
FLORIDA COUNCIL OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS



MANUAL FOR EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION

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INTRODUCTION

FCIS MISSION

The Florida Council of Independent Schools promotes the highest standards for PK-12 education through its accreditation process, professional development programming, and advocacy efforts.

FCIS HISTORY AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Florida Council of Independent Schools (FCIS) is a nonprofit professional association of elementary and secondary schools throughout the state of Florida. Through its evaluation and accreditation program, the association strives to ensure that each member school maintains high standards and independence. In serving the students of Florida, FCIS promotes educational, ethical, and professional excellence on the part of owners, trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff in member schools. FCIS also represents the concerns and viewpoints of independent education to the broader community.

The Florida Council of Independent Schools (FCIS) was founded in 1954 by a small group of independent private school leaders to establish high standards for nonpublic schools. FCIS has grown to become one of the nation's largest organizations of independent schools. Currently, almost 70,000 students are enrolled in 148 member schools. FCIS accredits coed, day, boarding, and single-sex schools in grades pre-kindergarten through twelve. The schools range in size from as few as 25 students to over 2,500 students. The Council is a member association of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and an affiliate of the Council of American Private Education (CAPE). It is a founding member of the Florida Association of Academic Non-Public Schools (FAANS) and the International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA).

A school must be accredited to join the Florida Council of Independent Schools. Accreditation is conferred by the FCIS Board of Directors after a school meets a rigorous set of Standards. Schools that apply for FCIS membership are scheduled for an evaluation visit by a committee composed of peer educators. This committee studies multiple facets of the school's programs and operations. Evaluation reports from this committee are submitted to the FCIS Board of Directors for their review. Schools that successfully meet published FCIS Standards and are deemed to be financially stable and provide quality education are then granted accredited membership into the Council.

The purpose of this manual is to provide information for our membership and evaluation team volunteers about the accreditation and evaluation process. Additional information can be found on the FCIS web site at www.fcis.org.

MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA AND RESPONSIBILITIES

MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

Members of the Florida Council of Independent Schools must meet the following criteria and requirements:

- The school must be incorporated in the State of Florida.
- The school must be an independent, academic school, serving any combination of grades 1-12.
- If the school has a program for two-, three-, four- and/or five-year-olds, the school is eligible for membership if and only if those programs are part of an overall lower school/elementary program that extends through at least third grade.
- The school must have at least 25 students.
- The school must comply with federal regulations regarding discrimination and fair employment practices and may not discriminate in any other activities.
- To be fully accredited, the school must be in its fourth year of operation or greater. Schools open for three years or less are eligible for New School Candidacy (see page 45).

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBER SCHOOLS

By undertaking accreditation and accepting membership in the Florida Council of Independent Schools, a member school agrees to:

- Pay annual dues to the Council by July 1 each year.
- Be evaluated once every five years and demonstrate compliance with FCIS Standards and Indicators (see pages 8-18).
- Submit responses to Special Recommendations by June 30 of the year following its full evaluation (see page 24).
- Promptly notify the Council of any substantive changes (see page 42) and be evaluated within twelve months of the substantive change.
- Complete the Annual Census, due on September 15 of each year.
- Submit data through Data Analysis for School Leadership (DASL) by the annual due date communicated from the FCIS Office.
- Attend the Annual Convention and send a representative to the Annual Business Meeting.
- Provide personnel to serve on evaluation teams.
- Support FCIS-sponsored events through attendance and/or providing workers for the events.
- Be guided by the principles laid down in the FCIS Code of Ethics.

PATH TO MEMBERSHIP

There are two types of membership in the Florida Council of Independent Schools (FCIS): full membership (for schools in existence for more than three years) and New School Candidacy (for schools in existence for less than three years). Both membership types require that schools meet the following criteria in order to apply:

- The school must be open and in operation, with students attending classes.
- The school must have at least 25 students.
- The school must be organized as a for-profit or not-for-profit corporation in the State of Florida.
- The school must offer elementary, middle school, and/or secondary programs. FCIS does not accredit post-secondary institutions.
- If the school has programs for 2-, 3-, 4- and/or 5-year-olds, those programs must be part of an overall elementary program that extends through at least 3rd grade.
- The school must not discriminate in admission or employment based on race, religion, national or ethnic origin and must follow fair employment practices.
- The school must have a written philosophy that guides the school's programs and operations.
- If not-for-profit, the school must have an independent governing Board whose sole function is the governance of the school.
- The school must have a curriculum consistent with its philosophy, as evidenced by a published curriculum guide.
- The school's students must not spend the majority of their day taking online courses unless those courses are developed by the school and executed by the school's instructors.
- The school must be financially solvent.

Interested schools begin by filling out an online inquiry form, which is available at www.fcis.org, and pay an Inquiry Fee of \$500.00. FCIS evaluates the inquiry to determine possible eligibility for membership. If eligible, the school is contacted to schedule a Site Visit with a representative from FCIS. The purpose of the Site Visit is to confirm the information provided by the school to the FCIS Office and to determine the school's progress toward meeting FCIS standards. The visit usually takes around 3 hours to complete.

During the Site Visit, the school should be prepared to:

- Give a tour of the school
- Discuss the academic preparation of the faculty
- Share a copy of the school's curriculum guide
- Describe the governance of the school

- Provide a copy of the school's latest budget, financial audit or review, and proof of liability insurance
- Answer questions about operations as they relate to FCIS standards
- Ask any questions about FCIS and the accreditation process

The Site Visit report is reviewed by FCIS. If it is deemed that the school should enter the accreditation process, the school will be sent a link to the official FCIS application for membership. The school must complete the application and pay the invoiced application fee of \$500.00 or 50% of membership dues, whichever is greater, to continue with the process.

Once the application and fee are received, the school is assigned an FCIS Chairperson to conduct its Original Evaluation or New School Candidate Evaluation. This evaluation must take place within 12 months of the school's submission of the FCIS application and application fee. The school bears the costs of reimbursement for the team members' travel expenses (see page 31).

The Original Evaluation or New School Candidacy report is reviewed by the FCIS Commission on Accreditation and the Board of Directors. If approved, the school receives accreditation and full membership, or New School Candidacy status, within FCIS upon the payment of annual dues.

FCIS STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

MISSION

STANDARD 1: The school has a clearly articulated mission statement and educational philosophy that guide its operations. The mission statement is approved by the governing body, reviewed regularly, and communicated to all school constituencies.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 1:

- 1.1** The mission statement is publicly present, and both the mission and educational philosophy are understood by all constituencies of the school community.
- 1.2** The mission and educational philosophy inform decision-making and program development at the school.
- 1.3** The school periodically reviews the mission statement and educational philosophy to assess their relevance to current school operations, and there is a process in place that governs making changes to the mission statement.
- 1.4** Faculty and staff support and implement the mission and educational philosophy of the school.

GOVERNANCE

STANDARD 2: The Board (or governing body) effectively functions within its core responsibilities of developing school policies, maintaining financial stability, planning for the future, and employing, supporting, and evaluating the school Head.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 2:

- 2.1** The Board is an entity that exercises functional independence to carry out its core responsibilities of school governance.
- 2.2** The Board develops, maintains, and regularly reviews the school's Bylaws.
- 2.3** The Board develops and maintains annual procedures and written expectations for the Board, including conflict of interest and confidentiality policies. These policies are reviewed and signed by all Board members annually.
- 2.4** The Board demonstrates an understanding of its role in governance and the formulation of school policies. The Head of School understands their separate role and responsibilities for hiring, evaluating and leading all administrators, faculty and staff; implementing policies; and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the school.
- 2.5** The Board nurtures a positive working relationship with the Head of School, provides feedback as needed, and evaluates him/her on an annual basis.
- 2.6** The Board plans and participates in board development, including effective recruitment of and orientation for new members, continuing education for all members, and a process for self-evaluation of the entire Board.
- 2.7** The Board's fiduciary oversight and stewardship ensures the availability of the necessary fiscal resources to support the mission and provide for the optimum operation of the school.

- 2.8** The Board supports and oversees the school's fundraising initiatives and financially supports these as well.
- 2.9** The Board meets regularly and maintains comprehensive and accurate records of its policies, meetings, and committee meetings.
- 2.10** The Board engages in succession planning for challenges in Head and Board leadership roles in order to provide stability and continuity for the school.

Proprietary schools are exempt from indicators 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6 and 2.8.

STRATEGIC AND LONG-TERM PLANNING

STANDARD 3: The Board (or governing body) engages in long-range and strategic thinking to support the continuous growth and development of the school.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 3:

- 3.1** The Board develops and approves a clearly stated multi-year strategic plan that outlines the major goals for school improvement and establishes the strategic priorities for the school.
- 3.2** The Board develops and approves a multi-year financial plan that supports the school's strategic plan and drives the development of the annual budget.
- 3.3** The Board engages in annual review of the strategic and financial plans that includes the review of relevant data as well as new strategic opportunities and challenges.

FINANCE

STANDARD 4: Consistent with its mission, the school plans and manages its financial operations in a manner that promotes strong fiscal health and sustainability while supporting its personnel, programs, facilities, and operations.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 4:

- 4.1** Evidence of financial stability in the form of an annual financial audit in compliance with GAAP must be prepared by an independent, certified public accountant (CPA).
- 4.2** The school manages its resources in an effective manner that advances the mission of the school and safeguards its assets for the future. Schools are required to maintain a total asset-to-total liability ratio of 1.5:1 or higher; other metrics of effective management include, but are not limited to, operation at a surplus over two or more consecutive budget years, including the most recent budget year; and current assets in excess of current liabilities.
- 4.3** The school has well documented financial and budgeting policies and procedures. There is a written annual operating budget that is reviewed and approved by the Board or governing body.
- 4.4** The school's financial plan provides for the accumulation of funds for unforeseen financial needs and addresses maintenance, repair and replacement of facilities.
- 4.5** All funds are under the control of the Head of School or Board.

ADVANCEMENT

STANDARD 5: The school engages in fundraising, marketing and other advancement activities congruent with its mission, philosophy and strategic goals.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 5:

- 5.1** The school has a comprehensive fundraising plan that meets both the annual and long-term funding goals of the school.
- 5.2** The school has methods in place for effectively educating constituencies about fundraising efforts and the school's financial needs.
- 5.3** The school maintains data documenting the effectiveness of its fundraising efforts and uses this data to improve its overall fundraising programs.
- 5.4** The school promotes a culture of philanthropy with key constituencies, including alumni, parents, grandparents, trustees, and other members of the community.
- 5.5** The school has marketing initiatives, both internal and external, that address the needs and goals of the school.

Proprietary schools are exempt from indicators 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4.

DATA AND RESEARCH

STANDARD 6: The school conducts research, collects data through effective methods, and uses the resulting information to support school improvement efforts.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 6:

- 6.1** The school utilizes appropriate and ongoing methods and tools for collecting data to inform school improvement. These methods are regularly reviewed and assessed for effectiveness.
- 6.2** The school allocates resources, including time, staff and budget, to pursue its data collection and research initiatives. There is evidence of the use of research and data in the operations of the school.
- 6.3** The school demonstrates an understanding of current research and best practices for the ongoing improvement of the educational program and school operations.
- 6.4** The school fully completes its annual survey and provides benchmarking information as required by FCIS on an annual basis.

ADMISSIONS

STANDARD 7: The school seeks an enrollment of mission-appropriate students consistent with its curriculum, culture and program through clearly stated admissions and financial assistance policies.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 7:

- 7.1** The school has determined its optimum enrollment and has established achievable enrollment targets for the next three to five years, which are included in the multi-year financial plan.

- 7.2 The school has admissions policies and procedures to ensure that the current and future composition of the student body is aligned with the mission of the school.
- 7.3 Prospective families and students are provided with information that clearly communicates the school's programs, typical costs of attendance, and the school's expectations for its students and their families.
- 7.4 The school allocates sufficient resources, both in personnel and in funding, to effectively execute its admissions programs.
- 7.5 When awarding financial assistance, the school communicates mission-appropriate, transparent criteria, policies and procedures to its constituents.
- 7.6 The school maintains the confidentiality of all aspects of the financial assistance process.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

STANDARD 8: The school's early childhood program reflects the mission and philosophy of the school and provides a developmentally-appropriate program and a safe environment for young children.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 8:

- 8.1 The early childhood program has a written philosophy regarding the wellness and education of young children that is consistent with the mission and educational philosophy of the school.
- 8.2 The director of the school's early childhood program must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree or international equivalent from an accredited institution in early childhood education or a related field.
- 8.3 All teachers of four- and five-year-olds must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in early childhood education or a related field.
- 8.4 All teachers for children from 18 months through PK3 must comply with one of the following requirements:
 - A bachelor's degree or international equivalent from an accredited institution with evidence that they are qualified for their specific responsibilities based on their education, training and/or experience.
 - An Associate of Arts degree in early childhood education or child development.
 - A Child Development Associate (CDA) or Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC) **if the faculty member was hired before August 2011.**
- 8.5 All classes must adhere to the following ratios and group sizes. For mixed groups, the ratio must be maintained according to the youngest child in the class.
 - 18 months-23 months: maximum child:staff ratio – 12:2
 - 2 years: maximum child:staff ratio – 14:2
 - 3 years: maximum child:staff ratio – 15:1
 - 4 years: maximum child:staff ratio – 20:1
 - 5 years: maximum child:staff ratio – 20:1

One adult must be a qualified lead teacher. In classrooms with students 36 months and older, an aide must be available to assist the teacher when needed. In classrooms with students 35 months and younger, an aide or additional teacher must be present at all times.

8.6 Students in the early childhood program must be under adult supervision at all times.

8.7 The early childhood curriculum includes core knowledge areas, including language and literacy, mathematical awareness, science, social studies, and fine arts. The early childhood curriculum also addresses the physical and tactile development of each child, including lessons that provide opportunities for students to develop both fine- and gross-motor skills.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

STANDARD 9: The school's curriculum and programs are consistent with its mission and philosophy. The school actively and regularly evaluates and revises its curriculum and programs to meet the evolving needs of its students.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 9:

9.1 The school has a curriculum consistent with its mission and philosophy that is designed to provide developmentally appropriate learning opportunities and experiences to meet the intellectual, emotional, physical and social needs of its students. The school maintains a curriculum guide that is updated annually and available to all constituents.

9.2 Classrooms and laboratories are furnished and equipped to provide a safe learning environment. The school provides instructional materials and equipment that support effective teaching and are appropriately aligned to the goals of the curriculum, and sufficient in quality and quantity.

9.3 With the goal of improving student learning, faculty and administration meet regularly for the purposes of instructional planning and evaluation of the educational program.

9.4 The school's programs provide guidance towards an understanding of diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion in a manner that is aligned with the school's mission.

9.5 The school provides evidence of a thoughtful process, respectful of its mission, for the collection and use of academic data, student learning outcomes, and standardized testing data to inform curriculum development.

9.6 Grade and progress reports are distributed to parents/guardians at regular intervals, and opportunities are provided for parents/guardians to meet with faculty and staff to discuss their student's progress. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled and documented at least once annually.

9.7 The school's media, technology and resource centers are adequately funded to support the educational program and to meet the needs of students, faculty and staff.

9.8 The school has a plan for the use and integration of technology for faculty and staff. The school provides professional growth opportunities for employees to remain current in technology skills, software and applications.

STUDENT LIFE

STANDARD 10: The school supports student learning and well-being through access to counseling and support services, as well as programs that encourage student engagement, health and wellness.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 10:

- 10.1** The school provides an orientation program for all new students.
- 10.2** The school provides developmentally-appropriate counseling services to assist and support the student body.
- 10.3** There are procedures for identifying and supporting students with learning differences; mission-appropriate resources are available for identifying and meeting students' learning needs.
- 10.4** Mission-appropriate clubs and extracurricular activities are offered to students. Appropriate staffing, supervision and resources are allocated for these activities.
- 10.5** The school's programs, services and facilities encourage the adoption of a healthy, active lifestyle, acknowledging the intellectual, social, physical, and emotional needs of its students
- 10.6** The school assists students, faculty, staff and parents in understanding physical and mental health issues and concerns.
- 10.7** Athletic offerings are aligned with the school's mission, carefully planned and executed, and have appropriate staffing, supervision and resources for every aspect of these activities.
- 10.8** In advance of graduation or completion of program, the school provides adequate services for mission-based college counseling, school placement and career planning.
- 10.9** The school enacts policies, training and practices to ensure that faculty, staff and students work collaboratively to build positive and appropriate relationships.
- 10.10** The school has a procedure for identifying students whom it can no longer effectively serve and for counseling the student and their parents in their search for a more suitable schooling option.

PERSONNEL

STANDARD 11: The school maintains a qualified faculty and staff sufficient and appropriate to execute its mission, programs and operations.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 11:

- 11.1** The faculty, staff and administration are of sufficient number to implement the full educational program of the school.
- 11.2** The Head of School must have either an advanced degree or a bachelor's degree or international equivalent from an accredited institution and several years of experience in teaching and/or administration.
- 11.3** All teachers and administrators have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution or the international equivalent.
- 11.4** The school demonstrates that all faculty, administration and staff are qualified for their

specific responsibilities based on their education, training and/or professional experience.

- 11.5** Auxiliary program staff (for example, security guards, custodial staff, facilities staff, food workers and bus drivers) are appropriately qualified, experienced and trained and adhere to all policies and procedures of the school.
- 11.6** The school provides the services of qualified technology personnel. Schools that outsource and/or supplement technology functions must hire technology consultants who possess technical certifications in the areas they are contracted to support.
- 11.7** All new faculty and staff are provided with an orientation that outlines the school's mission, educational philosophy, and culture as well as an overview of school policies and procedures.
- 11.8** The school distributes clearly written personnel policies that are fair and transparent with respect to benefits, workloads and working conditions. Employee handbooks require a signed acknowledgment of receipt annually.
- 11.9** The Head of School, or an appropriate administrator, evaluates annually all faculty and staff through a defined process that is consistent, clearly articulated and understood by all employees.
- 11.10** The school provides access to professional development opportunities for which funds are allocated in the annual budget. There is evidence that administrators, faculty and staff members consistently pursue professional growth opportunities.

SAFETY, SECURITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

STANDARD 12: The school promotes a safe, healthy, secure environment and safeguards school assets by identifying risks and developing and executing policies and procedures to control and minimize loss or harm.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 12:

- 12.1** The school has adequate and appropriate insurance for the transfer of liability, property and casualty risk.
- 12.2** The school has written policies and procedures, in keeping with state and federal laws, that govern the maintenance, retention, use and accessibility of past and present personnel, financial, corporate, legal, health, safety, facilities and student records. All records are safeguarded from loss, catastrophe and identity theft.
- 12.3** All full and part-time employees submit to a background check and Level II fingerprinting. This includes drivers of school vehicles and auxiliary staff, including those provided by independent, contracted suppliers.
- 12.4** The school has processes in place to prevent and respond to child abuse, including training that addresses state-mandated reporting requirements.
- 12.5** The plant, equipment, and facilities are suited to the purpose and adequate for the operation of the overall program of the school. They are maintained and operated in a manner assuring the health and safety of the students, faculty, and staff in compliance with all federal, state, and local health, safety and sanitation codes and legislation.
- 12.6** Vehicles are regularly inspected and operated in accordance with all applicable laws, including federal, state and local regulations for safety, inspections and child safety

restraints.

- 12.7** Sufficient financial, physical and human resources are allocated to reasonably assure the safety, security and protection of all members of the school community, including all school-sanctioned activities held on and off campus.
- 12.8** The health care program is appropriately staffed and resourced to adequately meet the needs of the students. Sufficient space is provided for the isolation of ill students.
- 12.9** The school has written policies and procedures for handling illness and injury as well as reporting health and safety issues to the appropriate personnel and, when applicable, parents and guardians.
- 12.10** Food service staff and facilities meet all federal, state and local codes and health standards. Food provided by the school's food service promotes healthy choices and good nutrition.
- 12.11** The school has a comprehensive written crisis and security plan that is reviewed and updated annually, practiced regularly, and is clearly understood by all faculty, staff, and students.
- 12.12** The school has arrival and dismissal procedures in place to provide for the supervision and safety of students.
- 12.13** The school complies with federal regulations in regard to discrimination in employment and fair employment practices and does not discriminate in any other activities. Evidence of compliance is available to all of the school's constituents.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

STANDARD 13: The school clearly understands its obligations to meet the needs of its international students by providing adequate programming, appropriately-trained faculty and staff, counseling support, housing, and the development of meaningful, cross-cultural relationships across the school community.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 13:

- 13.1** The school provides training, professional development, and evaluation for all faculty and staff regarding the unique needs of international students.
- 13.2** Schools with homestay programs have clear, written guidelines for homestay students and host families, actively monitor compliance with those guidelines, and regularly review the effectiveness of the homestay program.
- 13.3** The school provides opportunities for positive interactions between domestic and international students in order to promote inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding.
- 13.4** The school provides a mechanism through which regular communication between parents and the school occurs, regardless of language barriers or cultural differences.
- 13.5** When necessary, the school provides appropriate learning opportunities and curriculum for the development of English fluency or an alternative language of instruction.
- 13.6** Classroom teaching methods effectively provide for students for whom English, or an alternative language of instruction, is not their first language. Faculty receive training and professional development regarding curriculum and instruction delivery to non-native English speakers.

DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

STANDARD 14: Domestic and international travel is mission appropriate and well planned with clear expectations for execution and behavior.

Indicators that a school meets standard 14:

- 14.1** The purpose of student travel is in alignment with the school's mission.
- 14.2** Student travel is carefully planned to minimize interference with students' academic schedules, requirements and responsibilities.
- 14.3** Domestic and international trips have a trip sponsor who has overall accountability for development and implementation of the event or activity. The trip sponsor is the faculty or staff member responsible for handling the logistics of the trip, collecting the required information from participants, overseeing the health and safety of students, designating trip chaperones, and conducting follow-up activities.
- 14.4** The school has written policies and procedures governing domestic and international travel, including emergency procedures, chaperone responsibilities and expectations for student behavior.

RESIDENTIAL LIFE

STANDARD 15: The school's residential life program is mission-aligned and purposefully planned, resourced, and staffed to provide a safe and enriching experience for all boarding students.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 15:

- 15.1** The school has a written, regularly reviewed and evaluated residential life curriculum with defined goals and objectives consistent with the school's mission and philosophy.
- 15.2** The residential program is a part of the overall program of the school, and the school promotes and nurtures relationships between residential and day students.
- 15.3** The residential program has sufficient 24-hour per day adult supervision by residential faculty and staff who are qualified and trained to meet the needs of the students under their supervision and are capable of serving in loco parentis.
- 15.4** Residential faculty and staff receive regular professional development and training regarding topics applicable to the supervision and development of students in their care, based on an explicit set of values and goals for the boarding student program.
- 15.5** Evening, weekend, and, if applicable, vacation offerings are purposefully planned and supervised to meet the needs of boarding students and are integrated into the overall residential life curriculum.
- 15.6** The school has clearly defined, written policies concerning residential life, leaves, privileges and behavioral expectations that are distributed and explained to students, faculty and staff, and parents/guardians.
- 15.7** Residential facilities are safe, adequately supervised, well-maintained and appropriate to meet the needs of the students in the residential program.
- 15.8** The school has a policy regarding the needs of residential students receiving financial assistance as to costs associated with activities outside the school day.
(See 7.3)

PROPRIETARY SCHOOLS

STANDARD 16: Proprietary schools ensure effective leadership, clear organizational structure, and the necessary resources to successfully execute the mission of the school.

Indicators that a school meets standard 16:

- 16.1** The owner/governing body establishes and maintains policy-making processes with provisions for the participation of all stakeholders, as appropriate.
- 16.2** The school establishes and follows policies applicable to ownership that address conflicts of interest and provide protection against malfeasance by persons exercising control over the school.
- 16.3** There is a clear organizational chart that defines the roles and responsibilities of the school's owner/governing body, administration, faculty and staff.
- 16.4** One person is designated as the chief administrator (Head, Principal, President, etc.) of the school; this person may be the owner.
- 16.5** The designated chief administrator is evaluated on an annual basis.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

STANDARD 17: The school serves a defined student population consistent with its mission and provides appropriate curricular, behavioral and educational support for all students in the program.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 17:

- 17.1** The school specifies clearly its criteria for admission into the special education program.
- 17.2** The school maintains a record for each student enrolled in its special education program. The record includes:
 - evaluations that identify the specific needs of the student;
 - student strengths and needed program components;
 - the comprehensive program plan devised to meet the identified needs with clearly specified goals and objectives;
 - documentation of the review and revision of the program plan and its goals and objectives in consideration of the student's progress;
 - documentation of records access by individuals.
- 17.3** The program has a written, comprehensive curriculum that addresses all of the program's specific areas of instruction or training. The curriculum identifies mastery goals, objectives, and minimal standards in each course of instruction at each grade or developmental level, including, where appropriate, personal, social, behavioral, life management, and career independence.
- 17.4** In programs that enroll high school students, where appropriate, curriculum options exist to provide the opportunity for students to accrue credits towards graduation.
- 17.5** A behavioral support system is employed within the program and is consistent with the school's mission, philosophy and goals. The system allows for flexibility in response to individual student needs, and is understood and consistently implemented by all faculty

and staff.

- 17.6** The school has a system in place for evaluating individuals providing additional educational support services, such as occupational therapists, psychologists, speech therapists. Verification of licensure, continuing professional development, and accountability for delivery of services in alignment with the school's mission, educational philosophy, policies and procedures should be included in this assessment.

ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING

STANDARD 18: The school's online and/or blended learning offerings are integrated into the school's overall program, and provide high-quality, rigorous, and mission-appropriate learning opportunities for students.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 18:

- 18.1** Online courses or instruction offered by the school are mission-appropriate and comparable to the analogous courses taught on campus.
- 18.2** Online courses or instruction offered by the school are either developed and executed by the school or accredited by a recognized agency.
- 18.3** Schools that do not identify themselves as institutions that teach courses entirely or primarily through online methods, i.e. a "virtual school", clearly communicate to students and parents which courses are taught exclusively online.
- 18.4** In any circumstance in which a student spends more than 25 percent of their academic day taking online courses not developed and delivered by the school, the school must clearly explain and justify its choice of this instructional method of delivery.
- 18.5** Student attendance and student progress are tracked during all times students are in online courses or experiencing online instruction.
- 18.6** Applicable school policies, such as academic integrity and appropriate use, should specifically reference online learning.
- 18.7** Faculty members teaching online courses receive adequate training and professional development opportunities in the delivery and use of online learning, including strategies to promote academic integrity and appropriate use.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Member schools are evaluated every five years unless they report a substantive change (see page 42). In January of the year prior to the school's evaluation year, FCIS will assign an FCIS Chairperson to lead the school's evaluation. The school is notified via e-mail. Once the assignment is made, the school and the chairperson should work together to find mutually agreeable dates for the evaluation visit (see page 29) and for the Compliance visit (see page 32).

Once the school and chairperson notify the FCIS Office of the evaluation dates, FCIS builds the evaluation team (see page 27), while the school continues to work on its self-study, which is due 30 days before the evaluation.

Next, the evaluation itself takes place, and the team and chairperson generate a report which must be submitted to the FCIS Office within two weeks of the evaluation.

The FCIS Office reviews the evaluation report and then submits a draft-only version to the Head of School for informational edits. Once the report is reviewed by the school, it is sent to the FCIS Commission on Accreditation.

The FCIS Commission on Accreditation meets four times per year (October, January, April, and June). The Commission reads each school's report and makes an accreditation determination that is recommended to the FCIS Board of Directors, which typically meets one week after the Commission. The Board then votes to accept the Commission's recommendation or to change the accreditation determination to another accreditation status (see below).

After the Board meeting, the school is notified via letter as to the outcome. FCIS has four accreditation statuses:

Continued Accreditation – This means the school is fully accredited in good standing without any sanctions or issues. Unless there is a substantive change, the school will not be evaluated again for five years.

Warned status – This means that the school is fully accredited but must address issues in the report as determined by the FCIS Board of Directors. The school shall have a period of no longer than three years to address those issues. The FCIS Board may choose a time frame that is shorter than three years if warranted.

Probation status – This means that the school will remain accredited for a period of no longer than one year, during which it must undergo a follow-up evaluation to move to either warned or continued accreditation status. Failure to make significant progress on issues presented in the report within that year may result in the removal of accreditation.

Accreditation removed – If a school's accreditation is removed, it has 30 days to write a letter requesting an appeal. That appeal must be made before the FCIS Board of Directors in person. If the appeal is accepted, the FCIS Board will issue mandates that must be followed. If the appeal is denied, the school will no longer be an accredited member of FCIS.

PREPARING FOR A FULL EVALUATION: A SAMPLE TIMELINE

12 to 18 months before the evaluation:

- Inform the school and appropriate constituents that the school is entering the self-study and re-accreditation process with FCIS.
- Engage in a review of the school's mission and philosophy.
- Choose the self-study Coordinator. Begin adding collaborators to the FCIS Accreditation Portal.
- Ensure that the school's financial audit will be available prior to the evaluation.
- Start drafting Essential Questions. (see page 23)
- Attend FCIS-sponsored events on accreditation and evaluation.

12 (or more) months before the evaluation:

- Form self-study committees and subcommittees and begin writing the self-study.
- Submit Essential Questions to the FCIS office by September 1st.
- Review all standards for accreditation. Begin assembling documents for compliance.
- Review health and safety procedures for faculty, students, and staff. Practice emergency drills, if needed.
- Ensure the following documents are up-to-date and ready for review:
 - Strategic Plan
 - Curriculum Guide
 - Technology Plan
 - Financial Plan
 - Crisis Plan
 - School manuals (personnel, student, parent, etc.)
- Conduct any constituent surveys, if needed.
- Designate someone to handle the logistics of the team's visit (hotel, food, etc.).

3 to 4 months before the evaluation:

- The self-study committee should meet to ascertain the progress of the self-study.
- Decide how the opening reception and tour of the school will be handled and who will attend.
- Decide how the exit interview will be handled and who will attend.
- Draft a schedule for the team (see Sample Schedule on page 30). Select the constituents (parents, students, faculty members, trustees, etc.) who will meet with the team.
- Select a room in which the team will work. Decide what will be in the room (which documents and artifacts, refreshments, etc.).
- Make arrangements for hotel accommodations, meals, and transportation.

2 months prior to the evaluation:

- The Head of School and the Chairperson of the visiting team should discuss logistics of the evaluation – the schedule, accommodations, needs for the workroom, etc.
- Work towards completion of the self-study and any other documentation required for compliance.

1 month prior to the evaluation:

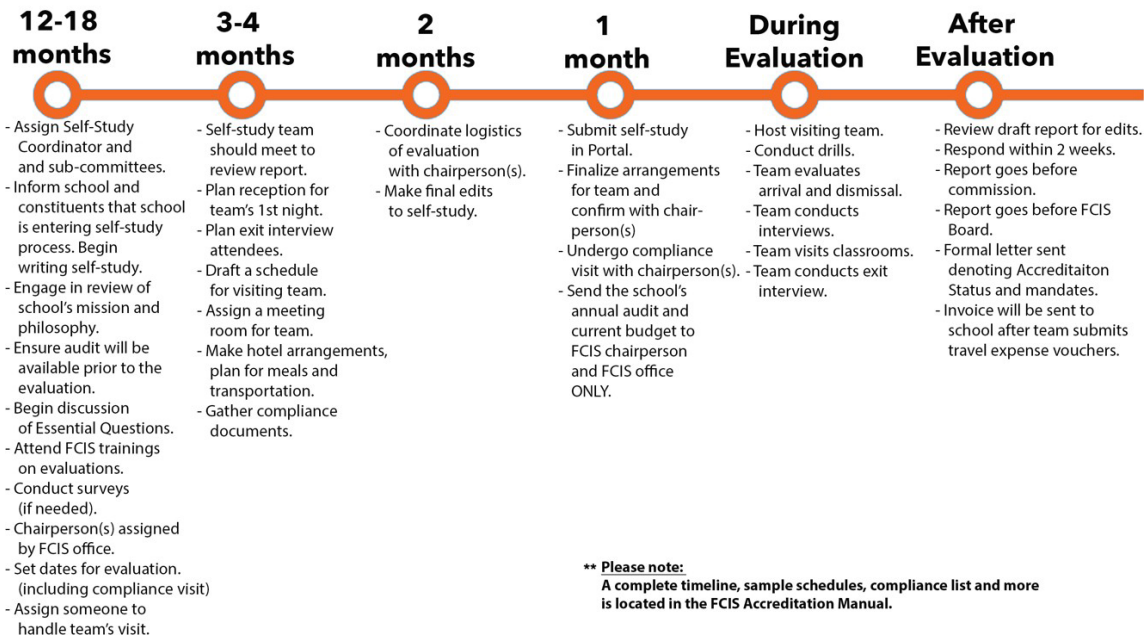
- Finalize all arrangements for the team.
- Complete the self-study and submit it through the FCIS Accreditation Portal. (All sections must be complete in order to submit.)
- Undergo a compliance visit (either electronically or in person). This should occur approximately 30 days before the evaluation, as agreed upon by the chairperson(s) and the school.

One week before the evaluation:

- The Head of School and team Chairperson should touch base to clear up any last-minute details prior to the team's arrival.



Evaluation Timeline for Schools



WRITING THE SELF-STUDY

The self-study provides an opportunity for the school community to take a close look at its mission, operations, programs, and future. Preparation of the self-study should involve multiple constituencies of the school. All faculty and staff, where appropriate, should have input. The self-study process is of benefit to the school, as it requires a full school community effort, prompts reflection on the school's current state, clarifies future goals, and encourages ownership of school improvement plans among faculty and staff.

Schools should begin the FCIS self-study process in the year prior to their evaluation year. The amount of time it takes varies from school to school, depending on size, grade levels, number of programs offered, etc.

The FCIS self-study is to be done through the FCIS Accreditation Portal. Schools should accurately report whether they meet or do not meet each indicator. If a school, while reviewing the FCIS Standards and Indicators prior to an evaluation, discovers that it is out of compliance, the school should disclose that within the self-study. Being transparent about non-compliance allows the evaluating team to be of greatest help to the school.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Schools should identify questions that go to the heart of their school improvement efforts and will provoke deep thought and discussion on the part of team members. These "Essential Questions" must also be included in the self-study. In addition, schools are required to submit "Essential Questions" to the FCIS office no later than **September 1** of their evaluation year. This gives the FCIS office time to find team members that can help answer these questions and offer help and guidance to the school.

The following are real examples of schools' Essential Questions:

"How can we encourage faculty retention and boost faculty wellness?"

"We keep adding programs, but are we doing enough evaluation of existing programs for effectiveness? Are we overloading/stressing our facilities and human resources?"

"Does our STEM program meet the needs of our 21st Century learners and if not, how can we improve?"

"Using data to support decisions, how do we maintain fiscal stability as well as continue to provide competitive salary, opportunities, and benefits for potential faculty and staff?"

RESPONSES TO SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the evaluating team's report, a number of Special Recommendations will appear. These are the major recommendations made by the team, and these must be addressed by the evaluated school.

Official responses to the Special Recommendations are due by no later than June 30 of the year following the evaluation year.

The general format should include a copy of the recommendation verbatim from the report, followed by the school's response to that recommendation. Here is an example:

Recommendation:

The school should investigate several inexpensive activities that could be added in the coming months to engage students in non-academic pursuits. These might include intramural sports, an archery club, surfing, a middle school culinary club, etc. It is the belief of the committee that immediate expansion of engaging activities for current students has great positive potential for retention.

Response:

The school has begun to offer an expanded program of extracurricular activities for students to engage in throughout the school year. This included the introduction of intramural soccer, which had two seasons in the fall and spring. In addition, during the next school year, we are planning to expand these offerings to include short court basketball intramurals as well. We also will be creating an activity space for middle school students to offer additional structured activities including board games, athletic tournaments, and supervised leisure time. Plans are in the works to create an Activities Director position as funds allow.

Sometimes a school is unable to -- or makes a conscious decision not to -- implement the strategies proposed by the evaluating team. The reasons for non-implementation should be included in the response to the recommendation.

SELECTION AND ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

SELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Chairpersons are selected by the FCIS office in January or February of the year preceding a school's evaluation year. Criteria for choosing the Chairperson include similarity of schools, whether that person has evaluated the school previously, and potential conflicts of interest. Neither the school nor the Chairperson has input into this process until after the choice is made. If either the Chair or school has a concern regarding the chairperson assignment, they should contact the FCIS office for assistance. Sometimes a school will also have an FCIS Vice-Chair; this is a chairperson who is new to conducting evaluations.

Chairpersons must be Head of an FCIS school, a retired Head of an FCIS school, and/or a current or former member of the FCIS Board of Directors. All Chairpersons must participate in FCIS Chairperson training, which is typically offered each summer prior to the FCIS Heads' Retreat.

Once a Chair has been selected, FCIS will notify the school via e-mail. After that, the school and Chairperson should work on the logistics of the evaluation, including evaluation dates (see page 29). While the FCIS office is available to assist, most of the conversation should take place between the school and the Chair(s).

THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

CHAIR TASKS BEFORE THE EVALUATION

In the months before evaluation, the chair should:

- Set evaluation dates with the school head and communicate dates with the FCIS Office.
- Discuss the date of the Compliance Visit, and/or whether it will be in-person or virtual.
- Be available to consult with the school as it prepares.
- Discuss potential team members with the Director of Accreditation and Assistant Director of Accreditation, as appropriate.
- Communicate expectations regarding the visit schedule with the Head of School.
- Make personal travel arrangements.
- Make arrangements with the Head of School for a private committee workroom in the school and in the hotel.
- Become familiar with the school's previous evaluation reports and special recommendations, which will be sent to you by the FCIS Office.

One month before the evaluation, the chair should:

- Ensure that the self-study has been submitted to the FCIS Accreditation Portal prior to compliance visit.
- Conduct a compliance visit, either on-site or virtually (as previously determined).
- Discuss any standard/indicator issues with the school.
- Begin checking off indicators in the FCIS Accreditation Portal.
- Confirm receipt of the school's financial information.

One week before evaluation, the chair should:

- Check with the Head of School to ensure that everything is in place for the visit.
- Participate in a conference call with the FCIS Office and all team members.
- Assign team members to standards in the FCIS Accreditation Portal.

CHAIR TASKS DURING THE EVALUATION

- Schedule a meeting prior to the beginning of the evaluation (usually upon arrival at the hotel) to make introductions and discuss meeting logistics.
- Ensure that all team members know their roles and how to use the portal.
- Manage the team and its tasks, as well as the logistics of the evaluation.
- Create an observation schedule for teachers.
- Schedule “working lunch” meetings with the team on both days to discuss initial impressions, standards violations, and commendations and recommendations.
- Be sure the team observes arrival and dismissal procedures as well as a fire drill.
- If dinner on the second night is in a public area (such as a restaurant), ensure that no discussion of the school and the evaluation takes place.
- Meet in the hotel working space after hours as needed to complete reports and review standards.
- Conduct a final full committee meeting to reach a consensus on special commendations and special recommendations.
- Meet with the Head of School privately prior to the exit interview in order to summarize the team’s findings.
- Distribute and collect reimbursement forms from team members.
- Make sure each team member has finished their assigned sections of the report.
- Hold an exit interview with the Head of School and representatives of the school (as agreed upon by the Head and Chair). All team members should be present at the exit interview.

CHAIR TASKS AFTER THE EVALUATION

- Submit team member evaluations and expense reports as soon as possible to the FCIS Office.
- Proof and approve all sections of the self-study.
- Submit the final report in the portal **within two weeks** of the evaluation. Contact the FCIS Office to confirm receipt.

SELECTION AND ROLE OF THE TEAM

SELECTION OF THE TEAM

Evaluation teams are formed by the FCIS Director of Accreditation and Assistant Director of Accreditation. All prospective team members undergo training and sign an electronic FCIS Confidentiality Agreement. The size of the team is based on the school's grade levels and total enrollment, following the guidelines below:

- Elementary (schools with grades 5 and below only)
 - 25-250 students: 4-5 team members
 - 250 or more students: 5-8 team members
- Elementary/Middle (schools with students below grade 5 and in grades 6, 7 and/or 8 only)
 - 25-300 students: 6-7 team members
 - 300 or more students: 8-10 team members
- Elementary/Secondary (schools with students below grade 5 and in grades 9, 10, 11 and/or 12)
 - 25-500 students: 10-12 team members
 - 500 or more students: 12-14 team members
- Middle/Secondary (schools with students in grades 6-8 and 9-12 only)
 - 25-500 students: 6-10 team members
 - 500 or more students: 10-14 team members
- Secondary (schools with students in grades 9-12 only)
 - 25-500 students: 6-10 team members
 - 500-800 students: 10-12 team members
 - 800 or more students: 12-14 team members

Team composition is based on factors that take into consideration both the evaluation process and the needs of the school in its improvement efforts. When forming teams, the FCIS office attempts to recruit:

- team members that have participated in the school's previous evaluation
- team members from schools with similar compositions and/or missions
- team members that can evaluate all aspects of school operations
- team members that can address the school's identified "Essential Questions" (see page 23)
- team members from schools located more than 30 miles from the school being evaluated

ROLE OF THE TEAM

In general, a team member's role is to evaluate whether the school is living its mission, validate the school's self-study as accurate, ensure that the school meets FCIS standards and indicators (see pages 8-18), and give the school recommendations and ideas for improvement. To prepare for this role, team members review information about the school, including its website and other online presence, and the self-study. Team members participate in an online conference call one week prior to the evaluation.

A team member must be willing to –

- conduct themselves professionally at all times.
- put aside the mission, philosophy, and beliefs of their own school and focus on the school being evaluated.
- treat all discussions, materials, and documents pertaining to the evaluation as completely confidential.
- spend time before the evaluation learning about the school and reading the school's self-study.
- work collegially with others.
- be on time for scheduled meetings and events.
- help schools become better at meeting their mission and enhancing student learning.

Team members are evaluated by the chairperson(s) after the evaluation based on their ability to meet the above criteria.

SELECTING EVALUATION DATES

FCIS evaluations may take place anytime between September 15 and April 30. It is the responsibility of the school and the FCIS Chairperson to select dates for the evaluation. Evaluations are 2 ½ days long, usually starting on a Sunday afternoon and ending on a Tuesday afternoon. However, evaluations may begin on another day of the week, if desired (for example, starting Wednesday afternoon and ending Friday afternoon).

A school should carefully review its calendar before proposing dates to the chairperson. In addition, the school should consider the following:

- Religious holidays
- Federal holidays that occur on weekdays (i.e., President's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday)
- Major events (such as Super Bowl Sunday)
- Spring breaks and other breaks (such as "Ski Week")
- Subject/program-specific conflicts. For example, if a school needs assistance with technology, it is unwise to schedule the evaluation during FETC (Florida Educational Technology Conference). If a school is an IB school or offers AP courses, April is an unwise choice, as individuals in those programs will be unable to participate on the evaluating team.
- Availability of the school's financial audit

NOTE: Because of Spring Breaks, standardized testing, and (depending on the year) religious holidays, March is a difficult month for recruiting evaluation team members. Schools and chairpersons should keep this in mind should they choose evaluation dates in March.

Chairpersons and schools should consult with all involved chairpersons (for example, Vice-Chairs and/or representatives from other associations) before finalizing dates.

Once the evaluation and compliance dates are selected, the school must notify the FCIS office. FCIS attempts to limit evaluations to two per week so that the office can provide teams, schools, and chairpersons with the support they need. Therefore, selecting dates early will help ensure schools secure their preferred dates.

THE EVALUATION SCHEDULE

The school should work with the FCIS Chairperson to create a schedule for the evaluation. When creating the schedule, the school should consider the availability of various constituents (parents, department heads, Board members, etc.) and best timing for events such as fire drills. Below is a sample schedule for a full evaluation.

Day 1 (typically Sunday or Wednesday) – times are approximate:

3:00 p.m.	Meet with FCIS team in hotel meeting room
4:00	Team arrives on campus for tour and reviews documents, schedules, etc. in conference room
5:00	Reception with faculty, staff, parents, trustees, etc.
6:00	Dinner with team, school administrators, Steering Committee
8:00	Return to hotel

Day 2

7:00 a.m.	Team meets for breakfast in hotel or at school
7:30	Team observes arrival of students
8:00 – 12:00	Team observes classes, meets with faculty, trustees, parents
12:00	Team meets with student representatives
1:00	Team meets for working lunch
2:00	Observations continue
3:00	Team observes dismissal and after-school activities; meets with teachers
4:00	Team meeting
6:00	Team dinner and work on individual reports

Day 3

7:00 a.m.	Team breakfast, check out of hotel, arrive on campus
8:00 – noon	Finalize observations, meetings, fire drill
12:00	Team meets for working lunch
2:00	Chairs meet with Head of School; team finalizes the report in the portal
3:00	Exit Interview with team and school

EVALUATION EXPENSES

FOR SCHOOLS

FCIS does not charge accreditation fees; however, the host school is responsible for the team's expenses, including:

- Lodging (two nights for a Full Evaluation; one night for a Change or New School Candidate evaluation)
- Meals (two dinners, breakfasts, and lunches for a Full Evaluation; varies for Change and New School Candidate evaluations)
- Other travel-related expenses (see below)

Once a team member arrives at the hotel, they should have no out-of-pocket expenses (aside from personal, non-reimbursable expenses) through the end of the evaluation. Hotel rooms should be paid for in advance.

The school does not need to track individual team member expenses. Team members will be issued an Expense Voucher from FCIS. These vouchers are submitted to FCIS along with corresponding receipts after the evaluation is concluded. FCIS will send individual reimbursement checks to each team member, then invoice the host school for the total amount. As of this writing, individual team member travel expenses average at around \$100.00-\$200.00 per person.

FOR CHAIRPERSONS AND TEAM MEMBERS

FCIS team members are volunteers and are reimbursed for expenses incurred because of participating in an FCIS evaluation. Team members must keep all receipts for submission to the FCIS office. The following is a list of reimbursable expenses for those serving on an evaluation team:

- Mileage to and from the evaluation (reimbursed at 50 cents per mile)
- Car rental – Please note: If a team member rents a car, they may NOT claim mileage for reimbursement. If renting a car, the team member must keep gasoline receipts for reimbursement of gas costs.
- Toll expenses
- Meals eaten outside of the evaluation (i.e. on the road to and from the evaluation)
- Parking fees

On rare occasions, team members may fly to an evaluation. **Flights must be approved through the FCIS office first.** If a team member takes a flight to the evaluation, FCIS will reimburse:

- Flight expenses
- Ground transportation to and from the airport

PLEASE NOTE: FCIS does not reimburse for alcoholic beverages.

THE COMPLIANCE VISIT

All schools undergoing an evaluation must have a Compliance Visit (sometimes called a “pre-visit”). This visit should take place approximately 30 days before the school’s scheduled evaluation.

The visit may be in-person or virtual, or even a blend of both, as agreed upon by the evaluation chairperson(s) and the school. The primary purpose of the Compliance Visit is to affirm compliance with as many standards and indicators as possible and to identify indicators (if any) with which the school has challenges. This allows the school time to address any concerns, and also allows the evaluating team to focus on helping the school with its improvement goals and Essential Questions rather than focusing on checking standards.

In-person Compliance Visits are one-day-only, and typically involve the FCIS Chairperson and 1-2 additional team members. The school and chairperson(s) should work out the details of lodging and meals for the Compliance Visit. The school is responsible for securing and paying in advance for any lodging. The chairperson(s) and team members must submit an Expense Voucher to the FCIS Office for any reimbursable expenses (see page 31) incurred during the Compliance Visit.

All artifacts should be uploaded into the FCIS Accreditation Portal under the designated standard and indicator. On pages 33-39, there is a list of potential artifacts, organized by standard, that demonstrate compliance with standards and indicators. Those indicators that require interviews and/or observations as evidence are noted. The school may not have each artifact listed on the following pages, and some forms of evidence may be combined (for example, disciplinary policies may appear inside the student handbook).

The following is a list of **potential** artifacts, organized by standard, that demonstrate compliance with standards and indicators.

STANDARD 1: MISSION	
1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the school's mission statement, philosophy, core beliefs, etc. • Examples of places where the mission is posted • May also be confirmed through interviews with stakeholders
1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of programs or recent decisions that were guided by the mission and/or educational philosophy
1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample of minutes from Board meeting confirming review of mission statement • Written process for making changes to the school's mission
1.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be confirmed through interviews and observations
STANDARD 2: GOVERNANCE	
2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational chart
2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's Bylaws • Minutes of Board meeting demonstrating review of school Bylaws
2.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Bylaws • Board Policies Manual • Copies of Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policies, signed by Board members
2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational chart • Must also be confirmed through interviews and observations
2.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of Head of School's most recent evaluation • Must also be confirmed through interviews and observations
2.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Policies Manual • Examples of continuing education activities undertaken by the Board • Copy of the Board's most recent self-evaluation
2.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be confirmed through interviews and observations, as well as a review of finances (see Standard 4)
2.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of fundraising activities • Evidence of Board participation in fundraising • Fundraising plan
2.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Bylaws • Board Policies Manual • Records of Board and Committee meetings, including minutes, agendas, etc.
2.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession plan for the Head of School • Succession plan for Board Leadership
STANDARD 3: STRATEGIC AND LONG TERM PLANNING	
3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the school's strategic plan • Board meeting minutes or other documentation of the Board monitoring the progress of the plan
3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the school's multi-year financial plan
3.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process for annual review of strategic and financial plans

STANDARD 4: FINANCE	
4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the school's most recent audit
4.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the school's most recent audit
4.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of written financial and budgeting policies
4.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the school's multi-year financial plan
4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed through interviews and review of financial documents above
STANDARD 5: ADVANCEMENT	
5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of school's fundraising plan
5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of school communication, marketing, etc. regarding fundraising events and initiatives
5.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising data • Examples of improvements/changes made to fundraising programs as a result of data
5.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This must be confirmed through interviews with various constituencies
5.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of school marketing materials, social media, etc.
STANDARD 6: DATA AND RESEARCH	
6.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of school data collection, such as (but not limited to) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessment data ○ Admissions data ○ Survey results ○ Faculty/staff demographics ○ Student outcomes (college or secondary school acceptance, etc.)
6.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of data and research initiatives at the school • Calendar of meetings where data and research took place/was discussed • Examples of data- or research-driven decision making at the school
6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be confirmed through interviews, observations, and document review
6.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be confirmed through the FCIS office
STANDARD 7: ADMISSIONS	
7.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the school's 3-5 year financial plan • Projected enrollment for 3-5 years
7.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of school's admissions policies • Explanation of admissions procedures
7.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of admissions materials provided to parents • School website information (if applicable)
7.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions budget • List of admissions personnel • Must also be confirmed through interviews and observations

7.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial aid policies Financial aid budget
7.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial aid policy regarding confidentiality
STANDARD 8: EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS (for schools with students below grade 1)	
8.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission and philosophy of the early childhood program
8.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early childhood director's personnel file/credentials
8.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty/administrator data sheet Faculty files, if requested
8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty/administrator data sheet Faculty files, if requested
8.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class sizes and ratios for all classes PK1-K
8.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This will be confirmed through observation and interviews
8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early childhood curriculum guide Samples of early childhood lesson plans
STANDARD 9: ACADEMIC PROGRAM	
9.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copy of, or online access to, the school's curriculum guide Samples of lesson plans
9.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This will be confirmed through observations and interviews
9.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of faculty meetings, vertical team meetings, departmental meetings, grade level meetings, etc.
9.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of lessons, activities, student travel, assemblies, etc. that reflect the school's position on diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion.
9.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardized testing data Samples of other collected academic data Alumni data, such as college or secondary acceptances, matriculation rates (from high school, college, graduate school, etc.), career information, alumni surveys, etc. Examples of program decisions made as a result of data analysis
9.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample of a grade report Dates for distribution of grade reports Policies and schedules regarding parent/guardian opportunities to meet with faculty and staff.
9.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credentials for media center staff Credentials for technology personnel School budget
9.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written minimum competencies for use and integration of technology for faculty and staff Examples of professional development activities/opportunities related to technology use.

STANDARD 10: STUDENT LIFE

10.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student orientation schedules and supporting documents (agendas, handbooks, etc.)
10.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of school counseling services and/or counseling resources
10.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies regarding students with learning differences • List of academic support programs (if applicable)
10.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of extracurricular activities and responsible staff members.
10.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be confirmed through observations and interviews.
10.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of communications to students and parents regarding health risks (for example, concussion information, symptoms of depression, etc.) • Examples of faculty and staff training regarding physical and mental health issues • Lesson plans that address physical and mental health issues • List of any related school activities (assemblies, field trips, etc.)
10.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of athletic offerings and responsible staff/coaches. • Athletic and coaching handbooks. • Policies regarding athletics.
10.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications regarding college counseling and vocation planning (if applicable) • Policies and procedures related to the college counseling office (if applicable) • List of events related to college counseling and vocational planning (college night, career day, college reps visiting campus, etc.)
10.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of professional development and training offered on critical issues, such as bullying, identifying drug abuse or sexual abuse, role as a mandatory reporter, etc. • Description of advisory or other such programs that enable positive relationships among students and staff.
10.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for counseling out students
STANDARD 11: PERSONNEL	
11.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff to student ratio. • This will also be confirmed through observations and interviews.
11.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of School resume
11.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/Administrator Data Sheet • Personnel files should be available for inspection upon request
11.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/Administrator Data Sheet • Personnel files should be available for inspection upon request
11.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of all non-faculty/administration staff members and their positions • Personnel files should be available for inspection upon request
11.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications for all technology personnel • Name and information regarding any contracted technology services • Personnel files should be available for inspection upon request

11.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation of orientation for new faculty and staff (agenda, orientation manual/handbook, etc.)
11.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personnel manual Faculty manual (if separate) Any other employee manuals (Coaches' Manual, Substitute Teachers' Manual, etc.) School compensation policy (if separate from personnel manual) Acknowledgement of receipt
11.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personnel evaluation policy and supporting documents (evaluation form, observation schedules, etc.) Completed evaluations in personnel files (for inspection as requested)
11.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of in-service professional development Sample of employee Professional Development Plan Sample of employee Professional Development log Copy of policy for requesting professional development funds School budget with line item for professional development/training
STANDARD 12: SAFETY, SECURITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT	
12.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proof of liability insurance coverage Proof of vehicular insurance coverage (if applicable)
12.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Records retention policy Records available for inspection, upon request
12.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence that level 2 screenings have taken place, such as consent forms, personnel policies, etc.
12.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies for reporting suspected child abuse Evidence of training addressing state-mandated reporting requirements
12.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private School Inspection Report, current (form DH 4030 or DH 4023) Fire code inspection and compliance report, current This standard must also be confirmed through observation
12.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most recent inspections for all school-owned vehicles
12.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will be confirmed through interviews and observations
12.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the school's health care program, including responsible staff Policies regarding medication storage and dispensation
12.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written policies for handling illness or injury Policies for reporting health and safety issues on campus
12.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Service Inspection Report, current Menu samples
12.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crisis Plan Log of fire drills, weather drills, lock down, etc.
12.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrival and dismissal procedures Communication to parents regarding pick up/drop off Map of traffic pattern
12.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copy of non-discrimination policies for employment and admissions

STANDARD 13: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	
13.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of training for faculty and staff regarding the needs of international students (schedules, agendas, training materials, etc.)
13.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homestay policies Written documentation of evaluation of homestay program
13.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of any events/lessons/projects that promote cross-cultural understanding (International Festival, holiday celebrations, guest speakers, etc.)
13.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures for communicating with non-English speaking parents/guardians
13.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESOL curriculum and related materials
13.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of professional development for teachers regarding teaching to non-native English speakers
STANDARD 14: DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL	
14.1 through 14.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of domestic and international travel opportunities provided by the school and the names of the trip sponsors.
14.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written policies and procedures for domestic and international travel Samples of other artifacts (permission slips, packets sent to parents, brochures, etc.)
STANDARD 15: RESIDENTIAL LIFE (for schools with boarding programs)	
15.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential Life Curriculum Procedures for reviewing and revising the curriculum
15.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will be confirmed through interviews and observations.
15.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedules for residential staff Hiring qualifications for residential staff (files should be available for inspection, if requested) Residential staff job descriptions
15.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of professional development offered to residential staff Sample of professional development logs for residential staff
15.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of evening, weekend and vacation offerings for residential students
15.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential student handbook
15.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will be confirmed through interviews and observations.
15.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies for residential students on financial assistance
STANDARD 16: PROPRIETARY SCHOOLS (for privately-owned and corporations for profit)	
16.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of stakeholder participation in policy-making, such as meeting agendas, minutes

16.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of pertinent policies, such as hiring, budgeting, financial review, compensation, etc.
16.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational chart
16.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of the Head of School
16.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of Head of School evaluation; for example, evaluation by ownership, surveys of constituents, self-evaluation, personal growth plans, etc.
STANDARD 17: SPECIAL EDUCATION (for schools with defined special education programs and/or taking McKay and/or Gardiner funds)	
17.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions criteria, policies and procedures for the special education program
17.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records for special education students should be available for inspection
17.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special education curriculum
17.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diploma types offered, and credit requirements for each type
17.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral support policies and procedures
17.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies regarding contracted support service providers (i.e., occupational or speech therapists, psychologists, etc.)
STANDARD 18: ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING	
18.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be determined through interviews
18.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of online courses offered and by whom, including accreditation if an outside provider is used
18.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum guide or other documentation through which students and parents are informed as to which courses are online
18.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written exceptions for any student spending more than 25 percent of their day taking online classes
18.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of online student attendance • Online student attendance policies
18.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School academic integrity policy • School appropriate use policy
18.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule of professional development for teachers engaged in online or blended learning

ACCREDITATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

FCIS has cooperative accreditation agreements with the following agencies:

- Cognia
- Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)
- Christian Schools of Florida (CSF)

In our agreements with all four agencies, FCIS is the lead evaluator on all cooperative evaluations. This means that the school must follow and complete FCIS accreditation protocols (including the FCIS self-study model), be evaluated by a team formed through the FCIS office, and work with FCIS to schedule evaluation dates. While these agreements are cooperative, they are not reciprocal. If a school seeking accreditation is already accredited by one of the above agencies, the school must still undergo an FCIS-led evaluation in order to become an accredited member of FCIS.

The following briefly outlines some details about each type of cooperative evaluation:

Cognia

Cognia and FCIS routinely perform “crosswalks” of standards to ensure alignment. Therefore, there is no need on the part of the school to address Cognia standards as part of the self-study process.

Cognia does not send additional team members to participate in the school’s evaluation. Cognia accepts the FCIS evaluation report and makes its accreditation determination based on that report. In general, little communication is required between the FCIS school and the Cognia Nonpublic Schools office. Cognia will send the school its final accreditation determination via e-mail.

Southern Association of Independent Schools

A school seeking cooperative accreditation with FCIS and the Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS) should contact the SAIS Director of Accreditation. While SAIS accepts the FCIS self-study, there are additional steps required for SAIS accreditation, such as completion of an RFP (Request for Participation) and uploads to the SAIS Accreditation Portal. Schools should contact SAIS for details on all those requirements.

SAIS sends two chairpersons on each cooperative evaluation with FCIS. They are responsible for confirming compliance with SAIS standards and any other tasks required by the SAIS office.

Association of Christian Schools International

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) sends 2-3 team members (depending on the size of the school) to check religious distinctives. Other ACSI standards are in alignment with FCIS standards. Schools should contact the Florida ACSI Office for any additional instruction regarding ACSI accreditation.

Christian Schools of Florida

As with ACSI, Christian Schools of Florida (CSF) sends 2-3 team members to check religious distinctives. Other CSF standards are in alignment with FCIS standards. Schools should contact the CSF Office for any additional instruction regarding CSF accreditation.

In summary, with all FCIS cooperative evaluations –

- The school should complete the FCIS self-study
- Dates should be set through the FCIS Chairperson, with input from the other association's chairpersons
- FCIS will form the evaluation team
- The school should contact the outside association with questions about that specific association's additional requirements

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE EVALUATIONS

FCIS Bylaws require that a school be evaluated within one year of undergoing a substantive change. FCIS considers the following to be substantive changes:

- Change of Leadership: This means that the school has a new Chief Administrator (Head, President, Principal, etc.), who is responsible for the overall day-to-day operations of the school. This includes Interim and Acting Heads of School.
- Change of Ownership: This means that the school's ownership has been transferred. In the case of a for-profit school, this occurs when the current owner sells to another individual or corporation, or when a for-profit corporation converts to a not-for-profit corporation. While ownership changes are rare for not-for-profit schools, they most frequently occur when a religious entity (church, mosque, synagogue, etc.) relinquishes ownership of an attached school, and that school becomes a separate 501 (c)3 not-for-profit corporation.
- Change of Program: This means that the school has undergone a change to its school population. For example, a K-8th grade school adds 9th grade; or a PK2-5th grade school drops its preschool program. This also includes adding or removing a boarding program. Curricular changes are not considered a Change of Program.
- Change of Location: This means that students, faculty and/or staff will be occupying a new structure. This could be an entirely new campus or second campus, or just a new building (such as a new gymnasium or classroom building).

All substantive changes must be reported to FCIS and noted on the Annual Census, and a Change Evaluation must take place within 12 months of the change. Change Evaluations are one day only and require a team of 2-3 people unless the evaluation is conducted by the FCIS Executive Director.

Once a chairperson or the Executive Director is assigned, the school will be notified, and the school and chairperson must select a date and notify the FCIS office.

The primary purpose of a Change Evaluation is to assess the effect the change has had on the school and the efficacy of the change itself. For example, how has adding ninth grade affected the school as a whole (its finances, human resources, admissions, etc.), and how effective is the new program itself (its curriculum, classroom space, faculty, etc.)? Or, how has building a new gymnasium affected the school as a whole, and how safe, clean, and suited to its purpose is the gymnasium?

All Change Evaluations require a review of documents and interviewing constituents. It is also customary to offer a tour of the school to provide context for the evaluation. For any Change Evaluation, the school must be able to produce its latest financial audit and its current profit/loss statement. Other documentation requirements include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Change of Leadership: Chief Administrator's resume
- Change of Program: Curriculum guide, teacher qualifications, student files
- Change of Ownership: Documentation of governance structure
- Change of Location: Proof of fire and health inspections, crisis management plan

When preparing for a Change Evaluation, the school should arrange for interviews with the appropriate constituents. The following table serves as a guide:

Leadership	Program	Ownership	Location
Head of School	Director of the new program	Owner or corporate representative	Head of School
Board members			Facilities manager
Administrative team	Teachers in the new program	Head of School	Administrators using new facility
Division Heads	Students in the new program	Business Manager	Faculty members in new facility
Faculty members		Administrative Team	Students
Parents	Parents of students in the new program	Faculty	Business manager
Religious representative (if applicable)	Board members	Parents	Parents
Business Manager	Head of School	Students	Board members

The following is a sample schedule. When creating a schedule, be sure to build in breaks for the team. Lunch should be ordered and brought to campus for a working lunch.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

9:00AM-9:30AM	Head of School
9:30AM-10:15AM	Business Manager
10:15AM-11:00AM	Division Heads
11:00AM-11:45AM	Board Chair and 1-2 Board Members
11:45AM-12:00PM	Break
12:00AM-12:30PM	Lunch
12:30PM-1:00PM	Teachers
1:00PM-1:30PM	Parents' Association President and 1-2 Members
1:30PM-2:00PM	Students
2:00PM-2:30PM	Head of School

In many circumstances, the team or Executive Director will be traveling a significant distance to do the evaluation. The school should ask whether the visiting team requires lodging for the night before the evaluation. If so, it is the school's responsibility to book and pay for the hotel room(s).

The evaluation team will submit its expenses to the FCIS office. These include things such as mileage, tolls, and meals taken on the road (see page 31). The FCIS office will reimburse the team members, and the school will be invoiced. Invoices are due upon receipt.

Following the evaluation, the chairperson will complete the required report, which must be submitted to the FCIS Director of Accreditation within two weeks. The Director of Accreditation will proofread the report and contact the chairperson if any clarification is required. Unlike Full Evaluation reports, Change Evaluation drafts are not shared with the school.

Once the draft is complete, the report is shared with the FCIS Commission on Accreditation. One Commission member is assigned to the report, which they read carefully. They also contact the chairperson of the evaluation.

The assigned Commission member reports to the entire Commission, which then votes on the accreditation status for the school (see page 19). At the subsequent FCIS Board meeting, the Chairperson of the Commission reports on the school and gives the Commission's recommendation, which the Board votes to accept or change.

After the Board meeting, the school receives a copy of the report along with the Board's decision.

NEW SCHOOL CANDIDATE EVALUATIONS

A school that has been established for three years or less may apply for New School Candidate status with FCIS. After an initial inquiry form and site visit (see page 6), an application may be extended to the New School Candidate. Within 12 months of the application submission, a small team (approximately 2-3 people) representing the FCIS Board of Directors will conduct a New School Candidate Evaluation visit to assess compliance with standards and initial preparations for full accreditation. A school must then undergo an Original Evaluation for accreditation in its fourth year of operation or end its association with FCIS.

The FCIS Office will assign a chairperson and team to conduct the New School Candidate Evaluation. Once the chairperson is assigned, the school and chairperson will designate a mutually agreeable date for the evaluation and communicate that date to the FCIS Office.

A New School Candidate evaluation is one-day only and includes:

- A tour of the entire campus
- Meetings with the following:
 - Head of School
 - CFO/Business Manager
 - Division Heads
 - Faculty representatives
 - Parent Organization representatives
 - Board of Directors representatives
 - Religious representative (if applicable)
- A review of the following documentation:
 - Curriculum Guide
 - Financial Statements (financial audit, budget, enrollment projections, etc.)
 - Faculty Qualification Data
 - Admissions Packet (including qualifications for admission)
 - Marketing materials
 - Student/personnel records
 - Crisis plan
 - Strategic plan

The school should arrange and pay in advance for any lodging required by the team. The school should also provide lunch to the team during the evaluation. The chairperson and team must submit an expense voucher to the FCIS Office for any reimbursable expenses incurred during the evaluation (see page 31). The FCIS Office will invoice the school for these expenses.

After the evaluation, the chairperson and team will write and submit a report to the FCIS Office within two weeks. The Director of Accreditation will proofread the report and contact the chairperson if any clarification is required. New School Candidacy Evaluation drafts are not shared with the school.

Once the draft is complete, the report is shared with the FCIS Commission on Accreditation. One Commission member is assigned to the report, which they read carefully. They also contact the chairperson of the evaluation.

The assigned Commission member reports to the entire Commission, which then votes to accept or reject the school as a New School Candidate. At the subsequent FCIS Board meeting, the Chairperson of the Commission reports on the school and gives the Commission's recommendation for membership, which the Board votes to accept or change.

After the Board meeting, the school receives a copy of the report along with the Board's decision. Membership as a New School Candidate is not conferred until the school pays its dues. Once dues are received, the school is added to the FCIS membership directory, with an NSC designation.

FCIS CODE OF ETHICS

- The basic criterion for all decisions in the school is the student's welfare.
- A school will not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national or ethnic origin in the administration of its admission or hiring policies. Sex and religious discrimination will be avoided except where services to children are enhanced or stated admission dictates it.
- A school will meticulously carry out all promises made to students, patrons, teachers, staff members or any other person, school organization or the general public.
- A school will carefully avoid misleading statements about its philosophy, stated mission and status.
- A school will make clear all dates concerning the admission procedure and adhere to those dates. A candidate for admission and the parents will be informed of the complete costs of the forthcoming school year and the applicable payment schedules.
- A school will not knowingly initiate attempts to bring about the transfer of a student from another independent school.
- A school recognizes the right of its enrolled students or families to visit and consider other schools without notifying the present school. It also recognizes and respects the right of another school to hold preliminary discussions about the possibility of admission without notifying the present school.
- A school will not accept a student for enrollment without first requesting from the current school all pertinent information concerning the student's academic and personal records and the reason for transfer. The transfer of students from another city, state or country may be an exception. Upon receipt of a request for information or for a transcript from a recognized or FCIS member school, the FCIS School will comply promptly. If compliance is not possible or advisable, the reason will be given.
- A school will allow each candidate for admission reasonable time to accept an offer of a place or properly notify the candidate of existing time constraints.
- A school recognizes its obligation to keep, protect and preserve the records of a student's attendance and achievement. A school will take all reasonable and lawful measures to maintain the confidentiality of reports and information exchanged among schools concerning the students and parents.
- When awarding financial aid based on need, reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that such an award does not exceed the demonstrated need of the family, and an FCIS school is encouraged to require adequate documentation of family financial resources.
- A school respects the right of a teacher to visit and consider employment in another school without notifying their present school, and it recognizes and respects the right of another school to hold preliminary discussions about the possibilities of employment without notifying the present school. No binding contractual arrangement should be formalized, however, without communication with the current employer.
- Officials (Trustees and Administrators, as well) of a school will not seek to encourage a teacher or administrator from another school to break a contract.