

National Lutheran School Accreditation

Early Childhood Accreditation

Glossary of Terms

Revised September 2022

The glossary is designed to assist schools with the terminology associated with the National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) Early Childhood (EC) accreditation process.

Accommodation: An alteration of environment, curriculum format or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks.

Accreditation in Good Standing: Accreditation award without condition.

Accreditation with Provision: Accreditation award with condition. This level of accreditation is awarded as a result of the school's failure to comply with any single Required Indicator of Success, failure to provide any single piece of Required Evidence, a General Indicator rating of "1" by the team or any Major Deficiency identified by the team, and where a school demonstrates a commitment to continuing school improvement.

Accredited School: A school that has been granted accreditation by NLSA.

Accrediting Agencies: Professional organizations that foster quality, encourage academic excellence, and promote improvement in teaching and learning through a process of self-study and outside review of standards and school improvement (i.e. NAEYC, NLSA, NCA, AdvancED).

Administrator: An individual charged with the responsibility of carrying out the day-to-day operations of the school as directed by the policies developed by the board or governing authority.

Adult/Child Ratios (Staff/Child Ratios): The number of children supervised by one (1) qualified staff person.

Age-Appropriate: Activities designed for the developmental age of the child served.

Anecdotal Notes: Written narrative descriptions recorded after the observed behavior(s) occurs.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

Assessment: The measurement of cognitive and social/emotional growth.

Assistant Teacher: A staff member who implements program activities under the direct supervision of a teacher (see teacher aide).

Authentic Assessment: A continuous evaluation of student learning based on pre-determined criteria, such as a rubric, that requires students to demonstrate their understanding of content or acquisition of skills in meaningful or "real-life" contexts.

Authorized Personnel: Individuals allowed access to student files, such as: teachers, teacher assistants, principal, nurse, NLSA validators, state licensing consultants, program-quality evaluators.

Cardiac Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR): Training that prepares individuals to perform heart resuscitation on an infant, child or adult.

Center: A term describing the physical building that houses an early childhood program; used interchangeably with school and facility.

Challenging Behaviors: Any behavior that 1) interferes with children's learning, development and success at play; 2) is harmful to the child, other children or adults or 3) puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure.

Child Care: Any program that provides child care for children; includes full-time care, drop-in programs, Mothers' Day Out, extended school care and infant care.

Child Development Associate (CDA): Child Development Associate credential issued by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition.

Child-Initiated/Self-Selected: Activities led by or chosen by the child; can involve adults and other children; is unique to every child, values individuality and respects children's interests.

Church Ministry Leadership Staff: May include the pastor(s), Family Life Ministries Director, Director of Christian Education (DCE), Principal/Administrator, Deaconess, etc.

Code of Conduct (Ethics): A written set of principles for members of an organization that prescribes acceptable behaviors that are in accordance with the institutions' values.

Collaboration: Two or more people purposefully working together on a shared goal.

Community Support Services: Health, mental health, oral health, nutrition, child welfare, parenting programs, job training programs, early intervention-special education screening and assessment services, and basic needs such as housing and child care subsidies.

Consultant: The individual appointed by NLSA to assist a school through the self-study process, including the preparation of the Self-Study Report.

Continuing Education: Additional course work that focuses on developing skills that will equip an individual to be more effective in meeting the needs of young children; includes college courses, conferences, workshops, webinars.

Continuing Education Unit (CEU): A CEU is a measure used in continuing education programs to assist a professional in maintaining his or her license in their profession.

Continuity of Care: The center maintains a primary caregiving relationship over a period of years; infants and their primary caregivers stay together until all children in the group are at least thirty (30) months of age.

Contamination: To soil or infect by any form of contact.

Continuous Improvement: A strategic plan for moving a program to ever-higher levels of quality.

Criminal Record Check: A state or national search and report of criminal records on forms provided by local, state or national agencies.

Curriculum: Written objectives and outcomes of what the students are expected to know, believe, and/or be able to do as a result of the schooling process.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): A program planned and carried out taking into account the level of physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of a child.

Developmental Milestones: Abilities/skills that a child is expected to master at a particular age.

Differentiation: Allows students to learn at the depth, complexity and pace that is beneficial to the child and is used to provide a rich and effective approach to meet the individual needs of children.

Direct Supervision: Qualified caregivers: 1) have all children in sight; 2) are alert to any problems that may occur; and 3) are taking an active supervisory role with the children.

Director/Administrator: The person responsible for the operation for the child care center at all times.

Discipline: The ongoing process of helping children to develop self-control for self-management while protecting and maintaining the integrity of the child.

Disruptive Behaviors: When a child is uncooperative and prevents him/herself and other children from working in the classroom exemplified by tantrums, defiance, being overly affectionate or impulsive, screaming and/or aggression.

District Accreditation Commission: A group of individuals who review NLSA Validation Team Reports and Cumulative Annual Reports and make recommendations about accreditation at the district level.

Documentation: Written records or copies of documents kept in files at the child care center.

Dramatic Play: A type of play where children accept and assign roles, and then act them out.

Early Childhood Professional: A qualified caregiver providing direct supervision of children.

Early Childhood Program: A program of activities provided for children birth to eight (8) years of age.

Elementary School: An educational center that promotes the education and care of children anywhere from kindergarten up to eighth grade. Early childhood programs below kindergarten may also be a component of these programs.

Emergency Drills: Practice drills designed to help children and staff rehearse what to do in emergency situations; such as fire drills, tornado drills, earthquake drills, lock down drills, etc.

Ethical Conduct: Behavior reflecting the core values of one's profession.

Evidence Based Accreditation (EBA): Recognition by National Lutheran Schools Accreditation (NLSA) of a school's quality involving extensive self-study that provides thorough documentation of compliance with NLSA standards, the production of a School Action Plan for improvement and verified by an outside Validation Team.

Extended Care: Programs that extend the early childhood school day or school year beyond the normal hours and calendar (i.e. before and after school programs, enrichment classes, summer camps, school vacation camps).

Facility: The building that houses the school/center/program.

Faculty: Individuals employed by the child care center such as administrators, teaching and support roles; interchangeable with "employee" and "faculty."

Field Trips: An event or activity that meets the following conditions: 1) the center sponsors it; 2) it is conducted on property that is not part of the child care center or their safely enclosed playground; 3) children enrolled in the child care center participate in it; 4) child care center caregivers supervise the children; 5) it occurs during the child care center's regular hours of operation.

Fine Motor/Small Motor Development: Refers to the improvement of small muscle movements and control, usually in the fingers and hands. Examples: turning/twisting hands and wrists, pouring liquids without spilling, fastening clothing, writing, pounding nails with control, etc.

Formal and Informal Communication: Formal communication refers to official notices through defined channels throughout the organization while informal communication flows freely throughout the organization from multiple directions. Examples: Handbooks, newsletters, email communication, conversations, conferences, etc.

Free-Standing Center: An early childhood program that is sponsored by a congregation without an elementary school.

Graduate Equivalent Degree (GED): A test that provides the equivalency to a high school diploma. The GED is available through traditional classroom settings or can be taken on-line. Students are allowed to progress at their own pace. The GED includes four tests: Math Reasoning, Reasoning through Language Arts, Social Studies and Science. Additional information regarding costs, practice tests, etc. is available on line.

Governing Authority/Governing Body: The governing body that guides, steers, directs and supervises the overall operation of the congregation through the early childhood program by developing policies (i.e. the board of education, preschool committee, advisory committees, governing board, elders, church council).

Governance: The action, manner or format of leading a congregation and early childhood center in ministry.

Gross Motor/Large Motor Experiences: Refers to the improvement of large muscle movement and control in the body and limbs. Examples include pulling up; walking; climbing in, on and over; moving through, around, and under; pushing; pulling; balancing and riding. Gross motor equipment is equipment that supports such activities: climbers, swings, slides, balance beams, balls, hoops, parachutes, wagons, trikes, mats, tunnels, sports equipment.

Handwashing: To cleanse hands and wrists a minimum of 20 seconds using soap and warm, running water (100 degrees through 120 degrees Fahrenheit) at a hand sink.

Hazard: A source of potential harm or negative outcome from past, current or future exposures (objects with sharp edges, flaking or peeling paint, chipped floor tiles, peeling or deteriorating caulk, splinters, protruding/rusty nails, missing parts, etc.).

In Good Repair: Furniture, equipment and materials not frayed, broken, chipped or peeling; foam containing products and furniture have no exposed foam or stuffing.

In-Process: The status of a school which has made application for NLSA accreditation and is in the process of completing the Self-Study process.

Indicator of Success: Another term for “benchmark, a criterion for helping to establish whether or not a standard has been met.

Individual Space: Examples are a cubby; individual hook for each child’s coat/backpack; a separate area to store extra clothing; a mailbox.

Infant: A child who is at least six (6) weeks of age to the age when he/she walks unassisted consistently.

In-Service: Professional development training that takes place on site.

Intervention: An action taken to improve a situation.

LCMS Roster: Individuals who are certified by the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod as a Minister of Religion Commissioned or a Minister of Religion Ordained (called teachers and pastors).

Lutheran Education Association (LEA): A Lutheran professional organization that links, equips and affirms educators and workers in ministry with a variety of networks, conferences, resources and publications for the purpose of equipping educators and building up the body of Christ.

Lead Teacher: The caregiver assigned to implement the program for a group of children.

Learner Outcomes: The objective of a school to help children learn. Learner outcomes, similar to objectives, specify what students are expected to know or be able to do as a result of the education process.

Learning Centers: A defined area within the classroom/area where children may participate in similar or related types of activities and areas that are prepared with a selection of materials that promote learning in a specific content area such as art or science.

Learning Domains: The primary focuses of early childhood instruction (spiritual, language/literacy, social/emotional development, math, science, social studies, physical development, and creative expression).

Learning Environment: The indoor/outdoor environment that includes space, equipment and materials.

Learning Styles: An individual's natural or habitual pattern of acquiring and processing information in learning situations. Core concept: individuals differ in how they learn. Reference to varied learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic.

Long-Term Goals: Goals that can be accomplished in three or more years.

Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS): A mission-oriented Bible-based, confessional Christian denomination headquartered in St. Louis, Mo., founded on the teachings of Martin Luther.

Lutheran School: An early childhood program, elementary school or high school (or combinations thereof) that are operated under the auspices of an LCMS congregation(s).

Major Deficiency: 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 children in the school.

Major Injury (Serious Injury): Any injury requiring treatment by medical professionals.

Management Procedures: The operational actions and decisions (aligning with existing policies) made by the administrator or staff members on a day-to-day basis.

Manipulatives: Toys and materials that necessitate children's use of small motor skills (i.e. lacing cards, parquetry blocks, pegboards, puzzles, etc.).

Minor Injury: Any injury that requires first aid treatment but does not require medical attention by medical personnel.

Mission/Ministry Statement: A statement of beliefs and values that guides how the vision of the organization is achieved and is reflective of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): An organization working on behalf of young children, with a national network of local affiliates and a growing global alliance of like-minded organizations working with research, resources and accreditation.

National Accreditation Commission (NAC): A trained group of experienced educators who provide the final determination about NLSA accreditation and reaccreditation.

National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA): An agency since 1978, NLSA serves as the accrediting body for Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod schools across the United States and the world.

Needs Assessment: A process of using objective and subjective means (surveys, focus groups, test data, etc.) to identify needs that, when met, will benefit children at the school.

Networking: Meeting and communicating with other educators and stakeholders.

Occupational Safety and Hazard Administration (OSHA): A federal law under which employers are responsible and required to provide a safe and healthful workplace by setting and enforcing standards and by providing training, outreach, education and assistance.

Ongoing: Continuing without conclusion or interruption.

Operating Congregation(s): The congregation(s) responsible for sponsoring the early childhood program.

Orientation: A meeting conducted for new staff and/or parents to acquaint them with the program.

Parent Handbook: A manual outlining expectations, rules and guidance for parents.

Personnel Manual/Staff Manual: A manual outlining expectations, rules and guidance for employees.

Philosophy Statement: A Gospel-oriented statement that articulates the beliefs of how children's developmental needs will be met and addresses the partnership between parents, school, congregation and community.

Policy: A governing authority decision which directs the future actions of the administrator and other school staff.

Portfolios: An thorough method of evaluating a child's growth and development that includes artifacts of the child's work demonstrating his/her efforts, progress and achievements over time (artifacts include: name writing, drawings, creative art, anecdotal notes made by the teacher, creative art samples, photos of children's engagement/activities, listing of children's interests, skills checklists, screenings, etc.).

Potentially Hazardous Situations: A condition, circumstance or combination of factors that create a substantial risk or danger of causing injury to persons or damage to property (inappropriate use of equipment or materials, crowding in learning centers, a child's lack of awareness of surroundings, i.e. sitting in a tricycle path, running near active swings).

Preschool: An educational program for children ages 3 – 5.

Preschooler: Children at least three (3) years of age and not yet attending kindergarten.

Procedure: An established or official method of accomplishing a task, usually with steps that are performed in a prescribed order.

Profile: A description of staff members' education, professional development, teaching experience and congregational and community involvement.

Professional Organization: A national or regional organization that provides support for educators.

Professional Staff: Paid employees of a school (congregation) who have responsibilities for education.

Program: All activities provided for children during their hours of attendance at the child care center.

Provisional Accreditation: A level of accreditation awarded to a school that failed to comply with Required Indicators of Success, is missing Required Exhibits and/or has been cited with Major Deficiencies by the Validation Team.

Rating: A value placed for each General Indicator of Success that is used to evaluate the actual practices of the school and is used to formulate the School Action Plan.

Registered Service Organization (RSO): A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is independent of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), but its operations foster the mission and ministry of the church, its program activities are in harmony with Synod and it agrees to respect and not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod.

Requirement: A condition of success that is compulsory and a necessary condition of accreditation.

Safe Environment: A fully enclosed area, free of safety and environmental hazards, occupied by at least one supervising adult.

Sanitation: The promotion of hygiene and the prevention of disease by maintenance of sanitary environmental conditions and practices.

Sanitize: Effective bacterial treatment by a process that provides adequate accumulative heat or concentration of chemicals for adequate time to reduce the bacterial count, including pathogens, to a safe level on utensils and equipment.

Sanitizable: An article, utensil or equipment that is easily sanitized because of the material composition.

School: A planned program for helping children learn; includes preschool, kindergarten, child care, elementary school, middle school, home school and secondary school (junior and/or senior high).

School Climate Survey: An assessment tool used by staff and/or parents to measure satisfaction with the overall school program.

Screenings (Developmental Screenings): A brief standardized procedure designed to quickly appraise a group of children to determine those that need further evaluation (screenings focus on the child's ability to acquire skills and should not be used as a "readiness test: examples include Brigance, DIAL 3, Ages and Stages, DENVER II, etc.).

Self-Study: The extensive process of school evaluation that identifies school strengths, areas of concern and develops plans to address areas needing improvement.

Sensory Play: Any activity that stimulates children's senses: touch, smell, taste, movement, balance, sight and hearing that facilitate exploration and naturally encourage children to use scientific processes while they play, create, investigate and explore (play with sand, water, play dough, finger paint, etc.).

Short-Term Goals: School goals that can be met within two years or less.

School Action Plan: A scripted plan for school improvement that includes "what" (specific goal), "who" (individuals or groups) "how" (strategies) and a time-line for completion.

Social Skills: Skills used every day to interact and communicate with others including verbal and non-verbal communication, speech, gestures, facial expressions and body language (Examples: cooperative play with other children, taking turns, expressing emotions in non-harmful ways, learning about self and others).

Special Needs: Physical or mental health conditions that require special education services such as early intervention or individualized support.

Staff Handbook: A manual that describes expectations for staff behaviors.

Staff: Individuals employed by the child care center such as administrators, teaching, and support roles; interchangeable with "employee" and "faculty".

Stakeholders: Staff, students, parents, community members and others who have a vested interest in the school/program.

Standard: A degree of excellence required for accreditation.

Statistical Report: An annual form administered by the LCMS that is intended to provide pertinent statistical information related to Lutheran Schools.

Steering Committee: A group that leads the Self-Study process, is composed of pastor(s), staff, administrators, parents, congregation and governing authority members and is responsible for overseeing the work of subcommittees and approving the Self-Study Report and School Action Plan.

Strategic Plan: A written plan stating goals, actions to be taken, identification of resources and/or allocation of resources to execute the actions.

Strategic Planning: An organization's process of defining its future direction and making decisions about allocating its resources to pursue the strategy.

Subcommittees: As directed by the Steering Committee, a small group of individuals focus on responding to a standard of the Self-Study by providing numerical ratings and comments for each Indicator, identifying strengths and concerns that inform the School Action Plan.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS): The sudden unexplained death of a child less than one year of age usually occurs during sleep, also known as cot death or crib death.

Support Staff: Service staff such as cooks, maintenance persons, secretaries and bus drivers.

Systematic Planning: A planning process for putting ideas into action based on the scientific method and includes concepts such as objectivity of approach and acceptability of results (components addressed include assessment of needs, specific objectives, methods and activities, implementation strategies and plan evaluation).

Task Force: A temporary grouping of individuals who are assembled for the purpose of accomplishing a specific objective.

Teacher Aide: A staff member who implements program activities under the direct supervision of a teacher (see assistant teacher).

Teacher Directed/Teacher Initiated: Activities planned and taught by the teacher.

Team Captain: A trained educator who leads an NLSA Validation Team.

Time-Out: An out-of-group activity for a child with adult supervision (not appropriate for a child who is less than 24 months of age).

Themes: Often referred to as thematic units, are based on a specific topic where learning activities are developed to support and explore the overarching concept of the theme. (Examples: seasons, farm animals, transportation, insects, etc.).

Toxic Substances: Any substance that is potentially harmful if ingested, inhaled or absorbed through the skin. (Examples: cleaners, detergents, bleach, hand sanitizer, paint, pesticides, herbicides, floor and furniture polish).

Transitions: Guiding and moving children from one activity to another (Examples: Moving from the classroom to the playground, from a large group activity to a small group activity, from the bathroom to the snack table, etc.).

Unit Blocks: A solid wooden block that comes in many shapes and sizes. The basic unit block is approximately 5 ½ by 2 ¾ by 1 3/8 inches (blocks are proportional in length or width to the basic unit).

Universal Precautions (UP): Training that provides instruction for handling blood-borne pathogens (UP supplies include a bucket, paper towels, plastic gloves, bleach or approved UP cleaning agent, red plastic bags).

Validation Team: Four to 6 individuals assigned by the district and approved by the synod to conduct on-site accreditation visits.

Validation Team Visit: A 2 ½ to 3-day on-site accreditation visit where the Validation Team verifies the Self-Study Report, conducts classroom observations, meets with stakeholders, provides a final written report and recommends for/or against accreditation.

Vendor: An outside company providing a service, food or materials for a fee.

Visitor: Any person observing or assisting in the child care center without compensation and for less than eight (8) hours per month.

Volunteer: A person working or assisting in the child care center without compensation for more than eight (8) hours per month.