



COUNCIL ON EDUCATIONAL  
STANDARDS & ACCOUNTABILITY

# CESA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

## ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

“IN PURSUIT OF GREATNESS:

A VISION FOR AMERICA’S FINEST CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS”

The purpose of the Institutional Review is to gain a perspective on a school’s performance in relation to research-based standards for Christian schools. The goal of CESA is to encourage high-performing Christian institutions delivering the best education to students across the country in their continuous growth.



## THERE ARE FIVE CATEGORIES OF STANDARDS

1. Mission Clarity
2. Effective Governance
3. Institutional Viability
4. Academic and Programmatic Distinction
5. Sense of Coherent Christian Community

### ADHERENCE TO STANDARDS

Within each section there are major standards that CESA asserts are important to attaining full membership in the Council. We realize schools are in various phases of development and it is important to view each institution individually and according to its strategic goals. In order to pass the CESA Institutional Review the school must meet all primary standards and 80% of the secondary standards.

Standards will be rated according to the following three categories: Meets standard (M), In Progress (IP), or Does Not Meet (DNM) standard. **Please comment on your current status for each standard.**

## STANDARD ONE: MISSION CLARITY

CESA member schools are accredited, mission-driven, Christian institutions aspiring to be academically, programmatically, and institutionally excellent.

### PRIMARY STANDARDS

- 1.1 \_\_\_\_ We have a deep commitment to Christian formation, academic, programmatic, and institutional excellence as evident in our published curriculum guide objectives, handbooks, and in our promotional materials.
- 1.2 \_\_\_\_ We require all school board members, faculty, staff, and administration to provide written agreement with and a commitment to the institution's philosophy and statement of faith based on the tenets reflected in the Nicene and/or Apostles Creed, the foundational tenets of Christian orthodoxy.
- 1.3 \_\_\_\_ We are fully accredited by a nationally recognized accreditor.

### SECONDARY STANDARDS

- 1.4 \_\_\_\_ Our faculty and staff are able to articulate our mission and core values in a way that demonstrates understanding and investment in the school's reasons for being.
- 1.5 \_\_\_\_ The mission is reviewed periodically by the school board and Head, with changes if necessary being made according to the school's bylaws.

## STANDARD TWO: EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

CESA member schools commit to a model of leadership that includes a governing board, which formally (policy statement) and informally (daily practice) delegates the daily operation of the institution to the head of school who supervises the administrative team, faculty, and staff. Throughout this document the term “board” is used as an inclusive term to represent “school board”, “board of trustees”, “board of directors” and other terms.

### PRIMARY STANDARDS

2.1 \_\_\_\_ We have written by-laws and written articles of incorporation that have been reviewed by an attorney licensed to practice in our state. The board has reviewed and approved these legal documents within the last five years.

2.1.1 \_\_\_\_ We (if governed through a formal church/school partnership) have clearly defined parameters for governance that enable the school and church to collaborate in a manner that propels ministry impact while cooperating to sustain distinct business management identities. The school and church have a thoughtfully constructed, written and executed ministry partnership agreement that outlines the role of a church governing body (super board) and the school governing body (school board) with respect to finances, facilities, personnel, and operations. The agreement is constructed to promote accountability, unity, educational excellence, and institutional best practices.

2.1.2 \_\_\_\_ We (if parent-owned or having corporate structure that grants any form of vote to an at-large parent body) have clearly defined parameters regarding the function of the board and the function of the parent body. The parameters are consistent with board governance best practices that establish a limited scope of authority for the parent body and vests primary governance for the school in the elected school board. The agreement is constructed to promote accountability, unity, educational excellence, and institutional best practice.

2.2 \_\_\_\_ We have a continuous improvement process that includes a compelling strategic planning process collaboratively designed and purposefully implemented.

2.2.1 \_\_\_\_ The strategic plan has been communicated to all school stakeholders.

2.2.2 \_\_\_\_ The strategic plan is monitored and has a demonstrated proof of effective implementation.

2.3 \_\_\_\_ The board acts as the “keeper of the mission”, reviewing it periodically, and stays at a policy level not getting involved in the day-to-day activities of the school.

2.4 \_\_\_\_ We are governed by a board of no less than seven members and we have policies which articulate the board’s primary responsibilities to be oversight of the mission of the school, the fiduciary concerns of the institution, developing broad policy for the institution, financial oversight, supporting/evaluating the head of school, and establishing, supporting, and funding the strategic plan. We designate, in policy and practice, the head of school as the single employee of the school board and assign the head of school executive authority over the vital operations of the school, including, but not limited to, personnel decisions, admissions, student discipline, curriculum and budget management.

2.5 \_\_\_\_ We have written institutional policies detailing standards for academic, administrative, legal, personnel, financial, and other issues that are made available annually to all members of the working community in a Parent/Student Handbook and a Personnel Handbook.

## SECONDARY STANDARDS (CONTINUED)

2.6 \_\_\_\_ The board has an annual written evaluation of the head of school. The evaluation includes successful implementation of the strategic plan.

2.6.1 \_\_\_\_ The school board conducts a thorough comparative compensation evaluation for the head of school at a minimum of every five years.

2.6.2 \_\_\_\_ The board provides a multi-year contract to the head of school.

2.6.3 \_\_\_\_ The board thoughtfully considers and plans for effective leadership transitions for the head of school and the school board.

2.7 \_\_\_\_ We have a documented board induction and education program that all board members must complete as a minimum requirement for board membership.

2.7.1 \_\_\_\_ We have a formal, written board self-evaluation process, which all board members must participate in annually.

2.7.2 \_\_\_\_ We have a process for continual board professional development.

2.7.3 \_\_\_\_ We have by-laws that establish a schedule and process for the rotation, resignation, and removal of existing board members, and their replacement with new board members.

2.7.4 \_\_\_\_ We have a board made up of a diverse constituency reflecting the needs of the institution. The board has a developed procedure for identifying prospective members who reflect the diverse population of the school.

2.8 \_\_\_\_ We have implemented our strategic plan through an annual administrative agenda that directs the work of the leadership team and school board.

2.8.1 \_\_\_\_ We utilize an annual performance appraisal process for the administrative team.

2.9 \_\_\_\_ We have a regular reporting process, including metrics and stories of impact, regarding vital operations of the school that is provided by the head of school to the school board so that the school board is fully informed, allowing the head of school to run the school.

2.10 \_\_\_\_ Our employment handbook is reviewed every 2-3 years and our student/parent handbook is reviewed every 5 years by an attorney.

## STANDARD THREE: INSTITUTIONAL VIABILITY

CESA member schools follow best practices that demonstrate astute financial management, appropriate budget forecasting, and thoughtful short- and long-term financial planning processes, for the stability and sustainability of the institution.

### PRIMARY STANDARDS

- 3.1\_\_\_\_\_ We balance the annual budget without internal borrowing from future years, or from any form of a loan, to cover the current year's expenses or have a board-approved plan to balance our budget in the future.
- 3.2\_\_\_\_\_ We are audited by an independent certified public accounting firm in conformity with U.S. Generally Accepted Auditing Standards (GAAS). The auditor presents the financial review or audited financial statements/report to the board of trustees or finance committee annually. If a review is used annually there must be a full audit of the financial statements every 2 years.
- 3.3\_\_\_\_\_ We pay teachers and administrators a competitive and professional wage benchmarked against other comparable schools.

### SECONDARY STANDARDS

- 3.4\_\_\_\_\_ We have a minimum of unrestricted cash for 2 months of operating expenses plus current liabilities (including unearned tuition revenue) or have a board-approved plan to gain unrestricted cash in the future.
- 3.5\_\_\_\_\_ Our annual long-term debt service payment is below 10% of the school's annual cash operating expenses.
- 3.5.1\_\_\_\_\_ We have debt service reserves (for schools with mortgage or long-term debt) that equals a minimum of annual debt service costs (principal and interest).
- 3.5.2\_\_\_\_\_ Our debt level (total liabilities) does not exceed 2.5 times the school's unrestricted net assets.
- 3.5.3\_\_\_\_\_ We have a loan to value ratio in which debt does not exceed 80% of the current market value of the underlying property that it collateralizes.
- 3.6\_\_\_\_\_ We have detailed administrative job descriptions for each member of the leadership team.
- 3.7\_\_\_\_\_ We have a clearly defined administrative structure detailed in an organizational chart that is made available to the faculty.
- 3.8\_\_\_\_\_ We have in place business office personnel appropriate to the financial activities of the school.
- 3.8.1\_\_\_\_\_ We have adequate insurance coverage for all students, staff and board that is periodically reviewed.
- 3.9\_\_\_\_\_ The average age of our accounts payable invoices does not exceed 30 days.
- 3.10\_\_\_\_\_ We have a comprehensive crisis management plan and a safety and security plan in writing that is made available to all faculty and staff.

## SECONDARY STANDARDS (CONTINUED)

3.11\_\_\_\_ Our school facilities are aesthetically pleasing and provide for the needs of an outstanding scholastic program, demonstrate adherence to rigorous health standards, and are exceptional with regard to student safety.

3.12\_\_\_\_ We have a development plan that advances the strategic plan through fund development initiatives, including annual funds, events, capital campaigns, and endowment campaigns.

3.13\_\_\_\_ We have a school board that understands, and demonstrates through personal practice, that it is their responsibility to fund the strategic plan and create a culture of generosity by making and/or soliciting leadership financial gifts to the school themselves and asking others to do the same.

3.13.1\_\_\_\_ We have giving and participation goals in place that include, but may not be limited to, the annual fund, capital campaigns, events, planned giving, and other specified forms of giving that support the institution.

3.14\_\_\_\_ We have a well-written and well-executed enrollment/marketing plan that is updated annually.

3.15\_\_\_\_ We have enrollment goals that reflect the mission and viability of our school. We track historic comparative data and have plans in place to maintain or improve re-enrollment, new family/student enrollment, offers extended, new prospects, and year-over-year forecasting for budgets.

3.16\_\_\_\_ We distribute merit-based scholarships and/or need-based tuition assistance in accordance with the school's own written policies and use a third party for assessment of financial needs.

3.17\_\_\_\_ We have an attractive and easily navigable website and school-controlled social media sites that speak to the current reality of high-tech consumers.

3.18\_\_\_\_ Privacy of data and records are protected. A plan to implement the best standards for cybersecurity is in place.

CESA member schools shall provide high quality academic, artistic, and athletic programs designed to meet the mission of the school and to distinguish the institution as one of high quality.

## PRIMARY STANDARDS

4.1\_\_\_\_\_ We develop a curriculum that reflects the stated mission of the school and which prepares students as desirable candidates for both higher education and the workplace.

4.1.1\_\_\_\_\_ We develop a clearly defined and documented curricular review process to determine school-wide and subject specific curricular goals, objectives, and outcomes. The curriculum is revised on a cyclical basis with a predetermined timeline of no more than five years.

4.2\_\_\_\_\_ We utilize a nationally normed standardized examination(s) as an external program assessment tool at multiple grade levels to determine student achievement and school-wide achievement with respect to other benchmark schools and national norms. Schools must demonstrate how they are utilizing the data to improve learning and informing their formative and summative assessments. Schools must strive to use CESA and /or independent school norms as its measurement.

4.3\_\_\_\_\_ We recruit, retain, train, and evaluate qualified professionals who are subject area specialists and minimally possess a bachelor's degree from an accredited four-year college or university. Equivalent mastery in certain areas may be accepted with appropriate documentation. We place an emphasis on teaching and learning with the understanding that a highly qualified faculty is necessary to build an institution that catalyzes high quality learning.

4.4\_\_\_\_\_ We build academic programs that reflect the stated mission of the institution, its faculty, its learners, and its community, and are research based and intellectually challenging. Our programs encourage intellectual inquiry and teach critical reasoning, analysis, independent thinking, and respect for diverse viewpoints while adhering to and teaching from a Christian worldview.

## SECONDARY STANDARDS

4.5\_\_\_\_\_ We have a policy and procedure for responding to challenged materials.

4.6\_\_\_\_\_ We develop curriculum that is vertically and horizontally aligned. The curriculum is communicated in a written curriculum guide for the school community that sets forth a program of study that is academically and intellectually challenging at each level, content rich, and knowledge and skills driven.

4.7\_\_\_\_\_ In addition to standardized testing in 4.2, we utilize an academic assessment program that utilizes both formative and summative assessments for the purpose of understanding student progress toward curricular goals.

4.8\_\_\_\_\_ We utilize a performance appraisal process for faculty, which annually evaluates planning and preparation, instruction, classroom environment and management, interpersonal relations, and professional responsibilities. We require students to complete course/teacher evaluations to improve the academic program in grades 9-12. The results are reviewed in some form by the school administration.

## SECONDARY STANDARDS (CONTINUED)

4.9\_\_\_\_\_ We use a formal tool to evaluate the faculty culture every three years at a minimum.

4.10\_\_\_\_\_ The goal of our professional development program is improvement of the academic program outcomes. We utilize ongoing professional development as a source of professional growth for the faculty, with an understanding that outside professional development can be used to effectively support the work of the institution's in-house program, including attending outside national conferences in order to stay abreast of the current research and best practices in independent schools.

4.10.1\_\_\_\_\_ We design an annual professional development calendar detailing the learning outcomes for the faculty for the upcoming school year.

4.10.2\_\_\_\_\_ We provide faculty with grade-alike and subject-alike planning and discussion time.

4.10.3\_\_\_\_\_ We provide a written program of orientation for new faculty/staff members that lasts for one full year and includes time to observe seasoned master-teachers as well as training in Christian philosophy/distinctiveness, mission/vision, and history of the school.

4.10.4\_\_\_\_\_ We have a mentoring program or improvement plan process for faculty in need of professional growth.

4.10.5\_\_\_\_\_ We provide, at a minimum, 2% of the personnel line items of the operating budget for professional development. Documentation of in-house PD can be used to meet a portion of this requirement.

4.11\_\_\_\_\_ We offer a broad range of extracurricular programs including visual and performing arts, athletics and leadership opportunities.

4.12\_\_\_\_\_ We have a written technology plan that incorporates effective management software and learning platforms for student use. Appropriate filters are in place and teacher training is evident within the professional development program of our school.

### **Standards below are for K-12 Schools Only. K-8 schools are exempt from these standards.**

4.13\_\_\_\_\_ 9-12 Schools: We have a comprehensive program for college placement with a ratio of roughly 1:150 for sophomores, juniors, and seniors enrollment.

4.13.1\_\_\_\_\_ The institution implements, evaluates, and monitors processes to identify and address the specialized social, emotional, developmental, and academic needs of students.

4.14\_\_\_\_\_ We utilize nationally recognized achievement tests (i.e. AP examinations, SAT examinations, ACT examinations, etc.) as both summative and formative measures to ensure student learning is maximized and instruction is informed.

4.14.1\_\_\_\_\_ We have external assessments and benchmarks in place, measure our students against students in other independent schools nationally. This includes the SAT, ACT, AP pass rates, or some other form of regularly benchmarked scores. The school's average score exceeds the national average.

CESA member schools shall develop a Christian ethos rooted in a commitment to the Nicene Creed and/or Apostles Creed, the foundational tenets of Christian orthodoxy, that distinguishes them from other local public and independent schools and we should have a nice sense of community through a coherent Christian community.

## PRIMARY STANDARDS

5.1 \_\_\_\_ We have an unwavering commitment to the infallibility of Scripture, Christian values and the preeminence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as being the only hope for the salvation of mankind.

5.2 \_\_\_\_ We regularly utilize a variety of survey tools to understand perspectives of the varying stakeholders within the community and that measure effectiveness of all aspects of our mission.

## SECONDARY STANDARDS

5.3 \_\_\_\_ We have effective school/parent programs and communication that encourage collaboration between the school and the family.

5.4 \_\_\_\_ We develop a variety of communication practices to enable stakeholders to gain access to the school's values, sense of purpose, and student progress, and to strengthen the relationship between the school and the families.

5.4.1 \_\_\_\_ We have a communications plan that outlines how the school connects with parents – print materials, electronic newsletters, blog posts, social media, email, etc.

5.5 \_\_\_\_ We develop traditions unique to our school and consistent with our mission to increase school-wide participation, build community, galvanize school culture, and involve a variety of constituents.

5.6 \_\_\_\_ We embrace our leadership responsibility and Christian mission by investing in our local community through service and outreach programs.

5.7 \_\_\_\_ We develop internal practices and/or programs that create a Christian community of care, resulting in a culture that glorifies Christ and promotes student learning.

5.8 \_\_\_\_ The head of school engages in intentional and ongoing regular and ad hoc professional support from colleagues in other schools, mentors, associations, and the Board.

5.9 \_\_\_\_ The head of school places an importance on personal well-being through a healthy balanced life.

5.10 \_\_\_\_ The school demonstrates its' attempts to understand and enhance its reputation in and impact on the community.

5.11 \_\_\_\_ The school is intentional about unifying diverse constituencies around its mission.