



ACIS STANDARDS FOR MEMBERSHIP

(Updated June 2011)

The following list of Standards for Membership has been developed, and reviewed periodically, to describe the kind of school that ACIS believes it can serve and that, in turn, can benefit from the ACIS network and services. The standards describe the type of schools represented in the Association's membership.

Because of the diversity in the ACIS membership and the corresponding variation in philosophy, program, procedures, and style, these standards have been developed to focus on the elements that should be common to all good independent schools. The approval of a school, however, for membership and accreditation shall not be contingent upon literal compliance with every detail of the standards. Wherever the provisions of a particular standard are waived, however, there shall be sufficient evidence that the intent of those provisions is being observed.

Of paramount importance are those standards listed below (Section A) because they are either essential to the definition of an independent school or they represent fundamental tenets observed by all independent schools. Among these tenets is the commitment to the highest possible quality in a school's program and both the learning and teaching integral to it. Of equivalent importance is the recognition of, and respect for, diversity and pluralism. As the American pluralistic tradition accommodates schools that emphasize and responsibly develop their own distinctive religious understanding, so does ACIS. In conclusion, the ultimate measure of a school's quality is represented by the degree of congruence between the school's mission, its program, its purposes and results.

A. ACIS POLICIES AND PRACTICES

1. The school shall be incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in Colorado and shall have been granted 501(c)(3) status by the Internal Revenue Service, or equivalent form of tax-exempt status.
2. There shall be no discrimination against any person that is in violation of Federal or State Law or regulations. (See Appendix M)
3. The school shall maintain its facilities and equipment so as to meet applicable health, fire, safety, and sanitary standards and shall maintain evidence of compliance. Compliance will include a crisis plan.
4. There shall be annual professional, opinion-level audits of the school's finances. Exceptions to this requirement for small schools may be granted by the Accreditation Committee. (*See Notes - 1*)
5. The school and its governance structure shall be organized with sufficient independence (from other organizations), so as to ensure its ability to fulfill its mission and to control its own destiny. It shall be legally and fiscally independent unless an exception has been granted by the Accreditation Committee.

6. There shall be full disclosure of the school's mission, policies, programs and practices.
7. There shall be a high degree of congruence between the stated mission of the school and the actual program and practices of the school.
8. The school shall provide clear evidence that it permits and encourages freedom of inquiry. The school shall stress the teaching of critical reasoning and independent thinking.
9. The school shall comply with the required ACIS septennial evaluation/accreditation program including a self-study, visitation by an ACIS team, and prescribed follow-up activity and reports. Self-study, first and third year responses must comply with guidelines for format, content, and satisfactory responses to each recommendation made in the Visiting Team Report.
10. The school is accountable to the Association at times of significant change in its purpose, direction, administration, financial viability, or variance from the ACIS Accreditation Standards. Such changes must be reported in writing in a timely fashion. If the Board of Directors deems the changes of significant magnitude, they may require a study of the situation by the Accreditation Committee, which may in turn lead to the requirement of a re-evaluation. Depending on the circumstances of the change, the Board of Directors may also vote to change the membership status of the member school. (See Significant Change Report Guidelines.)
11. The school shall have an equitable, just, and inclusive school community that embraces the value of diverse races, ethnic backgrounds, and religious beliefs.

B. MEMBERSHIP REFERENCES

1. There shall be a clearly articulated statement of educational mission and philosophy that determines the individual character of the school, based upon sound educational tenets. Such statement shall reflect the characteristics and needs of its youth, and shall be implemented by a specific statement of goals and/or objectives and manifested in the educational program. If an ACIS school is religiously affiliated, the academic and extracurricular programs must be based primarily on an educational rationale.
2. The governing body shall approve the statement of educational mission and philosophy; it shall be understood and supported by the governing body, administration, faculty, and staff.
3. The development and periodic review of the philosophy and objectives shall be a collective effort, involving faculty, students - where appropriate, administrators, parents, and the Board.
4. The school shall demonstrate its commitment to the principles of equity and justice through its governance and leadership, curriculum, support, programs, staffing, admission and activities.

C. COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL

1. There shall be clearly defined admissions policies and procedures consistent with the stated mission and philosophy of the school and which provide the general criteria upon which admissions are made.
2. The school shall require each candidate for admission to undergo evaluation to enable the school and the student to determine if matriculation would be mutually beneficial. A student shall be admitted when it is determined that the school can reasonably expect to meet the needs of the student.
3. Parents (or guardian) shall be fully informed of their financial responsibilities to the school prior to enrollment.
4. The school shall be attentive to the quality of life of all members of the learning community and take appropriate actions to create a positive learning and social environment.
5. The school shall have procedures for the effective communication with, and involvement of, parents in a way that is appropriate to their interests as well as the purposes and objectives of the school

D. PROGRAM, ACTIVITIES, AND STUDENT SERVICES

1. The program shall be based on the school's mission, which is shared broadly by the faculty, administration, and board. Such beliefs shall include an understanding of ways in which students learn and develop, and the appropriate means of instruction for all students enrolled in the school.
2. The school's program shall include a balance of humanities, fine arts, foreign language, mathematics, science, social science, and physical education as is appropriate for the ages, needs, and abilities of students enrolled in the school.
3. The school shall stress the teaching of knowledge, skills, critical reasoning, and independent thinking.
4. The program shall have sufficient diversity to meet the capacities, styles, developmental needs and cultural backgrounds of the students enrolled in the school.
5. The program shall include a balance of academic and extracurricular activities as is consistent with the school's purpose.
6. Provision shall be made for faculty involvement in periodic review, evaluation and development of the school's program.
7. The school shall provide adequate program support that reflects the school's philosophy.
8. The school day and year shall be sufficient for the effective implementation of the total school program.
9. The school shall have a curriculum that is articulated in detailed written form, and a corresponding process to assess individual student growth, development and achievement that reflects the school's mission.

10. The school has a thoughtful process, consistent with its mission, for using both internal and external data about student learning to make decisions about program improvements.

E. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

1. A Board of Trustees (Governors, Directors) shall develop major school policies; oversee and maintain the financial stability of the school; lead in fundraising and promotion; and employ, evaluate, and support the Head of School.
2. The Head of School shall be responsible for school programs, personnel, facilities, and resources.
3. The administration shall be developed and organized so as to carry out policies effectively.
4. The Board and administration shall provide clearly stated decision-making processes for long range planning, for the periodic review of school organization, and for appropriate modification of programs and services.
5. The Board shall generate necessary resources for providing and maintaining physical facilities, equipment and materials adequate to support the program of the school.
6. There shall be appropriate procedures for management of financial resources including budget-development, fiscal management, accounting, auditing such accounts, and long-range planning.
7. The school shall provide adequate fundraising, public relations, and financial management personnel to achieve the school's mission.
8. There shall be clearly defined programs for regular evaluation of the performance of the administration, faculty and staff, and understood procedures for non-renewal and termination of employment.
9. The Board shall conduct a self-evaluation, at least biennially.
10. Board practices and bylaws foster leadership continuity and partnership between the board chair and head of school.
11. The board shall provide effective recruitment, orientation, training, and continuing education for trustees each year.

F. PERSONNEL

1. The administration, faculty, support and boarding (where appropriate) staff shall be qualified for their positions and responsibilities by education and/or experience.
2. There shall be clearly established procedures for recruiting, screening, and interviewing prospective faculty.
3. There shall be fair and appropriate personnel policies, salaries and benefits for all employees.

4. Each employee shall be clearly informed of his/her compensation, term of employment, and principal duties.
5. The school shall have a clearly stated program for professional growth.
6. There shall be adequate procedures for identifying changing needs and priorities in faculty and staff requirements.
7. The school will make employment conditional upon a successful validation of the employee's credentials and background. This will include a criminal background check.

G. RESIDENCE LIFE

1. There shall be an organized, well-supervised and deliberate residence-life program plan, which integrates all residence hall initiatives with the school's Mission Statement.
2. The school shall create a residence-life curriculum that supports the academic mission of the school and enhances individual and community learning by developing the personal, emotional and social growth of students.
3. Clear and widely published policies concerning positive community behavioral expectations should be distributed and explained to students at the beginning of each school year. Consequences for students who fail to meet the expected norms also should be clearly understood.
4. Supervision for the residence hall program shall include live-in staff and regularly scheduled adult presence on a 24-hour/day basis. Workshops on adolescent development, community living and strategies for communicating with youth should be part of residence-life faculty and staff training.
5. Opportunities for student leadership and training should be available for students who are interested in assuming increased responsibility for community development.
6. There shall be clearly defined programs for regular evaluation of the residence-life staff.
7. The school shall create a management services system with adequate financial support that ensures the orderly maintenance and renovation of the residence halls and associated programs.
8. Disabled access, fire, security and other safety-related precautions should be in place and in full compliance with local, state and federally mandated regulations for community living facilities.

H. EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

1. **LICENSING:** The program shall meet or exceed local and state regulations and licensing requirements, as applicable, and provide documentation of compliance.
2. **CURRICULUM:** The program shall provide a developmentally appropriate and integrated curriculum that includes a variety of content areas and/or activities that are

- consistent with the school mission. The curriculum provides an effective basis for engaging children in joyful learning.
3. **AMBIANCE:** The learning environment is designed to support the growth, development, and achievement of students in a manner that reflects the school mission. The organization and aesthetic character of classrooms and other spaces supports the accomplishment of the program goals.
 4. **ASSESSMENT:** In keeping with the school mission, the program uses assessment practices that guide the learning process and support effective communication with families about each child's development, strengths, and challenges. Assessments include provisions for the early identification of learning difficulties that may require special support or a different educational environment.
 5. **DIFFERENTIATION:** Teachers recognize and appreciate the variability in maturity and learning styles of young children. They use developmentally responsive practices to support the learning and progress of every child.
 6. **FACILITIES:** The facilities provide adequate indoor and outdoor space, equipment, and materials to support a program that is consistent with the school mission. These elements are safe, well-organized, and developmentally appropriate. Appropriate space and furnishings are provided for teacher breaks.
 7. **ACTIVITIES:** The program includes activities that are balanced between child-directed and teacher-directed, active and quiet, large and small group, indoor and outdoor.
 8. **TEACHER/STUDENT INTERACTION:** Teachers and staff relate to students in ways that foster trust, mutual respect, caring, and clarity of expectations for appropriate behavior. They demonstrate an understanding of developmental differences and a commitment to addressing the needs and interests of each child.
 9. **SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:** In keeping with the school mission, the program shall support children in managing feelings, making friends, sharing materials, working/playing cooperatively, and resolving differences or conflicts.
 10. **FAMILY COMMUNICATION:** Communication routines between school and home facilitate a regular exchange of information to support children's progress. That communication includes an honest and accurate assessment of each child's strengths and areas of needed growth to support an appropriate school placement.

I. OTHER PROGRAMS

1. Special or supplementary programs offered by the school outside its principal operation (summer sessions, before and after school programs, special education, institutes, etc.) must display consistency with the school's stated mission and goals.

Notes:

1. Financial Audits:

- Candidacy Member Schools must provide full opinion audits for three consecutive years in preparation for their initial Visiting Team Review.
- ACIS will retain the right to require a full audit of any accredited member school at any time.
- Accredited schools with an annual budget of under \$1,000,000.00 may apply to the Accreditation Committee for an exemption to the annual audit requirement; granting that exemption remains at the discretion of the Accreditation Committee.
- After the initial three consecutive audits, an independent CPA must conduct audits every three years with a financial review in intervening years.
- Applications for Candidacy Membership must include one full-opinion financial audit.
- All audits submitted to ACIS must include a management letter from the accountant.