

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 15, 2026

Agenda Item: APPLE Independent Accrediting Agency Application Approval

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

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board approve the APPLE application as a “reliable authority concerning the quality of education” and grant the agency authority 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. 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)

APPLE Accrediting Agency Application to Become an Approved Independent Accreditor

Background

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

Interested agencies are asked to apply for Initial Recognition 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 be an approved independent accrediting agency to be placed on the State Board approved list was September 2, 2025. The applicants were notified via email the application was received before the deadline and was under review.

Application Review Process

The application review process included two 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 APPLE.

Section	Rationale	Score
Section A. Organization Information	Detailed description of accreditation process and sample certificate shared with schools was provided. Only some detail was provided on the percent of time the agency focuses on advising and evaluating “the quality of education.”	27/32
Section B. Accreditation Standards	Standards address Foundation/Philosophy, Governance/Organization, Child Well-Being/Physical Environment, Resources/Relationships, and Experiences/Learning.	50/50
Section C. Accreditation Process	The accreditation process includes application, portfolio, and verification visit. The application mentioned an annual report but specifics regarding the report were not provided.	9/13
Section D. Organization Structure, Citations	No negative findings to note.	8/8 to -8
Section E. Additional Information (no points)	The agency currently accredits 807 schools within the U.S.	N/A
Final Applicant Score and Final Rationale (if appropriate)	Recommended for approval. Documentation provided supports that APPLE would meet the requirements to be a Reliable Authority Concerning the Quality of Education Offered by a School.	94/103

Recommendation Table

Score Range	Recommendation
77-103 (75%+)	Recommended
61-76 (59%-74%)	Recommended subject to conditions or assurances
<61 (<58%)	Not Recommended

Recommendation

APPLE received a consensus score of 94 across the required components in the application. It is recommended that the State Board approve the APPLE application to accredit Iowa nonpublic schools as stated in the Iowa Code section 256.11(16).