

HISTORY OF WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD SCHOOL ACCREDITATION - WELSSA

Since 1981, WELS Lutheran school leaders have considered developing self-study guidelines and/or a process for the accreditation of WELS schools. At that time, it was determined that it was not feasible to establish an accrediting agency for WELS schools. It was also determined that it would be beneficial for WELS schools to conduct a self-study of their educational program as a means of improving the quality and effectiveness of their ministry.

The Commission on Parish Schools made special efforts to help schools evaluate their programs. The CPS developed Guidelines for Self-Study. Dr. Ray Dusseau, associate professor of education at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Mr. Paul Wichmann, administrator of Luther High School, Onalaska, Wisconsin, developed those guidelines. The National Lutheran School Accreditation Commission and its Executive Director, Dr. Carl Moser, permitted the two WELS authors to borrow extensively from NLSA resources, and he also permitted limited use of those resources for use in the WELSSA Handbook. Dr. Moser's permission is gratefully acknowledged.

In 2003 the Commission on Parish Schools (now called Commission on Lutheran Schools) and the Board for Parish Services (now called the Congregational Ministry Support Group) resolved to establish a WELS school accreditation process. The formal title of the accreditation process is Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod School Accreditation (WELSSA). The CPS presented WELSSA to the National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA) and applied for membership in that organization. In June 2003 the NCPSA granted Candidacy Status to WELSSA. Two of the requirements of that Candidacy Status is that WELSSA be field tested in WELS schools and that an NCPSA consultant work with the Executive Director of WELSSA during that field test. In June 2005 the NCPSA accepted WELSSA as a member.

The CLS expresses its appreciation to Dr. LeDell D. Plath for serving as director of the project to develop the materials and resources that are used in the WELSSA process. We also thank former CPS administrators Jason Nelson and Jim Brandt for making the accreditation of WELS schools through the Commission on Parish Schools an early priority in their leadership of WELS Schools.

May God be honored and glorified through the accrediting process.

OBJECTIVES OF WELSSA

The WELS School Accreditation program has been developed to:

- Assist WELS congregations with evaluating their early childhood ministries, Lutheran elementary schools, or Lutheran high schools based on Scripture and on sound educational principles
- Provide WELS congregations with a basis for developing a plan for improving the school by identifying strengths and areas in need of improvement
- Provide a means by which WELS schools can become accredited through WELS CLS. WELS schools can also pursue co-accreditation with regional agencies recognized by the National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA).

GOVERNING BOARD OF WELSSA

The WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools is the accrediting agency for WELSSA. As such the CLS establishes and administers all policies of WELSSA and approves schools for accreditation by WELSSA. A detailed description of all WELSSA policies is found in Chapter Three of the WELSSA Handbook.

COMMISSION ON LUTHERAN SCHOOLS MEMBERSHIP

The CLS is comprised of elected and appointed members. The chairman of the CLS is elected by the WELS in convention from a slate of laymen, pastors, and/or male teachers who are members of WELS congregations. The other CLS members - two pastors, two laymen, and two male teachers - who also belong to WELS congregations are appointed by the WELS Congregational Ministry Support Group (CMSG). These CLS members serve six year terms and can be re-elected once. The CLS also includes two advisory members.

THE WELSSA ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The Self-Study

The first step is a self-study conducted by the congregation and staff members using a set of standards developed by WELSSA. The year-long study will evaluate strengths and areas in need of improvement. The self-study committee will determine the school's mission and vision to establish goals to plan for the future and to maintain high standards of education for its students.

The Objective Evaluation

Having completed the self-study, a team of experienced educators, directed by a captain trained and experienced in accreditation, visit the school to validate the findings of the self-study. This is done by scheduling interviews, verifying documentation, and participating in activities to gain insights to the overall environment of the school. The team is onsite for two to three days and provides an objective report of their findings on the final day.

The Action Plan

The objective evaluation provides commendations on standards in which the school thrives and recommendations for further development and improvement in areas of weakness.

The Accreditation

The accredited school will file an annual report to the WELSSA executive office in June to substantiate continuous evaluation and improvement. The accreditation cycle is five years, after which the process to renew accreditation begins with an application for renewal and hosting a site visit.

THE WELSSA STANDARDS

- * The School's Mission, Vision, Objectives
- * The School's Partnerships with the Home, Students, Community, WELS
- * The School's Plans for Enrolling Students / Outreach
- * School Climate
- * School Governance and Administration
- * Professional Personnel (faculty and support staff)
- * Curriculum
- * Instruction (process, materials, resources)
- * Student Services (activities, guidance, health and safety, food services)
- * Physical Facilities
- * Planning and Information Management (personnel, student records, financial, accreditation)
- * Dormitory Facility and Management (if applicable)