

# Iowa State Board of Education

## Executive Summary

January 11, 2024



**Agenda Item:** Accrediting Commission for Western Association of Schools and Colleges Independent Accrediting Agency Application Approval

**State Board Priority:** Eliminating Achievement and Opportunity Gaps

**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):** Tina Wahlert, Bureau Chief  
Bureau of School Improvement

Eric Heitz, Administrative Consultant  
Bureau of School Improvement

Dennis McClain, Consultant  
Bureau of School Improvement

**Attachment(s):** One

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the Accrediting Commission for Western Association of Schools and Colleges application as a “reliable authority concerning the quality of education” and grant the agencies 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 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), The National Lutheran Schools Association (NLSA), and The Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI). The American Montessori Society was approved by the State Board at the May 2014 meeting.]



January 11, 2024

## Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC)

### 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.

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:

1. Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)
2. Christian Schools International (CSI)
3. Cognia (formerly AdvancEd)
4. The National Lutheran Schools Association (NLSA)
5. The Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI)

The American Montessori Society was approved by the state board at the May 2014 meeting.

The deadline to apply to become an approved independent accrediting agency to be placed on the state approved list was December 15, 2023. The applicant was notified via email the application was received before the deadline and was under review.

### Application Review Process

The application review process included three readers. Each 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 ACS WACS application.

Section	Rationale	Score
<b>Section A: Organization Information</b>	The application provided extensive information related to organizational structure and supports. This included a continuous improvement guide. The guide provided a clear description of standards being used. Evidence was not clear on how standards were developed or adopted or the research behind them.	<b>24/32</b>
<b>Section B. Accreditation Standards</b>	The application indicated rigorous academic standards in addition to monitoring of student achievement as evidenced by the self-study, visits and the continuous improvement process outlined for schools. The evidence provided lacked information on how the applicant helps schools with contract management.	<b>45/50</b>

<b>Section C. Accreditation Process</b>	The application outlined a solid process in place to help schools work toward accreditation. Evidence of this process included conditionals for eligibility, bylaws and processes.	<b>10/10</b>
<b>Section D. Organization Structure, Citations</b>	The application provided evidence of detailed fiscal, data and contract management practices and procedures for the accrediting agency.	<b>8 /8</b>
<b>Section E. Additional Information (no points)</b>	The applicant started accreditation in 1962. The agency accredits over 5,000 schools in all 50 states.	<b>NA</b>
<b>Final Applicant Score and Final Rationale (if appropriate)</b>	Recommended	<b>87/100</b>

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

## Recommendation

ACS WASC received a consensus score of 87 across the required components in the application. It is recommended that the State Board approve the ACS WASC application to accredit Iowa nonpublic schools as stated in the Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 16.

## Appendices

1. [Western Association of Schools and Colleges \(ACS WASC\) Application](#)