

MEMORANDUM

TO: Indiana State Board of Education Staff
FROM: Office of School Accountability, Indiana Department of Education
RE: Third-Party Recognition Petition for the Independent Schools Association of the Central States
DATE: January 13, 2021

This memorandum provides a summary of the information provided by the organization in the petition, as well as the Department’s thoughts and final recommendation regarding the recognition of the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) as a third-party accrediting organization.

Background & Organization Overview

Mission and Objectives: ISACS is an accrediting organization whose mission is to lead schools “...to pursue exemplary independent education.” ISACS accredits “secular and religious schools with a wide variety of missions, which serve a broad array of students, including college preparatory, gifted, and learning differences. Regardless of mission, all schools accredited by ISACS are private, nonprofit institutions that meet the association’s definition of independence.”

ISACS was founded in 1908 and has served as an accrediting organization since the early 1960s, accrediting schools within fifteen (15) states in the Midwest.

Member Schools: Currently, ISACS has 216 fully accredited member schools, as well as 20 schools with provisional membership status working towards full accreditation. ISACS currently accredits 22 Indiana schools.

Agency Personnel: In its petition, ISACS lists its executive staff and their experiences, as well as outlining the process by which appropriate personnel are selected for ten (10) member school visit teams. Specifically, each team is led by a “...Head of School who is familiar with the type of school being evaluated and who has previous experience serving on accreditation teams and undergoing the accreditation process at their school,” as well as ensuring at least 50% of the team has previous experience serving on accreditation teams.

Accreditation Process and Procedures

Review and Approval Process: In order to participate in ISACS’s three (3) year accreditation process, schools must first be accepted for provisional membership by demonstrating either that they currently meet all of the association’s standards for membership or that they will be able to meet them by the time they are ready to achieve full accreditation. Throughout the accreditation process, provisional member schools are required to submit annual reports and school profiles, “...detailing the previous year’s professional development and activities in preparation for full accreditation.” The provisional membership period may last up to seven (7) years.

No later than three (3) years prior to the end of the provisional school membership period, the school begins the formal accreditation process. The first year is dedicated to preliminary steps, including “...surveying the school community, accomplishing required governance tasks, reviewing the curriculum, and hosting a visit by the ISACS director of accreditation.” The second year requires the school to complete a thorough self-study report which addresses “...every area of school practice.” In the third year, the school hosts an accreditation team for a three (3)

day accreditation visit, in which the team assesses all areas of the school and makes commendations and recommendations for each area, in addition to an overall commendation and recommendation report.

Expectations and Requirements for Approval: Once the accreditation team completes its visit, it submits a recommendation letter to the ISACS Accreditation Review Committee, which specifies the team's recommendation for level of accreditation and detailing (if applicable) any standard of membership in which the school is deficient. ISACS's Accreditation Review Committee examines the accreditation team report and accreditation recommendation letter, making its own recommendation to the ISACS Board of Trustees about the school's accreditation. The ISACS Board of Trustees votes on the school's accreditation, and the association's Executive Director then notifies the school about the board's decision by letter.

There are four (4) options for accreditation status: full accreditation, full accreditation with conditions, and denial or delay of accreditation, with the fourth option for removal of accreditation reserved for currently accredited schools.

Assistance, Monitoring and Communication: ISACS maintains regular contact with schools throughout the seven (7) year accreditation cycle. Once a school achieves full accreditation during the third year of the cycle, "...it is required to submit two (2) additional reports: the Reaction Report in Year 4 and the Progress Report in Year 6." Reports are reviewed by staff and the Accreditation Review Committee, which determines whether to accept the school's report or request additional information. Additionally, ISACS also states "...if a school is required to submit documentation in order to remove a condition attached to its accreditation, the reporting requirements are more extensive."

Accreditation Standards

Standards and Expectations: The ISACS Standards for Membership are regularly reviewed and updated, with the most recent revision occurring in 2020. Currently, ISACS maintains 42 standards which are grouped into three (3) major areas: mission and governance, learning and teaching, and administration and operations.

Evaluation Process: ISACS expects member schools to demonstrate they meet all the standards for membership during each seven (7) year accreditation cycle. Confirmation that the school meets the standards rests with the accreditation team. If a school is found to be out of compliance with one or more standards during the accreditation process, the school is expected to meet conditions associated with the standards in question within a specified timeline or risk removal of accreditation. The timeline is established by the Accreditation Review Committee and monitored by ISACS staff and the committee.

Signed Recognition Agreement

ISACS provided the Department with a signed copy of the recognition agreement and was awarded points accordingly.

Department Recommendation

Each petition is reviewed and scored based on an established rubric where an organization may earn a score between 0 and 4. The Department recommends for approval a petition receiving a final score of 3 or higher. After reviewing and scoring the materials provided, ISACS received a

final score of 3.85 out of 4 possible points. Since ISACS received a near-perfect score in its renewal application, the Department recommends that ISACS's petition for recognition be approved for the maximum recognition term of ten (10) years.