



COUNCIL ON EDUCATIONAL
STANDARDS & ACCOUNTABILITY

CESA Institutional Review

Certification 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 the institution and its performance in relation to best practices for Christian schools. The goal of CESA is to encourage high-performing Christian institutions delivering the best education to students across the country.

There are five certification standard categories:

- **Mission Clarity**
- **Effective Governance**
- **Institutional Viability**
- **Academic and Programmatic Distinction**
- **Sense of Coherent Christian Community.**

Primary Standards

Within each section there are major standards that CESA views as important to membership in the organization. If an institution feels they are not able to meet one of the primary standards, please contact the Institutional Review Director or Executive Director for guidance. We realize schools are in various phases of development and it is important to view each institution individually and according to its strategic goals.

Standard Ratings

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.

Requirement

In order to pass the CESA Institutional Review the school must meet all primary standards and **80%** of the secondary standards.

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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, 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 becoming a student of 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.

Secondary Standards

- 1.3 _____ 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.
- 1.4 _____ We have a clearly stated mission that is prominently displayed throughout the campus and used to influence important institutional decisions.
- 1.5 _____ We are fully accredited by an authorized accreditor with rigorous standards and a nationally significant reputation.
- 1.6 _____ Our school board chairman has written a letter authorizing the school to pursue membership and authenticating the self-assessment scores.

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.

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 seven 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 ministry partnership agreement that outlines the role of 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 board of directors. The agreement is constructed to promote accountability, unity, educational excellence, and institutional best practice.
- 2.2 _____ We have a history of creating compelling strategic plans that are collaboratively designed, effectively communicated, annually monitored, and purposefully implemented.
- 2.3 _____ We designate, in policy and practice, the head of school as the single employee of the board of trustees and assign the head of school exclusive executive authority over the vital operations of the school, including, but not limited to, personnel decisions, admissions, student discipline, curriculum and budget management.
- 2.4 _____ 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.
- 2.5 _____ The board of trustees acts as the “keeper of the mission” and stays at a policy level not getting involved in the day-to-day activities of the school.

Secondary Standards

- 2.6 ____ The board of trustees has an annual evaluation of the head of school.
- 2.6.1 ____ The board of trustees conducts a thorough comparative compensation evaluation for the head of school at a minimum of every five years.
- 2.6.2 ____ The board of trustees provides a multi-year contract to the head of school.
- 2.7 ____ We have incorporated objectives from our strategic plan into the annual evaluation of the head of school and the head of school has done the same with the leadership team.
- 2.8 ____ 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.
- 2.8.1 ____ We have a documented board induction and education program that all board members must complete as a minimum requirement for board membership.
- 2.8.2 ____ We have a formal, written board self-evaluation process, which all board members must participate in annually.
- 2.8.3 ____ We have a process for continual board professional development.
- 2.8.4 ____ 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.
- 2.8.5 ____ We have a board made up of a diverse constituency reflecting the needs of the institution.
- 2.9 ____ The institution engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.
- 2.10 ____ We have implemented our strategic plan through an annual administrative agenda that directs the work of the leadership team and school board.
- 2.11 ____ We have a regular reporting process, including dashboard metrics, regarding vital operations of the school that is provided by the head of school to the board of directors.
- 2.12 ____ Our handbooks (Faculty and Student/Parent Handbooks) are regularly reviewed by an attorney (at a minimum of every 5 years).

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.

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.



If the rating is IP, please comment:

- 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 3-5 years.
- 3.3 _____ We pay teachers a competitive and professional wage benchmarked against other comparable schools.

Secondary Standards

- 3.4 _____ We have a minimum of unrestricted cash for 3 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 debt service payment is below 10% of the school's annual cash operating expenses.
- 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.
- 3.9 _____ We have a comprehensive crisis management plan (or safety and security plan) in writing that is made available to all faculty and staff.
- 3.10 _____ We have adequate insurance coverage for all students, staff and board.
- 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 debt service reserves (for schools with mortgage or long-term debt) that equals 6-12 months of debt service costs (principal and interest).
- 3.13 _____ Our debt level (total liabilities) does not exceed 2.5 times the school's unrestricted net assets.
- 3.14 _____ 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.
- 3.15 _____ The average age of our accounts payable invoices does not exceed 30 days.
- 3.16 _____ We have a development plan that implements research-based fund development initiatives, including operational funds, capital campaign funds, and endowment funds.
- 3.17 _____ 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 sacrificial financial gifts to the school themselves and asking others to do the same. Their gifts accounted for a significant portion of our most recent annual fund and/or capital campaign giving.

- 3.18 _____ We have giving goals in place that include, but may not be limited to, the annual fund, capital campaigns, special celebrations, planned giving, and other specified forms of giving that support the institution.
- 3.19 _____ We have a well-written and well-executed enrollment/marketing plan that is updated annually.
- 3.20 _____ We have ambitious enrollment goals and historic comparative data with regard to re-enrollment, new family enrollment, offers extended, and admissions prospects.
- 3.21 _____ 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.
- 3.22 _____ We have an attractive and easily navigable website that speaks to the current reality of high-tech consumers.
- 3.23 _____ 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.

Standard Four: Academic and Programmatic Distinction

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 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 Educational Records Bureau (ERB) CTP 4 examinations 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 strive to use independent school norms as its measurement.
Note: If the CTP4 is not given, the school must be able to clearly articulate its choice with another assessment tool and demonstrate its use to accurately measure student achievement using various norms, especially utilizing independent school norms.
- 4.3 _____ We hire 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.

Secondary Standards

- 4.4 _____ *9-12 Schools:* We have a comprehensively written program for guidance counseling and college placement with a ratio of roughly 1:150 for sophomores, juniors and seniors enrollment.
K-8 Schools: We have a comprehensively written program for guidance counseling placement with a ratio of roughly 1:300.
- 4.5 _____ We build academic programs that reflect the stated mission of the institution, its faculty, its learners, and its community.

- 4.5.1 _____ We have academic programs that are research-proven and intellectually challenging.
- 4.5.2 _____ We have a policy and procedure for responding to challenged materials.
- 4.6 _____ We develop curriculum that reflects the stated mission of the school and which prepares students as desirable candidates for both higher education and the work place.
- 4.6.1 _____ We design and communicate 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.
- 4.6.2 _____ We develop curriculum that is vertically and horizontally aligned.
- 4.7 _____ We develop an academic assessment program that utilizes both formative and summative assessments for the purpose of understanding student progress toward curricular goals.
- 4.7.1 _____ We train faculty to understand and utilize formative assessments for the purpose of understanding and charting student academic progress.
- 4.8 _____ 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.
- 4.8.1 _____ We utilize a performance appraisal process for faculty, which annually evaluates planning and preparation, instruction, classroom environment and management, interpersonal relations, and professional responsibilities.
- 4.8.2 _____ 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 division heads and head of school.
- 4.8.3 _____ We use a formal tool to evaluate the faculty culture every three years at a minimum.
- 4.9 _____ We utilize ongoing professional development as a source of development 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. The goal of the professional development program is improvement of the academic program outcomes. It is important to utilize outside national conferences in order to stay abreast of the current research and best practices in independent schools.
- 4.9.1 _____ We design an annual professional development calendar detailing the learning outcomes for the faculty for the upcoming school year.
- 4.9.2 _____ We provide faculty with grade-alike and subject-alike planning and discussion time annually.
- 4.9.3 _____ 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.
- 4.9.4 _____ We have a mentoring program or improvement plan process for faculty in need of professional growth.
- 4.9.5 _____ We provide, at minimum, 1% of the annual school operating budget for professional development.

- 4.10 _____ We offer a broad range of extracurricular programs including visual and performing arts, athletics and leadership opportunities.
- 4.11 _____ We utilize an annual performance appraisal process for the administrative team.
- 4.12 _____ The institution implements, evaluates, and monitors processes to identify and address the specialized social, emotional, developmental, and academic needs of students.

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

- 4.13 _____ 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.
 - 4.13.1 _____ We have external assessments and benchmarks in place measure our students against students in other independent schools nationally. This includes the SAT, ACT, or some other form of regularly benchmarked scores. The school’s average score exceeds the national average.
- 4.14 _____ We require at a minimum 24 academic credits with 4 years of English, 3 years of math, 3 years of science, 3 years of history/social studies, and two consecutive years of the same foreign language.

Standard Five: Sense of Coherent Christian Community

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.

Primary Standards

- 5.1 _____ We have an unwavering commitment to 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.

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 all necessary and pertinent community information.
 - 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 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 establishes regular and ad hoc professional support from colleagues in other schools, mentors, associations, and the Board.
If the rating is IP, please comment:
- 5.9 _____ The head of school places an importance on personal well-being through a healthy life that is pleasant, engaged, connected, meaningful, and accomplished.

Please fill out the following information:

6.1. What is the percent of each stakeholder group gave towards the annual fund?

- _____ Board
- _____ Faculty
- _____ Parents
- _____ Alumni

6.2. _____ What percentage of the faculty have advanced degrees?