

National Lutheran Schools Accreditation: Early Childhood

What Is It?

Why Do It?

How To Do It!

What Is It?

- National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) is a process of self-evaluation followed by a visit of objective observers designed to help Lutheran schools improve the quality of their programs.
- The process is completely voluntary and available for every school operated by a single congregation, by an association of congregations, or by a Recognized Service Organization of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod or the Lutheran Church—Canada.
- NLSA is a rigorous national accrediting process designed to evaluate schools based on their unique purpose as Lutheran schools.
- The "Standards for Lutheran Schools" and report forms are similar to those used by other accrediting agencies, both secular and religious.
- The National Accreditation Commission that is made up of representatives from various participating districts of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church—Canada, governs NLSA.
- The process is owned and operated by the District and Congregation Services of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is a service of the LCMS School Ministry.
- Over 700 schools of all types are currently accredited by NLSA.
- Both the NLSA and the Northwest District of the LCMS has a reciprocity agreement with the NAAS (Northwest Association of Accredited Schools).

The Purposes Of National Lutheran School Accreditation

- Help Lutheran schools - early childhood, elementary and secondary - to improve.
- Help all Lutheran schools and centers to evaluate themselves based upon their unique purposes and national standards.
- Give appropriate recognition to those schools that complete the process successfully.



Why should Lutheran schools of the region use National Lutheran School Accreditation?



- NLSA is a process that helps the school improve.
- Self-study and evaluation, based on a set of national standards, improves the quality of the school.
- The school gains greater self-respect.
- The school's public relations and recruitment could improve.
- Accreditation is a public acknowledgement of quality.

Why should Lutheran schools of the region use National Lutheran School Accreditation?

- National accreditation provides accountability to your community, constituents and congregation.
- Accreditation provides evidence of professionalism by the school and its staff and of an objective evaluation by educational professionals not personally involved in the school.
- It helps the school evaluate and improve its unique ministry as a Lutheran school.
- NLSA is international in scope, supported by more than 2000 schools.
- NLSA assures parents who move that a quality Lutheran school exists wherever NLSA accreditation is found.

The NLSA Accreditation Process for Early Childhood

- Step One
 - A self-study is to be carried out by the faculty/staff, pastor, board members, parents, and other constituents of the school. This step usually requires nine to twelve months. To assist the early childhood center in this step, a consultant is assigned at the time of application.
- Step Two
 - A team of outside observers visits the early childhood center/preschool to validate the self-study and to make recommendations for further improvement. The visiting team will be recruited by the early childhood director, recommended by the District, and appointed by the NLSA Director.
- Step Three
 - The center continues to improve with the help of the visiting team's recommendations. The District Accreditation Commission will help the school through this step.

The Early Childhood Center's Task in Accreditation

- Early childhood centers that are quite different may be equally good.
 - This belief dictates the basic principle that a Lutheran early childhood center should be evaluated based on standards of quality which are generally accepted, in terms of what it is striving to accomplish, and the early childhood center's own setting, beliefs, and constituents.
 - For this reason, it is essential that the faculty/staff carefully evaluate its educational program on the basis of its own statement of philosophy.
 - The school's statements of philosophy and mission become important indicators, along with particular standards, by which the center itself and the visiting team evaluate the center's ministry.
- NLSA accreditation is a whole center/preschool evaluation/improvement process. All aspects of the early childhood center are included in the NLSA process.

Preparing for the Self-Study

- Introductory materials explaining the NLSA process may be obtained directly from NLSA.
- Prior to completing an application form, it may be helpful to ask the LCMS District Education Executive or District NLSA Commissioner to visit and explain the processes.
- Once the application and initial fee have been submitted, the NLSA Director will appoint a consultant to assist during the selected self-study process.
- The faculty/staff should be aware of what is involved before the decision is made to undertake the accreditation process.
- The main purpose of NLSA accreditation is to help the early childhood center evaluate itself and improve.
- The consultant's role is to help the school through the self-study process, including making suggestions for visiting team members.
- The team captain's responsibility follows that of the consultant. The team captain is to lead the visiting team as it reviews the self-study report, visits the school, and prepares the visiting team's oral and written report.

The Steering Committee

- A steering committee (usually five to eight persons) should be appointed by the director or the Board of Education immediately after the decision has been made to seek accreditation.
 - The early childhood director should be a member of the steering committee.
 - A sample steering committee would include the early childhood director, a board member, a pastor, a congregational trustee or officer, and up to three active parents who represent the school population, and other church staff members.

The Steering Committee

- The steering committee will have the primary responsibility for planning and guiding the entire accreditation process including:
 - Naming the members of all subcommittees for each of the major areas for evaluation (Statements, Relationships, Administration, Personnel, Teacher/Child Relations, Indoor/Outdoor Environment and Health & Safety, Curriculum)
 - Establishing a schedule for the self-study.
 - Establishing a method and a schedule for subcommittees to report to the faculty/staff and the steering committee.
 - Securing materials and supplies for subcommittees.
 - Coordinating the work of all subcommittees.
 - Editing the subcommittee reports for inclusion in the self-study report.
 - Assuring that the early childhood center complies with all noted requirements in the self-study process.
 - Determining the early childhood's/preschool's readiness for an accreditation visit based upon compliance with required NLSA standards.

Work of Subcommittees

- Every staff member should serve on at least one subcommittee.
 - In small centers/preschools or because of special interests, some faculty/staff members may need to serve on more than one subcommittee.
 - Consideration should also be given to the role that the pastor(s), board members, parents and students can take throughout the study.
 - The school director and members of the steering committee should determine how the interests of the early childhood community can best be served as it selects subcommittee members.
 - The names of each subcommittee member should be listed with each report.
- In the Self -Study process, subcommittees are given specific responsibility for studying one or more sections of the NLSA standards.
 - By following the directions and responding to the items in the section of the Self-Study Report Form assigned, each subcommittee prepares the self-study for that section.

Work of Subcommittees

- Section A of the Early Childhood Accreditation Criteria, “Statements,” is the basic section upon which the self-study rests.
 - The entire faculty needs to be involved in the study of this section.
 - Be sure to include the pastor and other church staff persons in the study and preparation of this section.
- Even though the center’s/preschool’s statements may be very brief and simple, if it is cooperatively developed it can become the operational philosophy of the center/preschool.
 - Frequently an existing statement of philosophy is modified, revised, or rewritten as a result of the NLSA process.
- The subcommittee responsible for the “Statements” section of the report should prepare the final statements of philosophy and purpose and submit them to the entire faculty and steering committee for approval.
 - Once this review has occurred, the Statements section should be sent to the consultant for review and comment.

Work of Subcommittees

- Section 2, “Relationships,” provides information that is important to the entire evaluation.
 - The subcommittee responsible for this section of the self-study should begin to work on its report as soon as the philosophy section is completed.
 - This report also should be presented to the total faculty/staff before work is begun on the other sections of the instrument.
 - The typical process is that each section of the self-study is reviewed by Steering Committee and then forwarded to the consultant for review and comment.
 - With the foundation laid for the report by completing work on Sections I and II, the other subcommittees should begin their tasks.

Conducting the NLSA Early Childhood Self-Study

- Faculty members/staff, pastor(s), board members, parents and students should all be actively involved in this self-evaluation.
 - Normally the bulk of the work is carried by the teachers/staff and early childhood/preschool director.
- It is important that faculty/staff, pastor, board members, and parents understand that the purpose of this process is to improve the quality of the early childhood program through the process of planning self-evaluation, introspection, and comprehensive examination of what is happening to children in the early childhood/preschool environment.

Conducting the NLSA Early Childhood Self-Study

- It is important to recognize that no one section of the standards is meant to stand alone.
 - Each section has been designed to correlate with other sections to form a comprehensive self-evaluation.
 - It is important that participants do not become single-minded when working on a particular section and feel the total evaluation rests on that particular section.
 - It is possible that one or a few standards are not met for good reason, yet the early childhood/preschool can be accredited.

Conducting the NLSA Early Childhood Self-Study

- During the NLSA process, it may become obvious that some facets of the early childhood/preschool should be changed.
 - Those desirable changes that can be done quickly should be done as part of the process, not just planned for the future.
 - School improvement should occur, not just be discussed, as part of the NLSA process.
- Finally, it is vital for each participant in the process to receive feedback on those sections of the report that he or she had a role in preparing and to have an opportunity to review and suggest modifications to the final draft of the report.

Preparing the Self-Study Report

- The Self-Study Report Form is to be used as a tool for self-evaluation and improvement. For each section, the report requires:
 1. Responses to selected statements.
 2. Specific required documentations or exhibits
 3. An agreement-implementation rating scale for each standard.
 4. Comments explaining the rating given each standard.
 5. Comments about the strengths, needs for improvement, and plans for improvement for each section of standards as noted. (“Comment on...”)

Preparing the Self-Study Report

- The statements in each section are written not only for the purpose of clarifying and explaining, but also for stimulating thought, reflection and self-evaluation.
 - Supporting data and information should be categorically labeled and attached to the self-study report.
 - Items requested as a documentation or exhibit should be appended to the report.
- Discuss each statement and indicate with the appropriate letter how much your early childhood center/preschool agrees with that statement and level of implementation.
 - First determine how much your center/preschool agrees with that standard and then indicate your agreement with one letter (A-Very high, B-High, C-Moderate or Somewhat, D-Low, E-Very low.)
 - If you don't agree with a standard, make your level of agreement "D" or "E."
 - If you think it is a good standard, mark it "A" or "B."

Preparing the Self-Study Report

- Then determine how well you have implemented that standard and indicate your level of implementation with a letter.
 - If you do very well what the standard requires, give yourself an "A."
 - If you do it poorly, give yourself a "D" or "E" for level of implementation.
- After you have “graded” your center/preschool for agreement and implementation, justify and explain your “grades” in the space for comments.
 - If you put an “A” on the implementation line, explain how your school implements that standard.
 - Give specific examples where possible.
 - **Every standard should have some comment, even if it is brief.**

Preparing the Self-Study Report

- Finally, for each section of standards you will be asked to identify specific strengths, what needs improvement, and plans for improvement for that section.
 - No one section of standards is designed to be independent of another section.
 - All the standards are correlated so that comprehensive self-evaluation can be made.
 - Therefore, participants in the self-study process need to keep in mind that the total evaluation and decision related to accreditation do not rest solely on one particular standard or section of standards, but on the quality of the center/preschool as a whole.

Preparing the Self-Study Report

- This Self-Study Report Form is not intended to be the actual report, with blank spaces filled in.
 - **The actual report should be printed** using the format provided, but leaving adequate space for your responses.
 - Space is provided to indicate where responses are requested and to provide a place for brief notes.
 - The Self-Study Report Form is available in various formats on computer diskette and you should receive a copy of this diskette from the NLSA office.

Preparing the Self-Study Report

- The required thoroughness of the self-study report is designed to stimulate thought and to assist a thorough self-study and self-improvement process.
- It is also designed to give enough evidence to the visiting team and NLSA officials to determine whether or not your center/preschool is worthy of NLSA accreditation.

Surveys

- Various surveys are to be completed as part of the self-study.
 - Copies of the surveys may be downloaded from the NLSA CD provided to you.
 - EC Administrative Head Questionnaire
 - EC Performance Review
 - EC Pastor Questionnaire
 - EC Parent Questionnaire
 - EC Staff Survey
 - Professional Profile Survey

So Should I Consider Becoming Engaged In the NLSA Process?

- **Absolutely!**

- Next Steps

1. Have a consultation with NW Commissioner (me).
2. Ask for the packet with NLSA – Policy packet.
3. Meet with a School Committee.
1. Presentation to Commissioner to
2. Plan
3. Not be done
4. Due?

