated with General Indicators of Success that are rated as “highly functional” (4) by the school have the potential for identification as a *Powerful Practice* when the practice is transformational and replicable.

NLSA seeks to identify and share unique practices that set a school apart and make it 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.

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 ramifications for schools throughout the LCMS.

Addendum #9: NLSA School Shepherd Award

The Validation Team may 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) in which 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 nominated Pastor will be chosen in July by an appointed committee of the NLSA National Accreditation Commission to receive the national NLSA School Shepherd Award. District and Synod recognition will follow at a later time and date. Additional specifics can be found on the “NLSA District Commissioner Resources” page of LuthEd.org.