

MEMORANDUM

TO: Indiana State Board of Education Staff
FROM: Office of School Accountability, Indiana Department of Education
RE: Third-Party Recognition Petition for the National Association of Private Catholic and Independent Schools
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 National Association of Private Catholic and Independent Schools (NAPCIS) as a third-party accrediting organization.

Background & Organization Overview

Mission and Objectives: NAPCIS is a third-party accrediting organization which is “...dedicated to strengthening and promoting Catholic education through accreditation.” Based in Sacramento, CA, NAPCIS has been in operation since 1995. According to their website, NAPCIS was formed:

- to provide accreditation and teacher certification for small schools teaching the Catholic Faith;
- to promote and assist in the start-up of new private Catholic and independent schools;
- to assist administrators and teachers in private Catholic and independent schools in applying Roman Catholic teachings and sound academic principles; and
- to assist in the guarantee of the right of parents to choose an education for their children in accordance with their religious faith.

Member Schools: NAPCIS has 81 member schools, 24 of which are accredited as well as an accredited homeschool, with one (1) accredited school in Indiana.

Agency Personnel: While NAPCIS does not list any requirements for its staff to oversee its internal accreditation process in its petition or in any supplementary materials, NAPCIS does require members of its onsite evaluation committee to “...have experience in Catholic education and the educational and administrative processes of schools teaching the Catholic Faith.”

Accreditation Process and Procedures

Review and Approval Process: In order for a school to apply for accreditation, NAPCIS requires the school to first become a member of NAPCIS for a period of no less than one (1) year. After a full year of membership, member schools may submit an application for accreditation, which requires clearly defined documentation and fees from the applicant school. Once received, the application is reviewed by NAPCIS’s Accreditation Department, then forwarded to its Executive Committee for consideration.

After consideration from the Accreditation Department and Executive Committee, the applicant school must complete a self-study, which will be sent to the Executive Committee. Upon review of the self-study report, a delegation from the Accreditation Department visits the school and conducts an onsite investigation. After the onsite investigation, the Accreditation Department will make a final decision for approval and status of accreditation. Accreditation terms last for six (6) years.

Expectations and Requirements for Approval: NAPCIS accreditation "...is based on the premise that a school is best evaluated in terms of its own stated purpose and objectives and its demonstrated success in fulfilling its purpose and objectives." Furthermore, NAPCIS requires applicant schools to comply with its six (6) part criteria, which include integrity, mission, and objectives, curriculum, faculty, students, facilities, and governance. While NAPCIS did provide more detailed standards for the above criteria, it did not provide a scoring rubric outlining minimum approval standards to the Department in its petition.

Assistance, Monitoring and Communication: Member schools accredited by NAPCIS are required to provide annual reports detailing "...any changes or anticipated changes in the original accreditation materials pertaining to the Standards of Excellence and Criteria for Accreditation." According to NAPCIS's accreditation manual, the report's purpose is not to determine what progress the school has made towards implementing recommendations from the Self-Study. Rather, the purpose of the annual report is "...to certify that there have been no changes in the school's purpose, organization and operation that would affect its accreditation status."

Accreditation Standards

Standards and Expectations: In addition to NAPSIC's six (6) part criteria, NAPCIS also maintains a separate set of fifteen (15) standards, which NAPSIC refers to as its "Standards of Excellence." All accredited member schools are expected to abide by the Standards of Excellence, which range from Catholic doctrine to curricular and assessment requirements.

Evaluation Process: As indicated above, member schools are required to submit annual reports to NAPCIS. A member school's accreditation with NAPCIS "...may be terminated anytime if a school does not demonstrate continuing compliance with all Standards of Excellence and accreditation requirements." While the organization highlighted its only instance of revoking accreditation as an example, NAPCIS did not provide the Department with a copy of its procedure for terminating accreditation. In order for a school to renew its accreditation with NAPCIS, it must participate in the same process as outlined for initial accreditation.

Signed Recognition Agreement

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

Department Comments

- In addition to serving as an accrediting agency, NAPCIS also assists in the startup of schools. The Department has concerns this creates a potential for conflict(s) of interest.
- While NAPCIS maintains a comprehensive list of standards, many standards are subjective, with no provided rubric to score and determine to what degree applicants meet their standards. The Department has concerns with recognizing an organization that does not have a clearly delineated threshold for approval or denial of accreditation.
- NAPCIS's accreditation standards and doctrine primarily focus on the degree to which member schools adhere to Catholic doctrine in their educational practices, rather than a primary focus on academics and educational excellence. While the Department recognizes these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the Department

has concerns with recognizing an organization which may not primarily focus on educational excellence in its core accreditation practices.

- NAPCIS holds that its accreditation may be terminated at any time for failing to meet all standards and requirements but did not provide adequate information on the termination process or an appeals process. The Department has concerns with recognizing an organization that does not have a defined process for revoking accreditation.
- Under a section in its Accreditation Manual titled “Purposes of Accreditation,” NAPCIS makes several statements regarding the nature of state education standards and state regulation of private education. While the Department recognizes the organization’s right to maintain its own set of beliefs, the Department has concerns whether NAPCIS will ensure its Indiana member schools align their curriculum to Indiana State Standards.
- It should be noted that NAPCIS submitted a request for recognition prior to the formal adoption of the recognition criteria by the Board. As such, the Department notes that if desired, NAPCIS is eligible to reapply for recognition during the 2020-2021 school year.

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 approval for a petition receiving a final score of 3 or higher. After reviewing and scoring the materials provided, NAPCIS received a final score of 2.48 out of 4 possible points. Since the Department requires a minimum final score of 3 or higher for a recommendation to approve, the Department recommends that NAPCIS’s petition for recognition be denied.