

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.

Values:

Independence

Integrity

Service

Excellence

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FCIS is a founding member of the International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation and is an NAIS approved accreditor.



STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

Effective: July 1, 2025

Leading Educational Excellence

Schools are expected to be in compliance with every standard.

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 his/her 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.

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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.
- 1.5** The school supports a culture of giving and partnership with key constituencies, including alumni, parents, grandparents, trustees, and other members of the community.

ONLINE LEARNING

STANDARD 16: 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 16:

- 16.1** Online courses or instruction offered by the school are mission-appropriate and comparable to the analogous courses taught on campus.
- 16.2** Online courses or instruction offered by the school are either developed and executed by the school or accredited by a recognized agency.
- 16.3** 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.
- 16.4** In any circumstance in which a student spends more than 25 percent of his/her 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.
- 16.5** Student attendance and student progress are tracked during all times students are in online courses or experiencing online instruction.
- 16.6** Applicable school policies, such as academic integrity and appropriate use, should specifically reference online learning.
- 16.7** 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.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

STANDARD 15: 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 15:

15.1 The school specifies clearly its criteria for admission into the special education program.

15.2 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.

15.3 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.

15.4 In programs that enroll high school students, where appropriate, curriculum options exist to provide the opportunity for students to accrue credits towards graduation.

15.5 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.

15.6 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.

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, signed, and adhered to by all Board members annually.

2.4 The Board and Head demonstrate an understanding of their roles in governance and the formulation of school policies and implement a sound practice of this understanding.

2.5 The Board nurtures a positive working relationship with the Head of School, who, as their sole employee, is responsible for hiring, evaluating, and leading all administrators, faculty, and staff, implementing policies, and overseeing the school's day-to-day operations. The Head is evaluated 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 provides strategic oversight of the school's fundraising initiatives and financially supports them as well.

2.9 The Board meets regularly and securely 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.

Indicators 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6, and 2.8 do not apply to proprietary schools.

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.

PROPRIETARY SCHOOLS

STANDARD 14: 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 15:

14.1 The owner / governing body establishes and maintains policy- making processes with provisions for the participation of all stakeholders, as appropriate.

14.2 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.

14.3 There is a clear organizational chart that defines the roles and responsibilities of the school's owner / governing body, administration, faculty and staff.

14.4 One person is designated as the chief administrator (Head, Principal, President, etc.) of the school; this person may be the owner.

14.5 The designated chief administrator is evaluated on an annual basis.

RESIDENTIAL LIFE

STANDARD 13: 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 13:

13.1 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.

13.2 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.

13.3 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*.

13.4 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.

13.5 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.

13.6 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.

13.7 Residential facilities are safe, adequately supervised, well-maintained and appropriate to meet the needs of the students in the residential program.

13.8 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 6.3*)

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.

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.

DATA AND RESEARCH

STANDARD 5: 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 5:

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 The school demonstrates an understanding of current research and best practices for the ongoing improvement of the educational program and school operations.

5.4 The school fully completes its annual survey and provides benchmarking information as required by FCIS on an annual basis.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

STANDARD 12: The school clearly understands its obligations to meet the needs of its international students by providing academic and social programming, appropriately-trained faculty and staff, and counseling support.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 12:

12.1 The school provides training and professional development for faculty and staff having direct contact with international students regarding their unique needs.

12.2 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.

12.3 The school provides opportunities for positive interactions between domestic and international students in order to promote inclusivity.

12.4 The school provides for regular communication between parents and the school, regardless of challenges (language barriers, cultural differences, etc.).

12.5 When necessary, the school provides learning opportunities and curriculum for the development of English fluency or an alternative language of instruction.

12.6 When necessary, classroom teaching methods provide for students for whom English, or an alternative language of instruction, is not their first language. Faculty having direct contact with international students receive training and professional development regarding curriculum and instruction delivery to non-native English speakers.

SAFETY, SECURITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

STANDARD 11: 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 to the school and its constituents.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 11:

11.1 The school has adequate and appropriate insurance for the transfer of liability, property and casualty risk.

11.2 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.

11.3 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.

11.4 The school has processes in place to prevent and respond to all forms of child abuse, including training that addresses state-mandated reporting requirements.

11.5 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.

11.6 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.

11.7 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.

11.8 The school has a well-defined health care program that is appropriately staffed and resourced to adequately meet the needs of the students. Sufficient space is provided for the isolation of ill students.

11.9 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.

ADMISSIONS

STANDARD 6: 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 6:

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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.

6.4 The school allocates sufficient resources, both in personnel and in funding, to efficiently execute its admissions programs.

6.5 When awarding financial assistance, the school communicates mission-appropriate, transparent criteria, policies and procedures to its constituents.

6.6 The school maintains the confidentiality of all aspects of the financial assistance process.

6.7 The school has marketing initiatives, both internal and external, that address the needs and goals of the school.

6.8 The school provides an orientation program for all new students.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

STANDARD 7: 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 7:

7.1 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.

7.2 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.

7.3 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.

7.4 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.

7.5 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.

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

7.7 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.

11.10 Food service staff and facilities meet all federal, state and local codes and health standards. Food provided by the school's food service enables healthy choices and good nutrition.

11.11 The school has a comprehensive written crisis and security plan that is reviewed and updated annually, practiced, and understood by all faculty, staff, and students.

11.12 The school has arrival and dismissal procedures in place to provide for the supervision and safety of students.

11.13 The school complies with federal regulations in regards 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.

11.14 The school has written policies and procedures governing domestic and international travel, including emergency procedures for student safety, chaperone training and responsibilities and expectations for student behavior.

PERSONNEL

STANDARD 10: The school maintains a qualified faculty and staff sufficient and appropriate to execute its mission, programs and operations.

Indicators that a school meets Standard 10:

10.1 The faculty, staff and administration are of sufficient number to implement the full educational program of the school.

10.2 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.

10.3 All teachers and administrators have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution or the international equivalent.

10.4 The school demonstrates that all faculty, administration and staff are qualified for their specific responsibilities based on their education, training and/or professional experience.

10.5 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.

10.6 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.

10.7 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.

10.8 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.

10.9 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.

10.10 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.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

STANDARD 8: 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 8:

8.1 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.

8.2 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.

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

8.4 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.

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

8.6 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.

8.7 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.

8.8 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 9: 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 9:

9.1 The school provides developmentally appropriate counseling services to assist and support the student body.

9.2 There are procedures for identifying and supporting students with learning differences; mission-appropriate resources are available for identifying and meeting students' learning needs.

9.3 Mission-appropriate clubs and extracurricular activities are offered to students. Appropriate staffing, supervision and resources are allocated for these activities.

9.4 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.

9.5 The school assists students, faculty, staff and parents in understanding physical and mental health issues and concerns.

9.6 Any 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.

9.7 In advance of graduation or completion of program, the school provides adequate services for mission-based college counseling, school placement and career planning.

9.8 The school enacts policies, training and practices to ensure that faculty, staff and students work collaboratively to build positive and appropriate relationships.

9.9 The school has a procedure for identifying students whom it can no longer effectively serve and for counseling the student and his/her parents in their search for a more suitable schooling option.