

Standards for Membership

Because of the diversity in the ISACS membership of schools and the corresponding variation in philosophy, program, procedures, and style, these standards have been developed to focus on the elements that should be common to all 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. ISACS does hold that its standards describe the type of school represented in its membership. Accreditation by ISACS is assurance to the public that these standards have been met and that the school's success in meeting these standards is periodically reviewed.

Of paramount importance are those standards listed in Section A, "ISACS Policies and Practices," because they are either essential to the definition of an independent school, or they represent fundamental tenets observed by all independent schools, or they are necessary for the work of the association. Among these tenets is the commitment to the highest possible quality in a school's program and both the learning and teaching integral to it. Of equal importance is the recognition of, and respect for, diversity, equity, justice, and pluralism. It is believed that the ultimate test of a school's quality is the measure of how well the school creates its educational community as represented by the degree of congruence between the school's mission and program, as well as between its purposes and results. Finally, it is believed that all schools embark upon a program of continuous and comprehensive improvement, such as that represented by the ISACS accreditation process.

Schools are expected to be in compliance with each standard. If a school finds itself in non-compliance with a standard, or a part thereof, it must explain and clarify its non-compliance in the self-study and to the visiting team.

A. ISACS POLICIES AND PRACTICES

A1. The school shall be incorporated as a not-for profit organization and shall have been granted by the Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) status or equivalent form of tax-exempt status.

A2. There shall be no discrimination against any person in admissions, employment, conditions of work, or otherwise that is in violation of the law.

A3. The school shall maintain its facilities and equipment so as to meet applicable health, fire, security, safety, and sanitary standards and have current documentation on file confirming regulatory compliance.

A4. There shall be at least two professional, opinion-level audits of the school's finances within each seven-year cycle, one which shall occur during the fiscal year preceding the on-site accreditation visit (usually Year 2) and the second during Year 5 of the accreditation cycle. The school shall respond to and demonstrate plans to address any qualifications or recommendations stated in the audit.

A5. The school in its daily operations, governance structure, and financial operations shall function 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 school shall follow and the governing body shall endorse the ISACS statement of “Principles of Good Practice in Admissions and Employment.” In addition the school shall be aware of the NAIS “Principles of Good Practice” in all other areas of school operations.

A7. There shall be full disclosure of the school’s mission, policies, programs, and practices.

A8. There shall be a high degree of congruence between the stated mission of the school and the actual program and practices of the school.

A9. The school shall provide clear evidence that it actively promotes freedom of inquiry in the classroom.

A10. The school shall demonstrate its commitment to continual improvement through its compliance with the required ISACS septennial accreditation program including a survey of constituents, self-study, visitation by an ISACS team, and prescribed follow-up actions and reports.

A11. The governing body shall show evidence that it has given full consideration to the implications of accepting funds from any individual(s), organization, governmental or otherwise, which may exercise undue influence, regulatory, or doctrinal control over the school.

A12. The school shall demonstrate its commitment to the ISACS concept and definition of independence.

A13. The school shall be 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.

A14. The school shall possess written security, crisis, and risk management plans, and shall annually communicate and practice the plans as appropriate with all members of the school community.

B. MISSION, PHILOSOPHY, AND GOALS

B1. There shall be a clearly articulated and widely disseminated statement of educational mission and philosophy that reflects the individual character of the school, based upon sound educational tenets. Such a statement shall reflect the characteristics and inclusive needs of all of the school’s students, be implemented by a specific statement of goals and/or objectives, and be manifested in the educational program.

B2. The governing body shall at least once every seven years (preferably during Year 7 of the accreditation cycle) review, revise if necessary, and approve the statement of educational mission and philosophy; it shall be understood and supported by the governing body, administration, faculty, and staff.

B3. In keeping with its mission, philosophy, and goals the school shall provide an equitable, affirming, safe, and just environment for all its constituents through its policies, programs, and operations.

C. COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL

C1. There shall be clearly defined admissions policies and procedures that demonstrate consistency with the stated mission and philosophy of the school and that provide the general criteria upon which admissions are made.

C2. The school shall require 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 shall be admitted only when it is determined that the school can reasonably expect to meet the needs of the student.

C3. Prior to a student's enrollment, parents (or guardian) shall be fully informed of their financial responsibilities to the school.

C4. There shall be clearly defined policies and procedures that promote an equitable, affirming, and just climate of emotional and physical safety among students and between students and the faculty and staff. Discipline practices shall be humane and mindful of the inherent dignity of every student. Corporal punishment is an unacceptable practice.

C5. The school shall be attentive to the quality of life of all members of the learning community and take appropriate actions to provide an equitable, affirming, safe, and just environment for learning and social growth.

C6. The school shall provide 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.

C7: The school shall have documented processes in place to promote each child's safety and to prevent and respond to child abuse. These processes shall 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.

D. PROGRAM, ACTIVITIES, AND STUDENT SERVICES

D1. The program shall be based on guiding beliefs and assumptions shared broadly by the faculty and administration, which evolve from the school's mission, philosophy, and goals. Such beliefs shall include an understanding of ways in which students learn and develop and the appropriate means of instruction for all students enrolled in the school.

D2. The school's program shall include an appropriate selection of experiences from a wide variety of perspectives among the humanities, fine arts, world language, mathematics, science, social studies, and physical education as is appropriate for the ages, needs, and abilities of students enrolled in the school.

D3. In keeping with its mission, the program shall provide for the learning styles, developmental needs and cultural backgrounds of its students.

D4. The program shall include a balance of academic, extracurricular, and physical activities consistent with the school's mission.

D5. The school shall have a curriculum that is articulated in written form and evident in the program of the school. Provision shall be made for faculty involvement in periodic review, evaluation and development of the school's curriculum.

D6. The school shall provide adequate program support and student services that reflect the school's mission, philosophy, and goals.

D7. The school day and year shall be sufficient for the total school program to achieve its goals.

D8. The school shall demonstrate an assessment process to measure growth, development, and achievement of students.

D9. The operation of auxiliary programs shall not be in conflict with the school's mission or ISACS standards.

E. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

E1. The composition and organization of the governing body shall be sufficient to effect the growth and prosperity of the school. It shall develop major school policies, oversee and maintain the financial stability of the school, lead in fundraising and promotion, and employ, evaluate, and support the Head of School.

E2. Neither the Head of School nor any employee shall be a voting member of the governing body.

E3. The governing body shall engage in ongoing and continuous strategic planning.

E4. The composition and organization of the administration shall be sufficient to carry out policies effectively. It shall be responsible for realizing the strategic vision of the school through management of the school finances, programs, personnel, facilities, fundraising, public relations, and resources.

E5. The school shall demonstrate effective boundaries between the governance role of the governing body and the leadership role of the Head of School in daily operations.

E6. The governing body and the Head of School shall establish and communicate clearly understood processes for decision making.

E7. The governing body shall generate necessary resources for providing and maintaining physical facilities, equipment, and materials adequate to support the program of the school.

E8. There shall be appropriate policies and procedures for management of financial resources including budget development, fiscal management, internal control, accounting, auditing, and long-range planning.

E9. There shall be 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 his/her employment.

E10. The governing body shall be 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.

E11. There shall be periodic review, at least once every seven years, of the school's by-laws to ensure compliance with law and with the best current practice.

F. PERSONNEL

F1. All employees shall be qualified for their positions and responsibilities by education and/or experience.

F2. There shall be clearly established and communicated procedures for recruiting, screening, and interviewing prospective employees.

F3. There shall be fair and appropriate personnel policies, salaries, and benefits for all employees as required by law.

F4. Each employee shall be clearly informed of compensation, terms of employment, principal duties, school values, and expectations of behavior.

F5. There shall be evidence of regular, documented performance evaluation for all employees.

F6. The school shall demonstrate an intentional commitment to the professional development of its employees.

G. RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

G1. Residential programs shall be so conceived and staffed to fulfill that aspect of the school's program, particularly with respect to the portion of the day outside regular classroom hours.

G2. Applicable health and safety regulations shall be fully observed and special attention given to the emotional safety and social needs of all residential students.