



## **ACIS ACCREDITATION STANDARDS**

(Updated June 2021)

ACIS accredits a variety of schools that reflect many different educational philosophies, program designs, school cultures, and organizational procedures. The non-negotiable standards shown below in Section A describe the organizational characteristics, shared commitments, essential practices, and core values of the schools that ACIS can effectively support and accredit. Schools that are not committed to meeting these standards cannot join ACIS. Regarding the other standards, ACIS does not require *literal* compliance with every detail of each standard in order for a school to achieve or maintain accreditation. However, the school leaders must embrace the *intent* of each standard, and act with deliberate speed to implement any ACIS recommendations for strengthening compliance.

The ACIS accreditation standards reflect common principles and practices that have sustained American independent schools for decades. These include a commitment to continuous improvement, supported by a regular evaluation process that holds each school responsible for maintaining a high level of congruence between its mission and program. By requiring adherence to these standards, ACIS provides meaningful assurance of the educational quality and institutional strength of its member schools.

### **A. ACIS POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

1. **NON-PROFIT STATUS:** 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. **NON-DISCRIMINATION:** There shall be no discrimination against any person that is in violation of Federal or State Law or regulations.
3. **HEALTH & SAFETY REGULATORY COMPLIANCE:** The school shall manage operations, including the maintenance of facilities and equipment, to meet applicable health, fire, safety, and sanitary standards. The school shall also maintain evidence of compliance in these areas.
4. **RISK MANAGEMENT:** The school shall conduct a risk assessment of all programs and operations and make changes as needed to improve safety and security for the school community. The frequency of that assessment effort shall depend on the school's risk profile and its mission.

5. **CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANS:** Maintain practical crisis management plans for responding to potential incidents that occur on and off campus. This planning effort shall be guided by the school mission. Such plans shall be reviewed and adjusted as needed to remain current and effective.
6. **FINANCIAL AUDIT:** There shall be annual professional, opinion-level audits of school finances.
7. **INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE:** 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 ACIS Board.
8. **DISCLOSURE TO ACIS:** There shall be full disclosure of the school's mission, policies, programs and practices.
9. **MISSION/PROGRAM CONGRUENCE:** There shall be a high degree of congruence between the stated mission of the school and its actual program and practices. The mission shall be approved by the governing body, with understanding and support by the administration, faculty, and staff.
10. **ACCREDITATION PROGRAM COMPLIANCE:** The school shall comply with ACIS requirements at all stages of the accreditation cycle, including any reports or documentation requested by the Accreditation Committee.
11. **SIGNIFICANT CHANGE REPORTS:** The school shall comply with ACIS requirements for reporting significant changes.
12. **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION:** The school shall strive to have an equitable, just, and inclusive school community that embraces the value of diverse races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and religious beliefs. This commitment should be evident in the school's governance, administration, marketing, curriculum, program support, staffing, admissions, and other activities.

## **B. COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL**

1. **MISSION ARTICULATION:** The school mission shall be clearly articulated to current and prospective parents.
2. **ADMISSIONS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:** There shall be clearly defined admissions policies and procedures consistent with the mission and philosophy of the school, and with the association's expectations for the enrollment of student athletes, all of which provide the general criteria upon which admissions are made.
3. **ADMISSIONS EVALUATIONS:** School personnel shall evaluate each candidate for admission to determine if the student has a reasonable chance of meeting the school's program expectations.
4. **PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES:** Parents (or guardian) shall be fully informed of their financial and other responsibilities to the school prior to enrollment.

5. **POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT:** The school shall be attentive to the quality of life of all members of the learning community and take appropriate actions to sustain a positive learning and social environment.
6. **PARENT COMMUNICATION:** 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.
7. **FINANCIAL AID:** The policies and procedures for administering need-based tuition assistance are fair, transparent, consistent, and equitable, with effective safeguards to preserve confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest, in fact or perception.
8. **CHILD PROTECTION:** The school has policies and practices designed to safeguard students from physical/psychological abuse and sexual misconduct by school employees, students, independent contractors, and volunteers.

### **C. PROGRAM, ACTIVITIES, AND STUDENT SERVICES**

1. **PROGRAM DESIGN:** The program shall be based on the school's mission and educational philosophy, with attention to a current understanding, informed by relevant research, of how students learn and develop. The broad goal is to provide appropriate instruction for all students enrolled in the school.
2. **BREADTH OF PROGRAM:** The school's program shall include a balance of humanities, arts, world language, mathematics, science, social science, and physical education as is appropriate for the ages, needs, and abilities of students enrolled in the school.
3. **CRITICAL THOUGHT:** The school shall stress the teaching of knowledge, skills, critical reasoning, and independent thinking.
4. **DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS:** The program shall strive to provide sufficient differentiated instruction, and learning support, to meet the capacities, styles, and developmental needs of the students enrolled in the school.
5. **PROGRAM REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT:** Provision shall be made for faculty involvement in periodic review, evaluation and development of the school's program.
6. **PROGRAM SUPPORT:** The school shall provide adequate program support that reflects the school's purpose.
7. **CALENDAR & SCHEDULE:** The school day and year shall be sufficient for the effective implementation of the total school program.
8. **CURRICULUM DOCUMENTATION & LEARNING ASSESSMENT:** The school shall have a curriculum that is articulated in a detailed written form and a corresponding process to assess *individual* student growth, development and achievement that reflects the school's mission.
9. **DATA-INFORMED PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS:** 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.

## **D. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

1. **ROLE OF BOARD:** 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. **ROLE OF HEAD:** The head of school shall be responsible for school programs, personnel, facilities, and resources.
3. **ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION:** The administration shall be developed and organized so as to carry out policies effectively.
4. **DECISION MAKING PROCESS:** The board and administration shall provide clearly stated decision-making processes for strategic planning, for the periodic review of school organization, and for appropriate modification of programs and services.
5. **FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** The Board shall ensure that the school has necessary resources for providing and maintaining physical facilities, equipment and materials adequate to support the program of the school.
6. **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT:** There shall be appropriate procedures for management of financial resources including budget-development, fiscal management, accounting, auditing, and long-range planning.
7. **ADMINISTRATIVE STAFFING:** The school shall make adequate provision for all administrative functions necessary to achieve the school's mission and sustain the institution.
8. **BOARD EVALUATION:** The board shall conduct a self-evaluation, at least biennially.
9. **LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY & PARTNERSHIP:** Board practices and bylaws foster leadership continuity and partnership between the board chair and head of school.
10. **BOARD EDUCATION:** The board shall provide effective recruitment, orientation, training, and continuing education for trustees each year.
11. **RECORDS RETENTION:** There shall be appropriate procedures and policies for management of admissions, student, employment, financial, legal and other school records, and plans in place for a permanent repository.

## **E. PERSONNEL**

1. **EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATIONS:** The administration, faculty, support and boarding (where appropriate) staff shall be qualified for their positions and responsibilities by education and/or experience.
2. **HIRING PROCEDURES:** There shall be clearly established procedures for recruiting, screening, and interviewing prospective faculty.
3. **BACKGROUND CHECKS:** The school will make employment conditional upon a successful validation of the employee's credentials and background. This will include a criminal background check.
4. **FAIR COMPENSATION:** There shall be fair and appropriate personnel policies, salaries and benefits for all employees.

5. **EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENTS:** Employee shall be clearly informed of his/her compensation, term of employment, and principal duties.
6. **PERFORMANCE REVIEWS:** 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.
7. **PROFESSIONAL GROWTH:** The school shall have a clear and effective program for professional growth.
8. **PERSONNEL ASSESSMENTS:** The school administrators shall conduct a periodic assessment and updating of faculty and staff job responsibilities and qualifications to improve operational efficiency and determine where changes are needed.

## **F. AUXILIARY PROGRAMS**

1. **ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS:** Special or supplementary programs offered by the school outside of its principal operation (e.g. summer sessions, before and after school programs, teacher institutes) must display consistency with the school's stated mission and goals.
2. **EXTENDED DAY PROGRAMS:** Child care provided before or after school shall meet or exceed applicable regulations and licensing requirements, with documentation of compliance.

## **G. RESIDENTIAL LIFE**

2. **RESIDENTIAL LIFE PROGRAM:** There shall be an organized, well-supervised and deliberate residential life program that supports fulfillment of the school mission. That program shall have clear administrative oversight.
3. **PERSONAL GROWTH CURRICULUM:** The school shall create a residential 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.
4. **DISCIPLINE POLICIES:** Policies concerning student behavioral expectations, and the consequences for non-compliance, shall be clear, widely publicized in the school community and well-understood by residential faculty and students.
5. **RESIDENCE SUPERVISION:** Supervision for the residential life program shall include live-in staff and/or sufficient adult supervision to fulfill the school mission. Workshops with relevant readings on adolescent development, community living, and strategies for communicating with youth shall be part of training for residential life faculty.
6. **STAFF EVALUATION:** There shall be clearly defined practices for regular evaluation of the residential life staff.
7. **STAFF COMMUNICATION:** There shall be adequate provisions for regular and effective communications to sustain a strong and consistent program.
8. **WEEKEND PROGRAM:** There shall be an organized, well-supervised, and deliberate weekend program whereby students experience an intentional weekend community and are engaged in compelling and safe weekend activities.

## **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. **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** 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 experiences.
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.
11. **CHILD HEALTH:** The early childhood program includes a health and wellness program that is designed to support the healthy development of children in partnership with their parents