

3 PATH AND PROCEDURES TO ACCREDITATION

GENERAL INFORMATION

Accreditation is a means whereby the American Association of Christian Schools can assist member schools in building stronger Christian schools. Accreditation is voluntary. It is not an attempt to license or to regulate. In order to be accredited, a school must present a philosophy of education that conforms to biblical standards, must demonstrate that the school's written program is in agreement with that philosophy, and must meet certain standards generally accepted by Christian educators. A school voluntarily participates in the accreditation process and can withdraw at any time.

The concepts of being approved, seeking counsel, and performing a self-analysis are biblical. Such verses as Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21; Romans 14:8, 18; Philippians 1:10; James 1:22–25; Proverbs 15:22; and others speak of these concepts. The Bible exhorts Christians to be self-governed with the aid of the Holy Spirit and to seek wise counselors as they endeavor to grow in wisdom and stature. Counselors must be full of spiritual wisdom in order to give proper biblical counsel. The process of accreditation strengthens a school through self-analysis and then provides the added benefit of wise counselors in the form of an accreditation team who evaluate the school by standards that reflect both academic quality and fidelity to scriptural principles.

INTRODUCTION

With the development of the Christian education movement, there has at the same time developed the need for assessing the quality of the educational programs in Christian schools. That need has been recognized by the leadership of the American Association of Christian Schools; therefore, a strong commitment has been made within the Association to develop a program of "voluntary school accreditation." Accreditation is viewed as one means for improving the quality of a school's curricular and instructional programs.

The leadership of the American Association of Christian Schools is aware that accreditation never has and never will assure quality in any school. It will, however, cause a Christian school to evaluate its educational process and to receive counsel from experienced Christian educators. The accreditation process will also help a Christian school identify its programs' weaknesses and offer suggestions on how these areas can be strengthened. In this way, accreditation should assist a Christian school in improving the quality of its educational program. The Association is committed to helping Christian schools produce a quality product.

Quality in educational programs is an essential ingredient. While there are a number of reasons this is true, there are three main persuasive reasons.

1. A Christian education ministry is accountable to the Lord. Second Corinthians 5:10 states, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Those involved in the movement are accountable to God for quality programs. With such weight of responsibility, it is wise to request the assistance of peer evaluators for ". . . in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).
2. A Christian education ministry is accountable for quality to those without in accordance with such Bible passages as 2 Thessalonians 4:12, "That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without. . ." Those without include other believers who are not involved in Christian education and nonbelievers who may judge our Lord by the quality of what we do and what we offer in the Christian school. Christian education must offer quality curricular and instructional programs as a testimony to the Lord in Heaven. Dedication to quality is essential. In this case, accreditation is viewed as one means for improving quality to satisfy this aspect of accountability.
3. A ministry which is dependent upon a consumer of that ministry, as is the case of the Christian school, must offer quality to the consumer of that ministry. Otherwise, the consumer will no longer take advantage of the

ministry. In this case, accreditation becomes one means for serving the interest of the consumer. It has been observed that those Christian schools that are growing are schools that have a great concern for quality.

Today, the demand in the Christian education movement is not just a demand for more Christian schools, though new schools are still being opened. The demand upon the movement is also one of quality within the schools presently in operation. It is incumbent upon Christian educators to meet that demand.

DEFINITION OF ACCREDITATION

Applied to the Christian school movement, accreditation is the process by which a Christian school assesses its educational activities, in whole or in part, and seeks an independent judgment to confirm that it has substantially achieved its objectives while also demonstrating an exemplary level of quality as defined by professionally trained Christian educators. There are several essential elements in the accreditation process:

1. A school desiring accreditation must give a clear statement of its educational philosophy and its educational intentions. The assessment of quality is made in terms of the stated philosophy and intentions.
2. A school desiring accreditation must be committed to an on-going, directed self-study which is focused on the achievement of the school's intentions. The self-study is not something that is done periodically, but rather continuously.
3. The final step for a school desiring accreditation is an on-site review of the school's educational program in operation by a selected group of peers.
4. Following the on-site visit, a decision is made by the Association's Accreditation Commission that the Christian school either meets or fails to meet standards common to Christian education.

There may remain a measure of confusion about accreditation as to its essential characteristics. As operationally defined by the American Association of Christian Schools, the following statement of characteristics would apply:

1. Accreditation is totally voluntary and, therefore, the Association cannot mandate compliance or control behavior except by persuasion and peer influence.
2. It is primarily an on-going self-assessment process that serves as a testimony to believers and nonbelievers.
3. It functions essentially as an assessment process, with the on-going self-study by the school being the very heart of the process.
4. It provides for outside consultation through the on-site review, closely tied to the school's own statement of philosophy and educational intentions.

Accreditation does not guarantee a quality product, but rather verifies a quality process being implemented by an accredited school. There are unaccredited schools producing an outstanding educational product and accredited schools failing to do the same. Accreditation does, however, require the school to evaluate its educational process objectively. For this reason, the American Association of Christian Schools encourages its schools to go through the accreditation process, whether they are officially accredited or not.

POLICY STATEMENT ON ACCREDITATION

In keeping with the definition of accreditation that is given above, the American Association of Christian Schools has officially adopted the following policy statement:

Quality in educational programming offered by Christian schools is essential for the continued growth and effectiveness of Christian education in the United States. Scriptures give many reasons for ensuring quality in any ministry: "Iron sharpeneth iron..." (Proverbs 27:17); "...walk honestly toward..." (2 Thessalonians 4:12); and "...have a good report of them that are without" (1 Timothy 3:7). Accreditation is one means of self-improvement that promotes quality and a positive Christian testimony both within and

without the sphere of Christian education. Schools choosing to work toward improvement in some other way will not be viewed as substandard.

The American Association of Christian Schools believes its accreditation program should be continued and promoted. It is based upon a system of voluntary self-improvement and peer review using criteria that are generally accepted as indicators of quality.

Such a program should allow for the uniqueness of individual schools and encourage reciprocity with state associations in meeting and applying the accepted criteria.

Realizing that the decision to participate in the Association's accreditation program is the option of each local church and school, accreditation should never be viewed as a test for fellowship or even for membership in the American Association of Christian Schools. It will not be used by the Association as an instrument to impose its will upon Christian schools.

The Association never wants its accreditation program or its membership to be used to determine the right of any school to operate or exist.

RECIPROCITY/RECOGNITION

A member state association that has an accreditation process may request reciprocity with the AACCS accreditation process. The request will be evaluated by the AACCS Accreditation Commission. All manuals and accreditation policy documents will be submitted for Commission review. Recognition may be granted if policies and procedures are at least substantially equivalent to AACCS accreditation policies and procedures, and if the association accreditation process meets other criteria established by the AACCS Accreditation Commission. Schools seeking co-accreditation will be assessed a \$100 fee at the time of accreditation or re-accreditation and shall receive AACCS accreditation for the same period of time as their state association accreditation is valid.

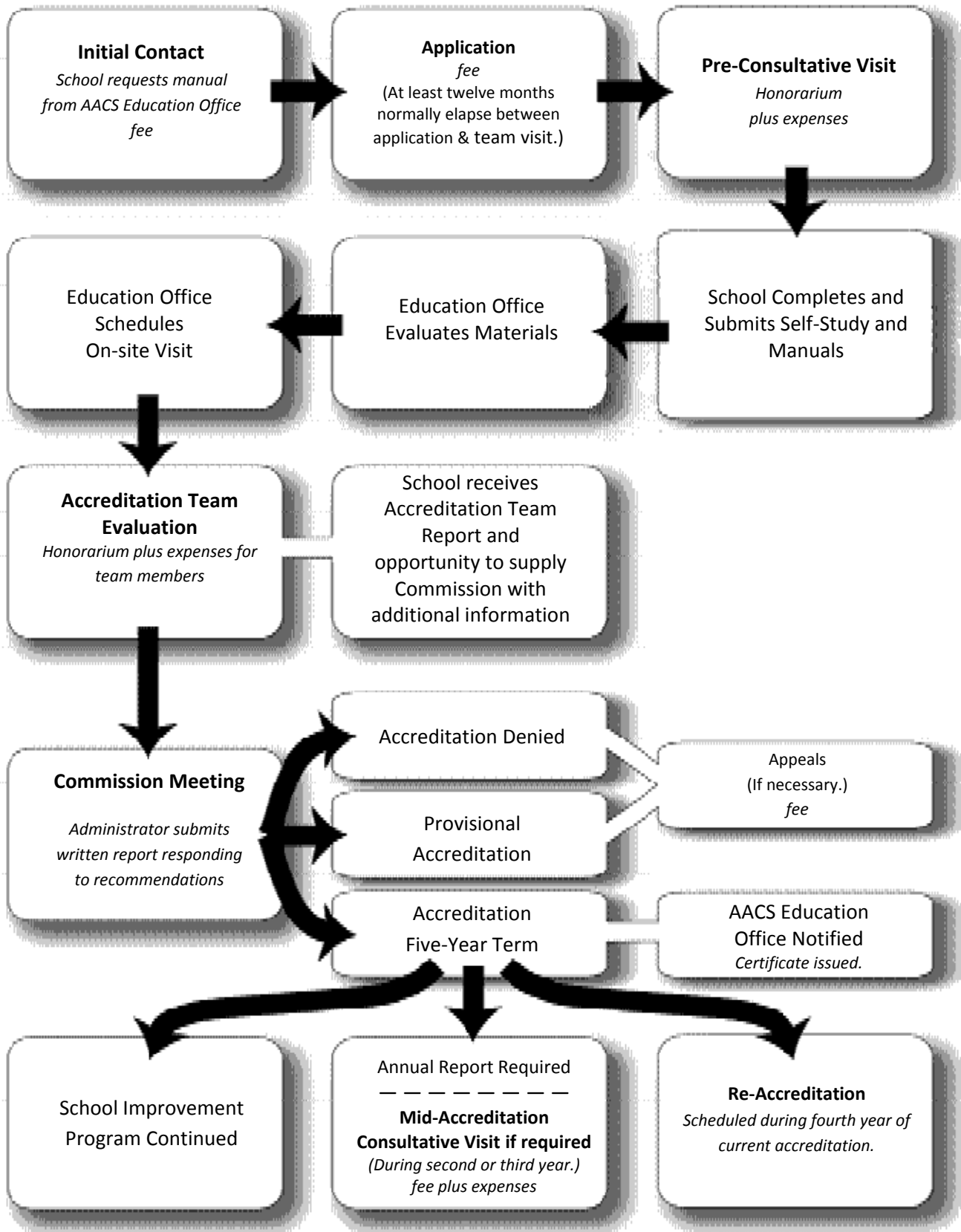
ACCREDITATION FEES AND EXPENSES

A current schedule of fees and expenses is included in the Accreditation Resources and Sample Documents folder on the AACCS website.

Accreditation Program Manual.....	fee
Pre-Consultative Visit.....	fee plus expenses
Mid-Consultative Visit.....	fee plus expenses
Application Fee (nonrefundable).....	fee
Accreditation Team Costs	honorariums, plus expenses*
Annual Maintenance Fee to Be Filed with Annual Report.....	fee
Appeal Fee (nonrefundable).....	fee

* The school is responsible for travel/meals/lodging costs for consultants and for members of the accreditation team. Automobile transportation is reimbursed at the current government rate for mileage. An honorarium per day including travel days should be provided for each accreditation team member. The chairman shall receive an additional honorarium to organize the team and finalize the accreditation team report. Persons doing a follow-up evaluation requested by the original accreditation team should be paid an honorarium per day plus expenses. These fees should be paid at the time of the evaluation.

PATH TO AACCS ACCREDITATION



PROCEDURES FOR ACCREDITATION

BASIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Before being considered for the AACS accreditation program, a school must meet basic eligibility requirements:

- The school must be clearly Christian in philosophy and practice.
- The school must demonstrate that administrators and teachers have appropriate degrees and training.
- The school must have an organized and effective curriculum.
- The school must be a member in good standing of the American Association of Christian Schools.
- The school must have been in operation as a school for at least two full school years.
- The administrator must have been at the school at least one full school year.
- The school must have a good testimony with other Christian schools, the community, and the businesses that deal with the school.
- The school must demonstrate fiscal responsibility and stability.
- The school must adhere to local, state, and federal health, safety, sanitation, length-of-school-day, and length-of-school-year laws.
- The school must provide the required school profile and documentation that supports the basic eligibility requirements.

STEPS TO ACCREDITATION

Since accreditation is a process, there are a number of steps that are to be undertaken by a school.

STEP 1—INITIAL CONTACT

The first step involves two areas:

The administrator of the school seeking accreditation should contact the Association's office to obtain appropriate materials. These materials include the Accreditation Manual, an application form, and other information critical to understanding the accreditation process.

The administration and the AACS office will communicate regarding key components of the accreditation process.

1. Policy Manuals
2. Curriculum Guide
3. Teacher Certification
4. Self-Study
5. School Improvement Plan

STEP 2—APPLICATION

An application to enter the accreditation process is filed with the Association. The application fee must be submitted with the application. Documentation to be filed with the application includes:

- A school profile
- End-of-year financial report for the last fiscal year demonstrating fiscal responsibility and stability
- Faculty worksheet
- Basic legal compliance documentation information.

Forms are located in Appendix for reference purposes only. See the Accreditation Resources and Sample Documents folder on the AACCS website for current forms.

STEP 3—PRE-CONSULTATIVE VISIT

After examining the materials and judging the school's readiness, the AACCS office will contact the school regarding a consultative visit by an American Association of Christian Schools representative. The purposes of the visit are (1) to make a preliminary appraisal of the school's program in light of the standards for accreditation; (2) to determine the school's readiness to begin the self-study; and (3) to give counsel with respect to the accrediting process. The school is responsible for the honorarium and the expenses of the pre-consultative visit.

A written report is prepared by the consultant. The report will include a general description of the various facets of the school's program and will state recommendations to assist the school in preparing for the on-site accreditation visit. A copy of the report is sent to the school administrator, and a copy is kept on file in the Association's education office. The report will include a recommendation on whether and when the school should continue the accreditation sequence.

In the event the school is found ineligible or otherwise not a candidate for accreditation, the accreditation process will cease. The school may resume the accreditation process after a twelve-month waiting period, at which time the reasons for ineligibility listed in the consultative report must be resolved.

STEP 4—MANUALS

The school must develop four manuals: (1) administrative, (2) curriculum guide, (3) student/parent, and (4) faculty. The purpose for the manual requirement is to ensure that policies and procedures are in writing. The manuals should be designed as working instruments, properly indexed to make them user-friendly, and should reflect the uniqueness of the school in both content and organization. The school is encouraged to consult with the AACCS Education Office during the development of the policy manuals. The South Carolina Association of Christian Schools has developed model documents (christianeducation.org). Guidance for these manuals is included in the Accreditation Manual.

STEP 5—SELF-STUDY

Accreditation is fundamentally an ongoing process of self-evaluation and school improvement. The mechanism for self-evaluation is the self-study. A range of persons representing the school community (pastors, administrators, teachers, staff, parents, governance and others) will participate in the self-study process. Through the self-study process, school leadership will evaluate the degree to which the school meets twelve standards that describe elements that are common to quality Christian schools. The

evaluation process will allow the school to identify strengths and weaknesses and initiatives for school improvement. Through the self-study process, the school will complete the evaluation and collect the data needed to produce a Five-Year School Improvement Plan (SIP) following the accreditation team visit. The self-study is the most important part of the process for the school. Only a thorough self-study will allow the school to accurately assess and plan. Schools normally allow at least one year for conducting a thorough self-study and developing the Curriculum Guide.

STEP 6—ACCREDITATION TEAM VISIT

When the education director determines that the self-study is in order, an accreditation team (committee of peers who serve in a consulting and verification capacity) will be scheduled to make an on-site visit of the school. Because the accreditation team will be comprised of experienced Christian educators, their written reports will be of significant value to the school. The accreditation team's written statements will include factual reporting, recommendations and suggestions for improving the school, and a recommendation to the Accreditation Commission of the American Association of Christian Schools relative to accreditation for the school. The final accreditation team report will be reviewed by the Accreditation Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

STEP 7 – ACCREDITATION COMMISSION REVIEW

Following the on-site visit, the recommendation of the accreditation team will be submitted to the Accreditation Commission. The Accreditation Commission has two regularly scheduled meetings per year and additional meetings as required. The Commission meets in September and in February, and at other times as determined by the Commission.

The school's administrator is required to participate in the Accreditation Commission meeting at which his school will be considered for accreditation. Participation may be in person or by virtual connection or conference call. The administrator should do the following:

Be prepared to offer a brief report on the school and responses to team recommendations.

Prepare a written report explaining how the school will address the recommendations made by the accreditation team. The school administrator will supply ten copies of this report to the Commission meeting.

The Accreditation Commission may make one of four determinations regarding the status of the school:

The school may be granted full approval for a term of five years. Action of the Accreditation Commission to grant accreditation is typically accompanied by recommendations pertaining to a school's future development. Accredited schools are required to submit annual reports on forms provided by the Association.

The school may be given provisional accreditation for a period of time recommended by the accreditation team and approved by the Accreditation Commission. Provisional accreditation will identify conditions that must be corrected before full accreditation will be granted. If those conditions are properly corrected, full accreditation will be granted with the entire term beginning on the date of provisional acceptance.

The school may be denied accreditation. Major corrections must be made and the school must reapply.

The school may be granted the status of “accredited with distinction” if requirements for that status are met. See pages 26–27 for accreditation status definitions.

MAINTAINING ACCREDITATION STATUS

A school initially seeking accreditation must meet or exceed basic standards held by the American Association of Christian Schools. After receiving an accredited status, the school is responsible to maintain those standards. The Association has as a primary purpose the continued improvement of accredited member schools.

ANNUAL REPORT AND REVIEW

Accredited institutions must file a maintenance fee and the annual report in which account is given of the school’s condition, progress, and the maintenance of standards for teacher certification. The statement of faith must be reaffirmed annually; the teacher certification report must be updated annually; and the AACCS certification requirement must be satisfied annually.

School Improvement Plan—An updated SIP must be submitted with the annual report in the third year of the accreditation term.

The annual report and maintenance fees are due in the education office by November 1. The annual report includes a matrix of responses to the recommendations of the accreditation team. A late fee is assessed on November 15. Failure to comply warrants the loss of accredited status; the school will be purged from the Association’s roster of accredited schools.

MID-ACCREDITATION CONSULTATIVE VISITS

A mid-accreditation consultative visit is required in some circumstances.

1. The school is provisionally accredited after the initial team visit.
2. The school’s head administrator changes. [Required with any administrator change before re-accreditation.]
3. The school fails to make progress on significant recommendations from the accreditation team.

Mid-accreditation consultative visits will be required by the Commission at any of its regular meetings. Schools requiring mid-accreditation visits will be notified.

A trained Association consultant will visit the school during the third year of the school’s accreditation term. The consultant will submit a written report to the school and Commission. The school is responsible for the consultant’s fee and expenses of the mid-accreditation consultative visit.

The consultant will be responsible for verifying a written response in the following areas:

1. Recommendations listed in the accreditation team’s report.
2. School Improvement Plan.
3. Curricular initiatives.
4. Certification status of all full- and part-time faculty members and administrators.

5. In addition to these areas, the consultant will conduct several interviews and check school records. The school will make available to the consultant any additional materials requested. The consultant will advise school leadership regarding preparations for re-accreditation.

RE-ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

An accredited school must apply for re-accreditation at least twelve months prior to the current accreditation expiration date, so that the school's accreditation does not lapse. The school will receive notification from the AACCS Education Office to this effect. The school applies for re-accreditation during the fourth year of a school's five-year accreditation term by submitting an "Application for Re-accreditation" to the education office. It is the responsibility of the accredited school to initiate the re-accreditation process.

Failure to comply with required reports and procedures will terminate a school's accreditation status; the school will be purged from the Association's roster of accredited schools.

ANNUAL REVIEW

AACS reserves the right to request a review of a school's accredited status at any time the school falls below the standards for accreditation. If an accreditation team evaluation is necessary, the school must bear the expense of a team visit.

If, on the basis of the annual report or the consultative visit, deficiencies are noted in the accredited school, the Accreditation Commission will issue a notice to the school describing the inadequacy or inadequacies. If the problem area is not corrected within the specified time (time frames are established by the Commission), the school may be placed on probation.

Probation is imposed for failure to correct specified inadequacies within the allotted time. The school is notified in writing of an inadequacy, the period of time during which probation is imposed, and conditions under which probation may be removed. If the inadequacy is not corrected within the designated period, the Commission may withdraw the school's accreditation.

Should a school have its accreditation status revoked, all advertisements of any accredited status shall immediately cease and the actual accreditation certificate must be returned to the AACCS Education Office.

APPEAL

The Accreditation Commission must provide the school administrator with a written statement of reasons for any adverse accrediting action. The administrator has the right to appeal such action. A letter of appeal, accompanied by the appeal fee, must be filed with the chairman of the Accreditation Commission within thirty days. The school's accreditation status remains in force during the thirty day period, or until the hearing, if an appeal has been made. The appeal's hearing would normally be scheduled for the next regularly scheduled Accreditation Commission meeting. The school administrator is responsible for the appeal and the presentation of the school's case before the Commission. After reviewing the appeal, the Commission provides the administrator with a written statement of the Commission's actions.

REINSTATEMENT

Schools may lose accredited status for several reasons: (1) failure to renew the accredited status before the period of accreditation has lapsed, (2) action taken by the Accreditation Commission to terminate the school's accredited status, (3) failure of the school to renew its annual membership in the Association, (4)

request by the school to terminate the accredited status, (5) failure of the school to file its annual reports with its annual fee, (6) or failure to adhere to accreditation requirements.

A school that has lost its accredited status may seek reinstatement by following the steps involved in the initial accreditation.

AACS ACCREDITATION STATUS DEFINITIONS

APPLICANT

An applicant school submits the application for accreditation, application fee, and documentation required under Basic Eligibility Requirements. Upon staff review and approval, status is granted and the school may request a consultative visit.

CANDIDATE

The school requests a consultative visit and prepares required documentation for the visit. A consultant is appointed who conducts a one-day visit at the school during a school day. The visit serves two purposes: (1) verification of basic requirements and preparation for accreditation, and (2) counsel to the school leadership regarding preparing for a team visit. The consultant prepares a report that is submitted to the school and to the AACS office. Status is granted upon recommendation of the consultant and AACS staff.

ACCREDITED

The school completes a self-study and prepares for a accreditation team. The accreditation team completes a report that is submitted to the AACS Accreditation Commission. School leadership reports to the Commission at one of the scheduled meetings of the Commission. Status is granted upon recommendation of the accreditation team and approval by the Commission. Accredited status may be granted at one of three levels. Schools at each level have all the rights and privileges of AACS accreditation and may advertise accredited status.

PROVISIONALLY ACCREDITED

The accreditation team has rated the school as “emerging” on one or more standards and has made one or more significant recommendations regarding areas where the school is not meeting a standard for accreditation. The Commission has determined that the area(s) needing progress is/are significant and establishes a time period, not to exceed two years, during which the school must meet the standard in order to retain accredited status.

FULLY ACCREDITED

The accreditation team has rated the school as “effective” or “exemplary” on all standards. A school may still be fully accredited with one rating of “emerging” for a standard provided the accreditation team recommends fully accredited status and the Commission approves. Fully accredited status is also granted to the provisionally accredited school that meets the recommendations of the accreditation team and Commission during the time frame established.

ACCREDITED WITH DISTINCTION

The school completes a five-year accreditation cycle, adequately addresses all recommendations made by the original accreditation team and Commission, completes the re-accreditation self-study, and successfully hosts an accreditation team for re-accreditation. The accreditation team rates the school as “effective” or “exemplary” on all standards. The school achieves an exemplary rating on two or more standards and the accreditation team recommends that the school be accredited with distinction. Status is granted upon Commission approval of the recommendation of the accreditation team.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

A school must report changes made within the school program when such changes alter the conditions under which the school was accredited. Changes in name, mailing address, church/school leadership, faculty, curriculum, philosophy, grade levels, etc., must be reported on the annual report and sent to the education office.

ACCREDITED SCHOOLS ADDING GRADES POLICY

Accredited schools that add a grade level or levels during their term of accreditation must have a one-day consultative visit by one or more evaluators designated by the education director (expenses to be paid by the school). This visit will follow these guidelines:

Verify that the curriculum for the new grade(s) correlates to the existing curricula.

Verify that all requirements for new grade(s) are adequately met, such as, course offerings, faculty needs, etc.

The consultant will submit a written report to the Accreditation Commission. This report serves as a supplement to the school’s original report.

CERTIFICATES

Accreditation certificates are issued to the accredited schools but remain the property of the American Association of Christian Schools. Accreditation certificates may be recalled from a school upon the lapse of a school’s membership in the AACCS or upon the revocation of a school’s accreditation by the AACCS Accreditation Commission.

PREPARATION FOR AN ACCREDITATION TEAM

When final approval is granted for an accreditation team to visit the applicant school, the team will be selected by the AACCS education director or the team chair and approved by the school. The accreditation team is comprised of five to seven experienced educators (depending upon the size of the school) who have administrative, supervisory, or teaching experience. The chairperson has the option to include a parent or business person. The majority of the accreditation team must have previous experience as accreditation team members. Team members should possess backgrounds and experience in the areas evaluated.

The school must have completed the school manuals, self-study, and all required documents.

The AACCS education director will establish the evaluation dates in coordination with the school administrator and accreditation team chairperson.

The administrator of the applicant school shall accomplish several tasks:

The school shall mail a copy of the completed self-study, and supporting documents to the education director of the American Association of Christian Schools.

The school shall mail a copy of the completed self-study and all supporting documents to the chairperson of the accreditation team that will visit the campus.

The school shall mail a copy of the completed self-study, and supporting documents to each member of the accreditation team that will visit the campus.

Two copies of policy manuals and curricula initiatives must also be available to the accreditation team members when they arrive on site.

When the accreditation team arrives at the applicant school, there will be established expectations:

A room will be provided for the team as the general headquarters.

The Administrator's Report

An orientation session will be scheduled, at which time the team meets with the school administrator and selected others. The administrator will give a brief report to the team and provide a tour of the facility.

The report will include a brief profile of the school, a brief history of the school, the current status of the school, brief description of the philosophy of school ministry to the church and community, and a brief description of any significant plans for improvement to the program or facility. The report should not take more than 15 minutes. No written report is required.

The following materials should be available in the accreditation team's headquarters:

1. Office supplies, access to photocopying machine
2. Master schedule of classes
3. Samples of cumulative records, student information files, and test profiles
4. Samples of printed materials, communications, and newspaper articles
5. Daily schedule for each teacher with time frames (Include academic and non-academic activities)
6. Copy of most recent fire marshal inspection report
7. AHERA asbestos program management plan
8. Copy of fire and tornado drill record (Include date, time of day, minutes/seconds to evacuate the building or prepare for tornado.)
9. Copy of most recent health inspection
10. Copy of school's written Crisis Management Plan
11. Drug and alcohol random testing program information (for CDL drivers)

12. Blank progress report
13. Blank report card
14. Blood-borne pathogen training program information
15. Hazard communication plan
16. Self-study copy
17. Administrative manual (2 copies)
18. Parent/student manual (2 copies)
19. Faculty manual (2 copies)
20. Curriculum guide (2 copies)

The administrator should ensure, as much as possible, that tests are limited during the days the accreditation team members are scheduled to visit classrooms. Teachers should teach during the accreditation team's classroom evaluation visits.

The administrator should ensure that all accreditation team expenses and honorariums are paid by the time of departure from the evaluation visit. Lodging for team members is arranged by the applicant school.

