

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 9, 2025



Agenda Item: Independent Schools Association of the Central States
Renewal Application Approval

**State Board
Priority:** Goal 2

**State Board
Role/Authority:** Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16 grants authority to the State Board to maintain a list of approved independent accrediting agencies.

Presenter(s): Eric Heitz, Administrative Consultant
Bureau of School Improvement

Dennis McClain, Education Program Consultant
Bureau of School Improvement

Andrea Danker, Education Program Consultant
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Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the Independent Schools Association of the Central States Renewal Application as a "reliable authority concerning the quality of education" and grant the agency authority to continue to accredit nonpublic schools in the state of Iowa.

Background:

A nonpublic school may be accredited by an independent accrediting agency that appears on a list maintained by the State Board of Education. The list shall include accrediting agencies that, as of January 1, 2013, accredited a nonpublic school in this state that was concurrently accredited under this section; and any agency that has a formalized partnership agreement with another agency on the list and has member schools in this state as of January 1, 2013. Five agencies met this standard at the enactment of these rules:

- Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)
- Christian Schools International (CSI)
- Cognia (formerly AdvancEd)
- National Lutheran Schools Association (NLSA)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI)

Four agencies have been approved by the State Board:

- American Montessori Society (May 2014)
- Middle States Association-Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (January 2024)
- Accrediting Commission for Western Association of Schools and Colleges (January 2024)
- Association of Classical Christian Schools (March 2024)

Independent Schools Association of the Central States

Background

Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16 grants authority to the State Board to maintain a list of approved independent accrediting agencies. Agencies on this list may accredit nonpublic schools.

During the March 2024 meeting, the State Board of Education directed the Iowa Department of Education (Department) develop and implement a review process for approved accrediting agencies. Agencies that have been approved for five or more years were asked to submit an application for Continuation as a Reliable Authority Concerning the Quality of Education Offered by a School to determine whether the organization is a “reliable authority concerning the quality of education” offered by an accredited nonpublic school.

The questions in the application have two purposes: (1) to determine the organization’s reliability in its accreditation authority, and (2) to determine the organization’s capability of helping schools maintain programs of acceptable quality. The deadline to apply to continue to be an approved independent accrediting agency to be placed on the state approved list was November 1, 2024. The applicant was notified via email the application was received before the deadline and was under review.

The Independent Schools Association of the Central States currently accredits 10 schools in Iowa.

Application Review Process

The application review process included three readers. Each individual read all applications and utilized the scoring matrix aligned to the application. After individual readers reviewed and scored each application independently, readers discussed the application and came to a consensus on the application’s scores. The scoring matrix below indicates the scores assigned to the Independent Schools Association of the Central States.

Section	Rationale	Score
Section A. Organization Information	The agencies accreditation process focused on academic, fiscal, and student safety indicators. The application indicated standards are revised every three years.	29/32
Section B. Accreditation Standards	The standards and indicators require schools to implement high academic and nonacademic standards.	45/50
Section C. Accreditation Process	The application was not specific in how the agency informs schools of changes in state regulations. The agency indicated an area of growth for them is how they analyze and use data to improve student learning with the schools they accredit.	17/20
Section D. Organization Structure, Citations	The organization does not have uncorrected citations of noncompliance or any judgements against them.	6/8 to -8
Section E. Additional Information (no points)	The agency accredits 226 schools in 11 states.	N/A
Final Applicant Score and Final Rationale (if appropriate)	Recommended	97/110

Recommendation Table

Score Range	Recommendation
83-110 (75%+)	Recommended
66-83 (60-74%)	Recommended subject to conditions or assurances
<66 (<59%)	Not Recommended

Recommendation

The Independent Schools Association of the Central States received a consensus score of 97 across the required components in the application. It is recommended that the State Board approve the Independent Schools Association of the Central States application to continue to accredit Iowa nonpublic schools as stated in the Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16.

Appendices

[Application Materials](#)