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Iowa's Protestant, Christ-centered schools.

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## INDEPENDENT ACCREDITATION FAQ

May 12, 2014 By Eric

### **What is Independent Accreditation?**

During the 2013 Iowa legislative session, as part of a larger Ed Reform Bill (HF 215), 256.11, subsection 16 was created in the Iowa Code establishing "Independent Accreditation" for nonpublic schools in the State of Iowa. This allows schools to be accredited by an independent accrediting agency on a list of six or more such agencies kept by the Iowa Department of Education in lieu of accreditation by the State Board. Iowa was one of only two States that required accreditation by the State at the time the law was passed.

### **Which Accrediting Agencies are Included?**

Currently, the following agencies may be used in lieu of State accreditation:

AdvancEd

Christian Schools International (CSI)

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA)

Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)

### **Why Choose Independent Accreditation?**

Independent Accreditation is important to Iowa's private schools for two reasons: First, it allows schools to choose an accrediting body that understands and respects its role and mission as a private school. Second, these independent accrediting agencies are not simply

compliance-based accreditation models. These accrediting bodies actually increase accountability while simultaneously increasing flexibility and keeping the schools accountable to reach its stated mission, purpose, and goals as an education institution. Without exception, those schools accredited by one of the included independent accrediting agencies find the process to be extremely meaningful, impactful, and more rigorous than other options.

There is no one-size-fits-all education model for students and there is not an adequate one-size-fits-all accreditation for schools either. The key is to encourage schools to increase accountability in a way that is laser-focused on achieving their stated goals as an education provider.

### **What Must Schools do to be Independently Accredited?**

Schools must work with an independent accrediting agency to become fully accredited.

"Candidate" or "Pending" accreditation status does not equal "Independently Accredited" for the purposes of Iowa law. Once this is achieved, the independent accrediting agency will include that school on its list of accredited schools and the State will recognize those schools as accredited just like any State accredited or "college-prep" private high school. The school needs to take no action or file any requests to become independently accredited.

### **Is This Program Permanent?**

In order to get independent accreditation passed, a sunset was included. The program is repealed on July 1, 2020 barring any changes to the Iowa Code. We are very confident that the Iowa Legislature will work with us to remove that sunset. Schools accredited by independent accrediting agencies include some of the highest achieving schools in the State, and we see no reason to believe that this program should be or will be repealed. The Iowa Association of Christian Schools (IACS) will be working hard to ensure this program becomes permanent.

### **Is There Reporting to the State Department of Education?**

Yes. The reporting is being worked out but will include a basic BEDS report for reporting enrollment (needed to verify eligibility for various programs) and a simplified CSIP report we have yet to see. The reporting should be very minimal. There are no Iowa Department of Education site visits for independently accredited schools.

### **Is There Any Other Reason for an Independently Accredited School to Contact The State?**

Generally, no. If an independently-accredited school has problems accessing transportation, textbook, tax credit programs, or other benefits, they should contact the IACS and we will direct that school to the appropriate department or person who can help. That may be the

Department of Education, the Department of Revenue, or other resources.

If the school has questions about programing, curriculum, innovative programs, or other school governance questions; the school should contact its independent accrediting agency to make sure their decisions are within the guidelines of their accreditation.

Most of our independently accredited schools will require that all teachers (or most depending on requirements of religious classes) be licensed by the State of Iowa. The process for licensure is determined by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE), but the decision on the timing and other qualifications for hire are up to the school within the confines of requirements for accreditation as determined by its accrediting agency.

### **What Regulations Must These Schools Adhere to Outside of the Accreditation Standards?**

Our interpretation of the law and the intent of the legislature was that health and safety standards (local fire and building codes, criminal codes, etc.) must be met. Also, any requirements of Federal programs such as free and reduced lunch and title funding must be met including any reporting or interaction with State agencies tasked with administrating that program. The Department of Education has indicated that it believes there may be other requirements, but we have yet to hear of or see these requirements. We will work with the Department and/or the legislature to make any clarifications we believe necessary as they arise.

## Comments

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