

# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

December 4, 2025

**Agenda Item:** Review Accrediting Agency Application

**State Board Goal(s):** Goal 2

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

**Presenter(s):** Tina Wahlert, Administrator  
Division of PK-12 Learning

Eric Heitz, Administrative Consultant,  
Bureau of School Improvement

Andrea Danker, Education Program Consultant  
Bureau of School Improvement

**Attachment(s):** Two

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board hear and discuss the information.

**Background:** A nonpublic school may be accredited by an independent accrediting agency that appears on a list maintained by the State Board. 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)

- The National Lutheran Schools Association (NLSA)
- The 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)

# Application for Initial Recognition as a “Reliable Authority Concerning the Quality of Education Offered by a School”

The purpose of this application is to determine whether your organization is a “reliable authority concerning the quality of education” offered by an accredited nonpublic school. The questions in this application have two purposes: (1) to determine your organization’s reliability in its accreditation authority, and (2) to determine your organization’s capability of helping schools maintain programs of acceptable quality.

When evidence required to answer a question is available in electronic format, please feel free to provide an electronic copy in lieu of paper copies. When evidence is available on a publicly accessible internet page, you may provide the web address as your response. If any evidence is password-protected, please provide passwords for security. If any evidence is password-protected or otherwise protected from disclosure, please describe the grounds for protecting that information from disclosure.

Answer all application questions and complete the certification at the end of the application. Contact Eric Heitz at 515-326-1018, Andrea Danker at 515-669-8157 or Dennis McClain at 515-822-2554 if you need more information.

**Application Deadline: Sept. 2, 2025**

**The results of the application review will be presented to the Iowa State Board of Education at its Nov. 19, 2025 meeting.**

## Application Sections

There are four required sections in this application, and an additional section that may be required upon the request of the Iowa Department of Education (Department):

- Section A. Organization Information
- Section B. Accreditation Standards
- Section C. Accreditation Process
- Section D. Organization Structure, Citations and Audits
- Section E. Additional Information

Answer all questions about your organization to the best of your ability. Provide ample evidence as indicated.

## Section A. Organization Information

Questions 1 through 6 are focused on basic organization information such as contact; descriptions and evidence needed to continue past Section 1 of the application process; as well as space to highlight any form of recognition for innovation or excellence for the organization’s work regarding school accreditation in this area.

1. Provide your organization contact and identification information.

Area	Completed by Applicant
Name of Organization:	
Telephone Number:	
Web Address:	
Form of Organization (corporation, LLC, etc.):	
Taxpayer ID #:	
Parent Organization, if any:	
Address of Parent Organization:	
Trade Name, if any:	
Contact Person:	
Address of Organization:	
Chief Executive or Authorized Representative:	

2. Provide evidence that your organization is a nonprofit, nongovernmental agency. *Note: if no evidence is provided, your organization is disqualified from recognition.*
3. Describe and provide evidence that your organization certifies, licenses, or accredits public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools as providing a minimally adequate educational program. *Note: if no evidence is provided, your organization is disqualified from recognition.*
4. Describe and provide evidence about the accreditation standards that your organization uses to certify, license, or accredit public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools as providing a minimally adequate educational program. Within this description include the following:
  - How the standards were developed and adopted.

- How the standards are reviewed and revised.
- Identify the research on which the standards are grounded.

*Note: if no evidence is provided, your organization is disqualified from recognition.*

5. Is your organization's principal business or activity advising or evaluating public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools on "the quality of education?"
  - If yes, provide evidence.
  - If no, explain.
6. Has your organization received any form of recognition for innovation or excellence concerning its work?
  - If yes, provide recognition details.
  - No.

## Section B. Accreditation Standards

Questions 7-11 are specific to your organization's accreditation standards. For these questions, **describe and provide evidence of the component of your organization's accreditation standards that require:**

7. A school to set high academic and nonacademic standards for all students, including preparation of students for postsecondary success.
8. A school to monitor and assess all students' progress toward high academic and nonacademic standards.
9. A school to recruit and retain properly licensed quality professional staff, and provide those staff members with ongoing professional development.

10. A school to set requirements for fiscal, data and contract management.

11. How your organization takes appropriate corrective action when accreditation standards are not met.

## **Section C. Accreditation Process**

Questions 12-16 are focused on your organization's accreditation process, including accreditation criteria, monitoring, renewal, and any suspension or removal of a school from accreditation.

12. Describe the process by which a school seeks your organization's accreditation.

13. Describe the process by which your organization actively monitors a school's performance after it achieves accreditation based on your accreditation standards. Also, describe the process by which a school renews its accreditation through your organization.

14. Describe the process by which you suspend or remove accreditation from a school.

15. Describe any other criteria used by your organization to determine accreditation. The description should include the degree to which:

- a school implements, monitors and makes progress towards goals in its strategic improvement plan, and
- the organization gathers, analyzes and uses data to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness.

16. How does your organization know that it is effective in accrediting schools?

## Section D. Organization Structure, Citations and Audits

Questions 17-32 are focused on your organization's overall fiscal, data and contract management procedures, as well as applicable citations/audit results.

17. Describe your organization's fiscal, data and contract management policies and procedures.
  
18. Are there any uncorrected citations of noncompliance by any governmental or nongovernmental agency or organization with jurisdiction/oversight of your organization, including any order entered in a contested case before an administrative agency?
  - If yes, provide evidence.
  
  - No.
  
19. Does your organization have any negative audit findings in the last five years?
  - If yes, describe.
  
  - No.
  
20. If the answer to question 19 was "yes," has the finding been corrected?
  - If yes, how did your organization correct the findings?
  
  - If no, describe why the findings have not yet been corrected.
  
21. Has any state or federal court of competent jurisdiction entered any judgments, orders, decrees, verdicts, or injunctions against your organization, whether a claim or a counterclaim, in the last five years?
  - If yes, describe.
  
  - No.

22. If the answer to question 21 was “yes,” please give the present status of any judgment, order, decree, verdict, or injunction against your organization, whether a claim or a counterclaim.

## **Section E. Additional Information**

23. Describe any other reports or findings sent to a nonpublic school regarding accreditation, including findings related to Iowa Code section 256.11 as amended by 2013 Iowa Acts, House File 215, section 89.
24. Indicate the number of schools your organization currently accredits.
25. List the states in which your organization provides accreditation.
26. Describe your working relationships with other state departments of education.
27. What school improvement tools, resources and expertise does your organization provide for its member schools?
28. Describe the applicant’s stakeholder involvement in the accreditation process.
29. Describe the ongoing professional development requirements for those in the organization who assess a school’s performance on the accreditation standards.



30. Indicate the beginning and end dates of your organization's fiscal year.

31. Provide your organization's most recent end-of-year financial statement.

32. Has your organization ever been disqualified from operating within any state or region?

- If yes, describe.
- No.



## SCORING MATRIX

### Review of Independent Accrediting Agency Recognition as a “Reliable Authority Concerning The Quality Of Education Offered by a School”

Organization Applicant Name	Reviewer Name

Use this matrix to process any application for recognition or any response to a proposed removal under Iowa Administrative Code rule 281—12.10. This matrix has 4 required sections for scoring, and an additional section that may be required upon the request of the Department:

- [Section A. Organization Information](#)
- [Section B. Accreditation Standards](#)
- [Section C. Accreditation Process](#)
- [Section D. Organization Structure, Citations and Audits](#)
- [Section E. Additional Information \(by Department request only\)](#)

Sections A through D require:

- Careful review and scoring of each item;
- Calculation of the total Section Score; and
- Notes regarding the rationale for the section score.

Section E does not require any scoring - it is informational only. There is one final section related to scoring and recommendations: [Final Applicant Recommendation](#). This final area contains a table to copy/paste final section scores and related rationale, for a final total score calculation. The [Recommendation Table](#) on page 10 provides the final recommendation based on scores for each applicant.

## Section A. Organization Information

Questions 1 through 6 are focused on basic organization information such as name, phone number, and so on, description/evidence needed to continue past Section 1 of the application process, as well as space to highlight any form of recognition for innovation or excellence for the organization's work in this area. *Please score as indicated on the matrix, followed by an overall section score and rationale.*

Application Question	Excellent	Adequate	Poor	Points
1. Organization Contact Information	All contact information is provided as applicable <b>1 point</b>		Not all contact information is provided, as applicable <b>0 points</b>	
2. Provide evidence that your organization is a nonprofit, nongovernmental agency. <i>Note if no evidence is provided, your organization is disqualified from recognition.</i>	Evidence of 501(3c) status or similar status that indicates the organization is a nonprofit, nongovernmental agency <b>1 point</b>		No evidence provided <b>0 points</b>	
3. Describe and provide evidence that your organization certifies, provides licenses, or accredits public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools as providing a minimally adequate educational program? <i>Note if no evidence is provided, your organization is disqualified from recognition.</i>	<p>A. Clear description of what certifications are provided by the organization (e.g., description of the certs, list of the certs, evidence that they have provided certs)</p> <p>B. Clear description of what licenses are provided by the organization (e.g., description of the licenses, list of the licenses, evidence that they have provided licenses)</p> <p>C. Clear description of accreditation for public/nonpublic schools (e.g., brief description of this, examples of schools that they have accredited)</p> <p><b>10 points</b></p>	<p>Must have C and either A or B, or A, B and C, but the descriptions are unclear.</p> <p><b>5 points</b></p>	<p>Must have C for <b>1 point</b></p> <p>No Evidence for <b>0 points</b></p>	

4. Describe and provide evidence that your organization has accreditation standards by which it certifies, licenses, or accredits public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools as providing a minimally adequate educational program? <i>Note if no evidence is provided, your organization is disqualified from recognition.</i>	Clear description - and copy of - the standards being used.  <b>10 points</b>	Description does not allow a complete understanding of what the standards include.  <b>5 points</b>	Description provides a vague understanding of what the standards include. <b>Up to 2 points</b>  No evidence. <b>0 points</b>	
5. Is your organization's principal business or activity advising or evaluating public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools on "the quality of education"?	Yes <b>3 points</b>		No <b>0 points</b>	
5b. If YES to 5, please score the evidence provided	Description of services provided, a graph or percent of time focused on advising and evaluating "the quality of education."  <b>4 points</b>	Some description of services provided.  <b>2 points</b>	No evidence <b>0 points</b>	
6. Has your organization received any form of recognition for innovation or excellence concerning its work?	Yes <b>1 point</b>		No <b>0 points</b>	
6a. If YES to 6, please score the evidence provided.	Description of national award with the purpose related to this work.  <b>2 points</b>	Description of state or local award with the purpose related to this work.  <b>1 point</b>	No evidence or the award is not related to this work  <b>0 points</b>	0
<b>SECTION A: ORGANIZATION INFORMATION TOTAL &amp; RATIONALE</b>	<b>Section A Rationale:</b>			<b>Total:</b> /32

## Section B. Accreditation Standards

Questions 7-11 are specific to accreditation standards. Score each item as indicated, followed by the total score and rationale for this section. The starter for each required item is:

***Describe and provide evidence of the component of your organization's accreditation standards that require.....***

Application Question	Excellent	Adequate	Poor	Points
7. A school to set high academic and nonacademic standards for all students, including preparation of students for postsecondary success.	Rigorous academic <b><u>and</u></b> nonacademic standards for all students.  <b>10 points</b>	Rigorous academic standards <b><u>or</u></b> rigorous nonacademic standards.  <b>5 points</b>	Rigorous academic standards <b><u>or</u></b> rigorous nonacademic standards, but not of minimal rigor or unclear description <b>1 point</b>  <b>OR</b> No standards <b>0 points</b>	
8. A school to monitor and assess all students' progress toward high academic and nonacademic standards.	Standards that support valid/reliable assessments for all students in academic/ nonacademic areas, <b><u>and</u></b> use of assessment results to monitor student progress.  <b>10 points</b>	Standards that support valid/reliable assessments for all students in academic/ nonacademic areas, <b><u>or</u></b> use of assessments results to monitor student progress.  <b>5 points</b>	Standards support assessments but unclear if assessments are (a) valid/reliable, (b) for all students, (c) academic/nonacademic areas, and/or (d) results used to monitor the progress of all students. <b>1 point</b>  <b>OR</b> No assessment or monitoring standards <b>0 points</b>	

9. A school to recruit and retain properly licensed quality professional staff, and provide those staff members with ongoing professional development.	Rigorous requirements for teacher licensure <b><u>and</u></b> professional development.  <b>10 points</b>	Rigorous requirements for either teacher licensure <b><u>or</u></b> professional development, but not both.  <b>5 points</b>	Standards for teacher licensure <b><u>or</u></b> professional development, but not of sufficient rigor. <b>1 point</b>  <b>OR</b>  No standards <b>0 points</b>	
10. Set requirements for fiscal, data, and contract management.	Rigorous requirements for fiscal, data, <b><u>and</u></b> contract management.  <b>10 points</b>	Rigorous requirements for fiscal/data, <b><u>or</u></b> contract management, but not both.  <b>5 points</b>	Standards for fiscal/data, <b><u>or</u></b> contract management but not of sufficient rigor. <b>1 point</b>  <b>OR</b>  No standards <b>0 points</b>	
11. Set requirements with your organization's standards and how your organization takes appropriate corrective action when standards are not met.	Rigorous requirements for schools to meet set standards, <b><u>and</u></b> a process for corrective actions taken when standards are not met (e.g., steps of corrective action, written process, example corrective actions, etc).  <b>10 points</b>	Rigorous requirements for schools to meet set standards, <b><u>or</u></b> a process for corrective actions taken when standards are not met (e.g., steps of corrective action, written process, example corrective actions, etc).  <b>5 points</b>	There are requirements, but it is unclear if (a) the requirements are rigorous, or (b) the process is rigorous to correct when not met. <b>1 point</b>  No standards <b>0 points</b>	
<b>SECTION B: ACCREDITATION STANDARDS TOTAL &amp; RATIONALE</b>	<b>Section B Rationale:</b>			<b>Total:</b> /50

## Section C. Accreditation Process

Questions 12-16 are focused on your organization's accreditation process, including criteria, how to begin and any suspension or removal of a school from accreditation.

Application Question	Excellent	Adequate	Poor	Points
12. Describe the process by which a school seeks your organization's accreditation.	Detailed description that includes how an applicant contacts and understands how the process works. <b>3 points</b>	Some description on the process that allows some understanding of what the process actually includes. <b>2 points</b>	Brief description, or description so poor it's difficult to understand the process. <b>1 point</b>  No description <b>0 points</b>	
13. Describe the process by which a school renews its accreditation by your organization.	Detailed description on the process for renewal.  <b>3 points</b>	Some description on the renewal process that allows some understanding of what the process actually includes. <b>2 points</b>	Brief description, or description so poor it's difficult to understand the process. <b>1 point</b>  No description <b>0 points</b>	
14. Describe the process by which you suspend or remove accreditation from a school.	Detailed description on the process for suspension or removal.  <b>3 points</b>	Some description on the process that allows some understanding of what the process actually includes. <b>2 points</b>	Brief description, or description so poor it's difficult to understand the process. <b>1 point</b>  No description <b>0 points</b>	
15. Describe any other criteria used by your organization to determine	The description provides a clear understanding of the		The description is unclear, or indicates a lack of detail	

<p>accreditation. The description should include the degree to which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a school implements, monitors and makes progress towards goals in its strategic improvement plan, and</li> <li>• the organization gathers, analyzes and uses data to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness.</li> </ul>	<p>additional criteria used to determine accreditation. <b>1 point</b></p>		<p>regarding the additional criteria used to determine accreditation.  <b>0 points</b></p>	
<p>16. How does your organization know that it is effective in accrediting schools?</p>	<p>Detailed description on how the organization knows that it is effective.  <b>3 points</b></p>	<p>Some description on how the organization knows that it is effective. <b>2 points</b></p>	<p>Brief description, or description so poor it's difficult to understand how the organization knows that it is effective. <b>1 point</b></p> <p>No description <b>0 points</b></p>	
<p><b>SECTION C: ACCREDITATION PROCESS TOTAL &amp; RATIONALE</b></p>	<p><b>Section C Rationale:</b></p>			<p><b>Total::</b> <b>/13</b></p>



## Section D. Organization Structure, Citations and Audits

Questions 17-22 are focused on your organization's overall fiscal, data and contract management procedures, as well as applicable citations/audit results.

Application Question	Excellent	Adequate	Poor	Points
17. Describe your organization's fiscal, data, and contract management policies and procedures.	Evidence of detailed fiscal, data, and contract management practices and procedures.  <b>4 points</b>	Some evidence of fiscal, data, and contract management practices and procedures.  <b>2 point</b>	No evidence  <b>0 points</b>	
18. Are there any uncorrected citations of noncompliance by any governmental or nongovernmental agency or organization with jurisdiction or oversight of your organization, including any order entered in a contested case before an administrative agency?	No  <b>1 point</b>		Yes  <b>-1 points</b>	
19. Does your organization have any negative audit findings in the last 5 years?	No  <b>1 point</b>	Minor findings  <b>0 points</b>	1 or more major finding that would suggest the organization is not credible or sustainable.  <b>-2 points</b>	
20. Has your organization corrected each of the negative audit findings referred to in Item 19? Please explain.	No corrections needed Or Yes – and explanation indicates the organization has appropriately corrected the audit findings	Yes – but the explanation indicates the organization has not appropriately corrected the audit findings  0 points	No  <b>-2 points</b>	

	<b>1 point</b>			
21. Has any state or federal court of competent jurisdiction entered any judgments, orders, decrees, verdicts, or injunctions against your organization, whether a claim or a counterclaim, in the last 5 years?	No <b>1 point</b>	No and - Routine judgments not related to process of school accreditation, but not satisfied or paying as agreed. <b>0 points</b>	Yes. Any judgment relating to academic or financial fraud, violations of human or civil rights, or conduct involving moral turpitude. <b>-3 points</b>	
22. If the answer to Item 21 was "yes," please give the present status of any judgment, order, decree, verdict, or injunction against your organization, whether a claim or a counterclaim.	No points awarded for this question			
<b>SECTION D: ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE, CITATIONS, AUDITS TOTAL &amp; RATIONALE</b>	<b>Section D Rationale:</b>			<b>/8 to -8</b>

## Section E. Additional Information- by Department Request only

Questions 23 through 27 are to be answered only if requested by the Iowa Department of Education. No points awarded for this optional section. Indicate:

- **i. DE Request.** Whether the Department requested the information indicated - *Request* or *Did Not Request*;
- **ii. Applicant Response.** Whether the applicant *Provided information requested*, or *Did not provide information requested*; and
- **iii. Notes.** Any information that might be important to note.

Application Question	i. DE Request	ii. Applicant Response	iii. Notes
23. Describe any other reports or findings sent to the nonpublic school regarding accreditation, including findings related to Iowa Code section 256.11 as amended by 2013 Iowa Acts, House File 215, section 89.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
24. Indicate the number of schools your organization accredits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
25. List the states in which your organization provides accreditation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
26. Describe your working relationships with other state departments of education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
27. What school improvement tools, resources and expertise does your organization provide for its member schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	

28. Describe the applicant's stakeholder involvement in the accreditation process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
29. Describe the ongoing professional development requirements for those in the organization who assess a school's performance on the accreditation standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
30. Indicate your organization's beginning date and ending date of your organization's fiscal year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
31. Provide your organization's most recent end-of-year financial statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
32. Has your organization ever been disqualified from operating within any state or region?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested</li> <li>• Did not request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided information requested</li> <li>• Did not provide information requested</li> </ul>	
<b>SECTION E: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BONUS POINTS TOTAL &amp; RATIONALE</b>	<b>Section E Rationale:</b>		

## FINAL Applicant Recommendations

To determine final application recommendations, a final score must be calculated. Please provide the final score and rationale below by copying/pasting the rationale and final total scores from each section, and then adding the section scores for a total score. Feel free to provide a final rationale in the space provided. Once this has been completed, review the Recommendation Table to determine the appropriate recommendation for the applicant.

Section	Rationale	Score
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<b>Section A: Organization Information</b>		<b>/32</b>
<b>Section B. Accreditation Standards</b>		<b>/50</b>
<b>Section C. Accreditation Process</b>		<b>/13</b>
<b>Section D. Organization Structure, Citations</b>		<b>/8 to -8</b>
<b>Section E. Additional Information (no points)</b>		<b>NA</b>
<b>Final Applicant Score and Final Rationale (if appropriate)</b>		<b>/103</b>

***Recommendation Table***

<b>Score Range</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
<b>77-100</b> (75%+)	Recommended
<b>61-76</b> (60-74%)	Recommended subject to conditions or assurances
<b>&lt;61</b> (<59%)	Not Recommended