

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 9, 2025



Agenda Item: The National Lutheran Schools Association 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
Bureau of School improvement

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the National Lutheran Schools Association 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 (ACSI)

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)

National Lutheran Schools Association

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) to 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 National Lutheran Schools Association currently accredits 15 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 National Lutheran Schools Association.

Section	Rationale	Score
Section A. Organization Information	The application provided some description of educational services that were provided but lacked detail.	27/32
Section B. Accreditation Standards	In order to find evidence for specific questions, reviewers had to search the website.	45/50
Section C. Accreditation Process	The application did not provide extensive detail of the outcomes that will be evaluated in the next five years.	19/20
Section D. Organization Structure, Citations	The application provided evidence of fiscal, data, and contract management practices and procedures.	8/8 to -8
Section E. Additional Information (no points)	The agency currently accredits 665 schools in all 41 states.	N/A
Final Applicant Score and Final Rationale (if appropriate)	Recommended	99/110

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 National Lutheran Schools Association received a consensus score of 99 across the required components in the application. It is recommended that the State Board approve the National Lutheran Schools Association application to continue to accredit Iowa nonpublic schools as stated in the Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16.

Appendices

[Application Materials](#)