

ACSI Exemplary Accreditation Standards/Critical Factors

I. Critical Factor One: Board Governance

- A) The governing board assumes final authority for the school, develops broad policies, accepts fiduciary responsibility for the school, and provides oversight of the head of school. In church sponsored schools, policy clearly delineates the scope of authority for the church governing board, the senior pastor, and the school governing board.
- B) The governing board has a deliberate selection and screening nominating process, a documented orientation procedure, and requires participation of the full board in annual professional development training.
- C) The governing board has an extended history of effective functioning within their board role and provides significant evidence that they function in that role at an exemplary level, including evidence of an annual, formal, written board evaluation (of the board) in which all board members participate. The governing board has an extended history of demonstrating best practices in their relationship and functioning with the head of school.
- D) There is evidence that definitive governance policies are established and maintained at an exemplary level and rigorously followed, reviewed, and updated.
- E) The Head of School functions as the sole school employee of the board and is given executive authority over (and accountability for) all operations of the school, including curriculum, personnel, and financial management.
- F) The governing board completes an annual, written, comprehensive performance evaluation of the Head of School, focused on achievement of annual goals.
- G) As trustees entrusted with being the guardians of the school mission, the board regularly reviews and affirms the foundational documents of mission, vision, values, and philosophy, as well as the alignment with school policy and practice, without usurping the head of school's operational leadership.

II. Critical Factor Two: Executive Leadership

- A) The head of school has a master's degree in school leadership or a related field; ACSI certification, (Administration or Executive Director) and has a continued and documented pattern of both formal and informal professional development.
- B) The head of school embodies the multiple competencies required for school leadership.
- C) The head of school is a recognized participant in the local educational and civic community, and attends professional conferences on educational leadership. The school leadership team is well-qualified and is engaged in ongoing professional development.
- D) The head of school, and the school staff, actively support the broader Christian school movement by sharing expertise and resources in helping other schools. The school, being blessed, seeks to be a blessing to other Christian schools.
- E) The head of school has a proven track record of leadership at the school, and there is not a pattern of head of school turnover.

F) The head is well respected within the school community including staff, board, students and parents and is recognized as a model of spiritual/educational leadership. The head is well read and current on educational issues at the local, state, and national levels.

G) The head of school works in collaboration with church and community groups, is engaged with the school's key stakeholder groups, and provides leadership for a vibrant school community.

H) The head of school oversees a process of annual performance reviews for all employees, including administrators, faculty and staff. All employee reviews must be documented, rigorous, fully disclosed to the employee, and filed. Marginally performing employees have an opportunity to improve before being released.

I) The head of school supports the governing board, keeps the board well informed, and encourages the board to follow best practices in board governance.

J) The school utilizes a strategic planning process that reflects careful thought regarding marketing, fund development, curricular and co-curricular programs, personnel, facilities, and multi-year financial planning.

K) Business operations, including admissions, student records, and personnel practices function at an exemplary level.

III. Critical Factor Three: School Viability

A) The school has a demonstrable history of financial viability and strength with a tuition and fee structure that covers 90% or more of annual operational expenses and there is limited dependence on annual fundraising events.

B) The school has a written development plan that includes donor development and effectively raises strategic and capital funds.

C) The school has a written admissions/marketing plan that effectively communicates with all constituencies, includes internal marketing, and provides focused attention to prospective families.

D) The school has an appropriate unrestricted operating reserve fund (5% to 15% of annual operating budget) and operates from a position of financial health and strength. Debt service requires 5% or less of the annual operating budget.

E) The school is a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, or provides artifacts and evidence that it meets all their standards for their business /fiscal operations, including an annual audit of business practices by an independent certified public accountant. (Evidences: EFCA membership or documentation of meeting the seven standards of ECFA which are: Statement of Faith, Governance, Audit, Legal Compliance, Transparency, Conflict of Interest, and Stewardship of Charitable Gifts.)

F) The school compensates its staff appropriately based on geographically appropriate, documented benchmarks, including comparisons to local public and comparable private schools.

G) The school utilizes quality facilities throughout, that provide strong support for the instructional program, the needs of students and staff, and includes specialized facilities for instruction such as

laboratories, fine arts, physical education and athletics, as well as large and small group instructional spaces.. There is documented compliance with building codes as required. (Evidences: documentation of code compliance and safety inspections by officials or contracted experts)

H) The school provides some level of mission driven tuition assistance and/or merit scholarships, and adheres to school policies in the implementation of tuition assistance and/or merit scholarships.

IV. Critical Factor Four: Student Learning

A) School-wide outcomes are thoroughly assessed and the results used for school improvement planning.

B) The school organizes, maintains, and adjusts its curriculum via a mapping system including curricular standards, benchmarks, and assessments, and is linked to the established Expected Student Outcomes.

C) The head of school provides evidence and demonstrates that the school uses current research-based instructional strategies and organizational methods teachers use to actively engage students, and assure students are developing skills, higher order thinking, as well as deep understanding of content.

D) There is evidence that the school uses its assessment data and has a formal process to make regular adjustments to curriculum. Assessment data should include formative assessments to measure achievement of curricular goals, norm-based nationally recognized achievement tests, and annual benchmarking and reporting. (Evidences: observation of curriculum mapping process and usages, use of assessment data, examples of adjustments to curriculum maps/lesson plans)

E) The students meet the school's well-defined school-wide and subject specific expectations for learning, academic achievement, content and skill mastery. (Evidences: school and standardized data are correlated with achievement expectations such as standards, benchmarks, advanced and honors courses, AP data, college admissions testing data, testimonials from schools/colleges at which students matriculate, and online learning experiences.)

F) The school's curriculum is biblically integrated, utilized pervasively by the teachers (Biblical Worldview Integration (BWI)), and is supported by appropriate professional development. (Evidences: curricular examples, lesson plans, observations/videos of best BWI practices, professional development plan for BWI)

G) There is external validation of academic achievement with a pattern of students who are recognized as National Merit Scholars, AP Scholars, strong SAT/ACT scores, AP scores, etc.

H) Evidence that technology is current, well integrated, and well-resourced to include data management, instructional media, reporting, and offers a wide variety of instructional support to include instructional planning, lesson delivery, and assessment. Student use of technology is evident.

I) Library/media research resources are exemplary in support of the curriculum, readily available to faculty and students, and electronic media are well-integrated to the instructional program.

J) Instruction prepares students for online learning opportunities as part of their educational experience.

K) There is adequate evidence of strong co-curricular offerings, including opportunities for students to participate in various activities such as arts and athletics.

L) For students with exceptional learning needs, support, accommodations and or differentiation is evident in pedagogy, programs, and services.

V. Critical Factor Five: Spiritual Formation of Students

A) The school conducts external formative and summative assessments, at least every other year, of the spiritual climate of the school. It utilizes this data to adjust its programs and policies to impact the lives of students and provide a culture where faith development flourishes. (Evidences: data from internal and external spiritual formation audits and school responses to that data, discipleship ethos within the school, testimonials.)

B) The school has an ongoing component of professional development and related teacher evaluation that ensures t the staff is trained to meet the needs of students as role models and as either formal or informal mentors.

C) The school has a staff member whose job description gives significant time and attention (i.e., chaplain) to the spiritual formation and nurture of students, including supporting the staff in discipleship and the integration of faith and learning in the curriculum.

D) The school is purposeful and intentional about providing a variety of significant opportunities for students to be engaged in ministry, especially ministry in the local church, and serving in the community and abroad.

E) The school conducts systematic surveys of secondary students and of graduates and incorporates survey results in program planning and analysis.

VI. Critical Factor Six: School Culture

A) Professional Development Culture: the head of school leads the school staff as a Professional Learning Community. Evidence includes strong, ongoing, internally led professional development activities, formal teacher induction, ongoing mentoring, data informed professional development planning, and adequate time and financial resources allocated for professional development activities.

B) Faculty Professional Culture: the head of school documents the quality and qualifications of all faculty members in experience and training for the subjects they are teaching, and that those qualifications are an in-field/level match for their assignments.

C) Organizational Culture: the head of school establishes a clear administrative structure, supports the administrative leadership team, and clearly communicates roles and responsibilities of leaders to all employees. School policies, systems, structures are clearly understood by employees.

D) Organizational Culture: the head of school gathers feedback for key stakeholder groups (employees, parents, students) in assessing attitudes and perceived effectiveness of school policy and programs.

E) Student and Community Culture: the school leadership and staff have cultivated a relational, grace-oriented culture across the school community that is based on high levels of trust and respect. This relationship is evident among students and between students and faculty members. Student spiritual leadership is evident and faculty serves as appropriate advocates for individual students as well as student groups.