

ISACS Standards for Membership

Also available in [Appendix A](#).

Because of the diversity in ISACS member schools and the corresponding variation in mission, program, procedures, and style, these standards have been developed to focus on elements that should be common to all independent schools. The following list of standards for membership has been developed, and reviewed periodically, to describe the kind of school that ISACS believes it can serve and that, in turn, can benefit from the ISACS network and services. ISACS does not suggest that the only good schools are those that meet its standards, but ISACS does hold that its standards describe the type of school represented in its membership.

Among these tenets is the commitment to the highest possible quality in a school's program and the learning and teaching integral to it. Of equal importance is the recognition of, and respect for, equity and inclusion. The ultimate test of a school's quality is the measure of its educational community's success as represented by the degree of congruence between the school's mission and its program, as well as between its purposes and results. Accreditation by ISACS assures the public that these standards have been met, that the school's success in meeting these standards is periodically reviewed, and that the school remains focused on improvement.

ISACS member schools are expected to meet each standard fully. If a school finds that it does not meet a standard, or a part thereof, it must explain the circumstances, take steps to address the situation and/or provide the rationale for not meeting the standard.

A. MISSION AND GOVERNANCE

A1. The school has a clearly articulated and widely disseminated mission statement, based upon sound educational tenets, that reflects the institution's individual character, is evident in the educational program, and is supported by the school community.

A2. The school fully discloses its policies, programs, and practices.

A3. The school's policies, programs, and practices are congruent with its mission.

A4. At least once every accreditation cycle, the governing body either reviews and reaffirms or, if needed, revises and approves the school's mission statement.

A5. The school, in its daily operations, governance structure, and financial practices, functions with sufficient independence from other organizations or individuals so as to ensure its ability to fulfill its mission and to control its own destiny.

A6. The governing body shows evidence that it has given full consideration to the implications of accepting resources from any individual(s) or organization(s), governmental or otherwise, which may exercise undue influence or control over the school.

A7. The governing body's legal and fiduciary roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and transparent. It develops major school policies and has a composition and committee structure sufficient to ensure the school's prosperity.

A8. The governing body oversees and maintains the financial stability of the school. It generates necessary resources for providing and maintaining physical facilities, equipment, and materials adequate to support the program of the school.

A9. The school engages in ongoing and continuous strategic planning, taking into consideration the perspectives of school community members and outcomes from the ISACS accreditation process.

A10. The governing body is committed to a program of professional development for its members that includes annual new member orientation, ongoing education, self-assessment and evaluation, and governing body leadership succession planning.

A11. All members of the governing body abide by the school's conflict-of-interest and confidentiality policies.

A12. At least once during each accreditation cycle, the governing body reviews the school's bylaws to ensure compliance with law and alignment with best practice.

A13. The school demonstrates effective boundaries between the governance role of the governing body and the leadership role of the head of school in daily operations.

A14. The governing body and the head of school establish and communicate clearly understood processes for decision making.

A15. The governing body employs and supports the head of school. There is evidence of regular, documented performance evaluation for the head of school by the governing body and understood procedures for renewal, non-renewal, and termination of the head's employment.

B. LEARNING AND TEACHING

B1. The program is based on guiding beliefs and assumptions shared broadly by the faculty and administration, which align with the school's mission. Such beliefs reflect research and data regarding the ways in which students learn and develop and the appropriate means of instruction for all students enrolled in the school.

B2. Through its policies, programs, and practices, the school is attentive to the quality of life of all members of its community. The school ensures an equitable, affirming, safe, and just environment, taking into account cultural, learning, and social-emotional needs of all individuals.

B3. There are clearly defined policies and procedures that promote emotional, physical, and psychological health and safety among students and between students and faculty and staff in day, residential, and homestay settings. Disciplinary practices are humane and mindful of the inherent dignity of every student; corporal punishment is not practiced.

B4. The school's curriculum is articulated in written form and evident in the program of the school. Provision is made for faculty involvement in periodic review, evaluation, and development of the curriculum.

B5. Consistent with the school's mission, the school provides a balance of curricular and extracurricular activities that engage the mind and body.

B6. The school actively promotes freedom of inquiry in the classroom.

B7. The school's program draws from a wide variety of perspectives across academic disciplines and develops essential skills for learning.

B8. The school demonstrates an assessment process to measure the growth, development, and achievement of students; student progress is communicated effectively and appropriately to students and families.

B9. In day, residential, and homestay settings, the school provides adequate program support and student services that reflect the school's mission.

B10. The operation of auxiliary programs is consistent with the school's mission and ISACS standards.

C. ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

C1. The administration's composition and organization are sufficient to carry out policies effectively. The administration is responsible for realizing the strategic vision of the school

through management of the school's finances, programs, personnel, facilities, fundraising, public relations, and resources.

C2. The school is aware of and in compliance with all state requirements for full recognition and approval to operate as an independent school in the state in which the school is located.

C3. There is no discrimination against any person in admissions, employment, conditions of work, or otherwise, that is in violation of the law. The school has a published non-discrimination policy that is approved by the governing body.

C4. The school day and year are sufficient for the total school program to achieve its goals.

C5. The school provides evidence of effective communication with, and involvement of, all constituencies in a way that is appropriate to their interests as well as the purposes and objectives of the school.

C6. There are clearly defined admissions and retention policies and procedures that demonstrate consistency with the school's mission and provide the general criteria upon which admission and re-enrollment decisions are made.

C7. The school requires each candidate for admission to undergo an evaluation process to enable the school and the family to determine if matriculation would be mutually beneficial. A student is admitted only when it is determined that the school can reasonably expect to meet the needs of the student.

C8. Prior to a student's enrollment, families are fully informed of their financial responsibilities to the school.

C9. There are appropriate procedures for management of financial resources including budget development, fiscal management, internal control, accounting, auditing, and long-range planning.

C10. The school conducts an independent, full-opinion financial audit at least once every three years. The governing body accepts the audit, and the school responds to and addresses any qualifications or recommendations stated in the audit.

C11. All employees are qualified for their positions and responsibilities by education and/or experience.

C12. There are established and clearly communicated procedures for recruiting, screening, and interviewing prospective employees.

C13. There are fair and appropriate personnel policies, salaries, and benefits for all employees as required by law.

C14. Each employee is clearly informed of compensation, terms of employment, principal duties, school values, and expectations of behavior.

C15. There is evidence of regular, documented performance evaluation for all employees.

C16. The school demonstrates an intentional commitment to the professional development of its employees.

C17. The school's policies and programs demonstrate a commitment to environmental stewardship.

C18. In day, residential, and homestay settings, the school has documented processes in place to promote each child's health and safety and to prevent and respond to child abuse. These processes include background checks in hiring all employees and for all volunteers who directly supervise children; training for all employees; and clearly communicated policies including state-mandated reporting requirements.

C19. In day and residential settings, the school maintains its facilities and equipment so as to meet applicable health, fire, security, safety, and sanitary standards and has current documentation on file confirming regulatory compliance.

C20. The school possesses written security, crisis, and risk management plans, and annually communicates and practices the plans as appropriate with members of the school community. The school follows best practices to secure its data and ensure recovery from potential data loss.