

ACADEMIC SCHOOLS ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

A DIVISION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF FLORIDA, INC.

STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

I. Nature and Purpose of the Association

- A. The nature of the Independent School is to provide educational opportunities unhampered by political considerations. Independent schools, including not-for profit, non-profit, and for profit schools, add to the variety of educational choices in this country and enrich the quality of educational programs available to our nation's youth.
- B. AISF schools are varied in their purposes and programs, but they all emphasize educational fundamentals while tailoring their programs to meet the needs, capabilities, and interests of their students. AISF schools are committed to furthering their stated philosophies and objectives.
- C. The purpose of this Association is to improve private education in Florida by monitoring its accredited and provisional members to maintain the accreditation standards, by fostering relations with the public, other schools, and local, state, regional, and national educational authorities and associations, and by promoting in-service education of teachers and administrators.

II. Philosophy and Objectives

- A. Each member school shall complete the Association's Self-study as required by the Association to:
 - 1. Express its basic philosophy; and
 - 2. State its educational objectives.
- B. Schools shall convey and disseminate their philosophies and educational objectives to the public in order to adequately notify the community of such information.

III. School Calendar and Class Hours

- A. Schools are required to be in session a minimum of 170 days per school year while also meeting the requirement of at least 540 instructional hours for kindergarten, 720 instructional hours for grades 1-3, and 900 instructional hours for grades 4-12.
- B. Either the above standards or current standards incorporated in the Florida Compulsory Attendance Law or other governing laws shall be used, whichever requires longer student attendance.

IV. School Leadership

- A. The superintendent, director, head of school, president, or the equivalent shall:
 - 1. Have appropriate education, training, and experience to manage a stable educational institution; and
 - 2. Be of sound moral character.
- B. The principal or equivalent shall:
 - 1. Have at least a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university;
 - 2. Have at least a Master's degree from an accredited college or university, if overseeing any high school grades;
 - 3. Have the appropriate training and experience to perform the duties of the position; and
 - 4. Be of sound moral character.

- C. The teachers:
 - 1. Shall either have at least:
 - a. A Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and a valid teaching credential; or
 - b. A Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and be enrolled in the Florida Professional Preparation and Education Competence program or its current equivalent; or
 - c. Other appropriate qualifications with experience and/or academic training and/or in-service training appropriate for the position and for the school's philosophy and program.
 - 1. Should be encouraged to participate in community and in-service educational experiences and educational workshops.
 - 2. Should be encouraged to understand individual differences in student abilities and needs.
 - 3. Shall be of sound moral character.
- D. Non-instructional personnel shall:
 - 1. Be selected on the basis of job related qualifications and experience;
 - 2. Have current and appropriate licenses and certificates as the law requires; and
 - 3. Be of sound moral character.
- E. General Policies
 - 1. Salaries shall be determined by education, experience, training, and responsibilities.
 - 2. Schools shall provide at least three (3) sick leave days per year for salaried employees without loss of pay.
 - 3. Schools shall maintain employment files for each staff member including employment applications and professional documentation.
 - 4. Schools shall employ and train teacher aides/assistants as needed.
 - 5. Schools shall submit all required information to any applicable governmental agency/institution.
 - 6. Schools shall conduct a Florida state criminal background check on all new hires and on all volunteers with regular or unsupervised contact with students and maintain documentation of such.

V. Finances and Related Records

- A. Tuition and other revenues shall sustain the educational program and services of the school.
- B. The Association may periodically require a school to submit a professionally constructed financial statement.
- C. An annual budget shall be used as a guide for financial stability.
- D. A school's financial affairs shall be under the general review of a professional, certified accountant.
- E. The school shall maintain accident, liability, and comprehensive insurance policies and keep copies of the policies. Coverage shall be adequate for the protection of students and for the financial protection of the school in light of the characteristics of the school program and value of the school's assets.
- F. The school shall maintain vehicle maintenance files and copies of automotive titles.
- G. The school shall maintain and display all licenses and certificates as may be required by any applicable governmental agency.

VI. Student Data

- A. Records
 - 1. Current student cumulative record files shall be kept in a secure location in the school and shall be kept up to date.
 - a. Records of former students shall be maintained for a minimum of 15 years from the last date of attendance.
 - b. High school records shall be:
 - 1. Maintained indefinitely,
 - 2. Stored on-site or off-site so that files are secured physically and/or digitally, and
 - 3. Secured from natural disasters, theft, or other losses.
 - c. Cumulative records, at minimum, include grades received, attendance and tardy information, standardized test results, and dates of entrance and withdrawal.
 - 2. Accurate daily attendance and tardiness records shall be maintained.

3. Students' progress reports shall be issued at least twice a year.
 - a. Other forms of parent-teacher communication shall be offered.
 - b. Records of parent-teacher conferences shall be maintained at least through the current school year.
 4. Teacher and student schedules shall be maintained in an administrative office.
 5. In the event of a school's closing, student records shall be transferred to the Board of Public Instruction (or its equivalent) of the county in which the school is located.
- B. Standardized Tests
1. National standardized tests shall be administered annually in grades K-12.
 2. The school shall make the results available in a confidential manner to students, parents, and teachers.
 3. All data shall be dated and recorded in the students' cumulative records within two months of its availability.
 4. Qualified school personnel shall be available to help parents and age-appropriate students interpret the results.

VII. Enrollment and Class Size

- A. Each school shall educate children at least through third grade.
 1. There must be at least 25 total students enrolled from kindergarten through grade 12.
 2. There must be a minimum average of at least five students enrolled per grade level/cluster in grades kindergarten and higher.
- B. Students shall generally be taught in a class, not tutorial, manner.
- C. The school shall admit students who can benefit from its programs.
- D. The school shall practice a policy of admission without discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic origin, color, or national origin.
- E. The school shall set standards for admission, dismissal, and re-enrollment based on the philosophy and objectives of the school.
- F. The school shall determine class sizes based on the school's philosophy and objectives, buildings and grounds, and student needs.
 1. The school must adhere to the following guidelines in each class:

Grade Level*	Maximum Student:Staff Ratio**
Birth - 1 year	4:1
1 year olds	6:1
2 year olds	10:1
3 year olds	15:1
4 year olds	20:1
Kindergarten	25:1
Grades 1 - 5	28:1
Grades 6 - 8	30:1
Grades 9 - 12	35:1

*When children of mixed ages are grouped together in the same room, cluster, or group, and the mixture includes a child of 23 months or younger, then the standard to be applied is the standard applicable to the youngest child. (Example: If one room, cluster, or group contains one 9 month old, two 22 month olds, and three 3 year olds, then the standard for the nine month old would be applied – in this case, a ration of 4:1.)

*When children of mixed ages are grouped together in the same room, cluster, or group, and the mixture does not include a child of 23 months or younger, then the standard to be applied is the standard applicable to the age group which makes up the majority of the children in the room, cluster, or group. (Example: If one room, cluster, or group contains three 2 year olds, six 3 year olds, and five 4 year olds, then the standard for the three year old program would be applied.)

**Exceptions may be made in physical education, music, art, chorus, recess, extracurricular classes, and other similar activities, provided that the class size in these areas is manageable and appropriate for the philosophy and objectives of the school.

VIII. Educational Media

A. Financial Provisions

1. Money shall be budgeted annually for rental or purchase of educational media.
2. Provisions shall be made in the school budget as appropriate for the annual purchase of current books, e-books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, databases, credible library access, or other audio-visual materials.

B. Library/Media Center

1. The school must maintain either a centralized or decentralized media center that supports the philosophy and mission of the school. In either case, the center program shall:
 - a. Provide physical or digital access to material.
 - b. Be supervised by qualified personnel to assist students and staff in using the resources and accessing information.
 - c. Provide a minimum of ten e-books or print books per student.
 1. In no case shall a school be required to have more than 10,000 books, or accessibility to 10,000 e-books.
 2. No more than 20 copies of a title shall be counted toward this requirement.
 3. For new schools with a library/media center, the school shall open with a minimum of four books per student and add at least two books per student per year until the school reaches ten books per student.
 - d. Annually remove outdated materials, and materials that are in poor condition.
 - e. Have age-appropriate balance of fiction and non-fiction books in either hard copy or digital format.
 - f. Be of sufficient size to contain the books, digital books, and equipment to provide sufficient seating/study space.
 - g. Have adequate delivery systems to accommodate digital materials.
 - h. Reflect current technologies.
 - i. Provide a credible and substantial age-appropriate print or digital encyclopedia with copyright date within the past five (5) years.
 - j. Provide appropriate materials and services in various areas of the school.
 - k. Provide a feasible system for circulating materials/books.

C. Technology

1. Technology is current, functional, and sufficient for student use.
2. Technology infrastructure is adequate to support the technology used.
3. Credible and substantial resources must be made available to teachers and students that support the philosophy and mission of the school.

IX. Physical Facilities

A. General Environment

1. Buildings and grounds shall be clean, well-maintained, and attractive.
2. Buildings shall be sufficient in size for groups served.
3. Buildings shall comply with all applicable zoning and structural codes and other governmental regulations.
4. Grounds shall have proper drainage.
5. Buildings shall have adequate lighting, ventilation, heating, and cooling.
6. Buildings and structures shall be safe and of stable construction.
7. Adequate, unobstructed exits shall be provided and identified.
8. All equipment and furniture shall be appropriate for the ages being served and sufficiently provide for the students' needs and the school's instructional objectives.
9. Classes shall have sufficient display areas including bulletin boards and whiteboard/chalkboard (or the equivalent).

10. An inspection of all play area equipment shall be conducted at least four times per year.
 - a. The school shall maintain play area equipment inspection forms indicating the date of inspection, person conducting the inspection, equipment inspected, and deficiencies found.
 11. Sufficient area shall be provided for organized play appropriate for the student age range and sports program.
 12. There shall be adequate storage space.
 13. The school's main office shall be accessible to students, parents, faculty, and visitors. Its location shall be well marked.
 14. Facilities must support the school's philosophy and educational objectives.
 15. Equipment must support the school's philosophy and objectives.
- B. Lavatory Facilities
1. The size and number of lavatory facilities shall comply with applicable regulations and student needs.
 2. Supplies shall be adequate.
 3. Facilities shall be clean and properly maintained.

X. Health, Safety, and Sanitation

A. Government Compliance

1. The school shall meet or exceed all appropriate local, state, and federal laws relating to fire protection, safety, sanitation, and health.

B. Health and Sanitation

1. Sanitary drinking fountains shall be maintained and available to all ages of children served by the school.
2. Toilet facilities shall be sufficient in number, centrally located, clean, and well-ventilated.
3. Lunch areas and kitchen areas shall be clean and well supervised. Lunch areas and kitchen areas must be adequately equipped to meet the needs of the school and must comply with all applicable regulations.
4. First aid kits shall be placed in proper locations in the school. They should be well-stocked and inspected regularly.
5. An isolation area shall be provided for students or staff members who fall ill on the premises.
6. With exceptions as provided by law, any student or staff member who suffers an infectious disease must be removed from the premises until certified by a physician to be non-infectious and able to return.
7. All appropriate health and athletic eligibility forms shall be maintained by the school.
8. A written policy complying with governmental regulations for administering and storing medications has been developed and made available to parents/guardians.
9. A detailed medical log is maintained that includes a record of all medications given to students, the times the medications were given, and the person administering the medications.
10. The school has developed policies and procedures to protect the staff and children from blood-borne pathogens including a blood-borne exposure control plan and annual in-service training to the staff regarding protective procedures. The staff shall use "universal precautions" when encountering children's or other staff members' body fluids.

C. Fire Control System

1. There shall be a manual and/or automatic fire alarm system that can be heard throughout the buildings.
2. Fire extinguishers shall be visibly distributed throughout the school and updated as recommended by manufacturer and local fire authorities.
3. Each science lab must be equipped with a fire extinguisher.

D. Crisis Plans and Drills

1. Emergency evacuation plans must be posted in each classroom by the exit.
2. Emergency evacuation drills must be conducted as often required by governmental regulations but at least twice per year.
 - a. The school shall maintain records of such drills indicating the dates of the drills, the time taken to evacuate, and any deficiencies found.
3. Crisis and lockdown plans shall be devised according to "industry best practices" and as are appropriate for the school.

- a. Such plans shall be communicated to the staff and students as may be appropriate for the school.
 - b. The school shall conduct annual in-service training for the staff.
 - c. Lockdown drills shall be conducted at least twice per school year.
4. The school shall maintain records of such drills. d. Crisis drills shall be conducted as many times as may be appropriate for the school.
- 5 The school shall maintain records of such drills.

E. Safety

- 1. Students in play areas shall be adequately supervised.
- 2. Play areas shall be safe and appropriate.
- 3. The school shall employ a person qualified to administer first aid and child and adult CPR.
- 4. The school shall provide supervision and assistance for students crossing busy streets near the school grounds at appropriate times.
- 5. Appropriate safety precautions shall be taken when students are transported such as using age-appropriate restraint devices and equipping the vehicle with a first aid kit.
- 6. Each chemistry lab must be equipped with a shower and an eye bath.
- 7. The school shall maintain a safe and secure environment with adequate supervision at all times.

XI. Curriculum and Instruction

A. Educational Program

- 1. The educational program shall:
 - a. Implement and support the school’s philosophy and objectives;
 - b. Be organized sequentially and described in current written curriculum guides;
 - c. Provide for the needs, interests, and talents of the students served by the school;
 - d. Be assessed at least annually to determine needed changes; and
 - e. Provide appropriate remedial and/or advanced programs.
- 2. Supervision
 - a. The principal or principal’s designee shall have primary responsibility for supervising the school’s academic offerings.
 - b. When applicable there should be a correlation among guidance, students’ selection of courses, and the creation of student schedules.
 - c. Faculty shall be consulted in the process of curriculum development.
 - d. The faculty shall have regularly scheduled meetings.
- 3. Subject/Content Areas
 - a. In grades 1-8, the school shall provide learning experiences in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, fine arts, and health education.
 - 1. The school shall provide for continued development in these subject areas.
 - b. In grades 9-12, the school’s required coursework shall meet or exceed the minimum state requirements for core academic courses needed to receive a graduation diploma.
 - c. The school shall provide for intellectual development.
 - d. The school shall provide for creative expression and development.
 - e. The school curriculum shall reflect current technologies.

B. Other Considerations

- 1. Teachers shall respect the student’s right to hold individual viewpoints.
- 2. Responsibilities of citizenship and rights of the individual shall be emphasized.
- 3. All classes shall be taught from written, prepared plans.
- 4. Textbooks and other teaching materials shall be selected to support the schools’ philosophy and objectives, course content, and the needs and abilities of the student body.
- 5. A school with students in grades 11 and/or 12 will provide college and career counseling from a guidance counselor, or equivalent.
- 6. A variety of instructional resources shall be implemented including the use of technology to support the curriculum.

7. The school shall provide for an effective transition between school levels (i.e., from early childhood to elementary, from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school).
8. Educational materials shall be in good condition and reflect current information.
9. Discipline policies shall be published, and appropriate measures shall be used to maintain discipline. Corporal punishment is not allowed.
10. The school shall provide a supportive and positive environment.

XII. Additional Early Childhood Standards *(Note: Early Childhood is defined as infants through kindergarten except in the case of Montessori schools where Early Childhood is defined as infants through six year olds. Other standards still apply to Early Childhood programs. These additional standards may add to or modify those other standards. All standards shall be applied according to age and developmental appropriateness.)*

A. Staff

1. Instructional personnel of the infant to four year old children (for Montessori schools, this shall apply for the infants to six year olds) must have one of the following:
 - a. A valid teaching certificate in early childhood education, or
 - b. A college degree in early childhood education, or
 - c. An Associate of Arts Degree with an emphasis in Early Childhood (CDA), or
 - d. An Associate of Arts Degree with training in Early Childhood Education, or
 - e. A MACTE or NCME approved Montessori teaching credential, or
 - f. Other appropriate credentials.

B. Program/Curriculum

1. Learning experiences shall provide for cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development.
2. Learning experiences and activities shall be varied and age appropriate to include activities such as:
 - a. Art
 - b. Computer activities
 - c. Handwriting
 - d. Mathematics readiness
 - e. Music
 - f. Dramatic play
 - g. Physical development (gross and fine motor skills)
 - h. Reading/language development (linguistic, auditory, and visual)
 - i. Listening to and reading stories
 - j. Science
 - k. Social development
 - l. Social studies
 - m. Tactile development
3. Learning experiences and activities shall be varied and age appropriate to include activities such as:
4. Routines are developed and followed.
5. Children have time for self-selected tasks.
6. Children often work in small groups.
7. Children are given opportunities to work alone and as a class.
8. Children are involved in lessons engaging them in active exploration.
9. Children are given opportunities for creative expression.
10. The educational atmosphere should be one of building on children's strengths in a non-threatening environment.
11. Children must be given positive encouragement and support.
12. Free play, supervised by staff, shall provide indoor and outdoor opportunities for growth through physical and social experiences.
13. Children are encouraged to cooperate and help one another.
14. For the pre-kindergarten level, ongoing assessment of children's progress takes place and is used to plan activities for individual children and for groups of children. Assessment methods are consistent with the program's philosophy and methodology.

C. Outdoor Play Areas

1. Outdoor equipment should be scaled appropriately and shall be sufficient to provide physical activities, social development, and imaginative expression. (These might include blocks, climbing apparatuses, sandboxes, monkey bars, outdoor tables and benches, slides, swings, and wheeled toys).
 2. Outdoor play areas shall have a balance of shade and sun.
- D. Equipment
1. Multi-media equipment shall be sufficient to meet the needs of the Early Childhood program.
 2. Art material shall be in varied modalities and age appropriate. The following supplies should be available in ample supply for the use of every Early Childhood classroom: clay, construction paper, crayons, easels, finger paints, markers, paints, paste, pencils, and scissors.
 3. Music equipment shall be sufficient to allow students to experiment with and appreciate various forms of music.
 4. Science equipment and materials may be shared throughout the school. Aquariums, animals (with cages), plants, and terrariums are recommended for the school's curriculum and environment.
 5. Physical education equipment shall be both age and skill appropriate for both fine and gross motor skill development.
 6. Sufficient equipment shall be available for rest time if applicable.

XIII. School Improvement

- A. Each school shall continually work to improve student learning and/or school performance. The school will prepare a School Improvement Plan that focuses on student achievement and learning and other student based outcomes including the students' cognitive, social, emotional, and/or physical growth. The School Improvement Plan should identify and encourage improved outcomes for students. The plan should analyze data from the Self-study and other sources to determine the present state of the school and to develop objectives and action plans to improve student outcomes. As the School Improvement Plan is an ongoing document, long term goals will be updated to reflect successes and opportunities for continued growth.
- B. In order to achieve such goals for improvement, each school must:
 1. Select a team of individuals who will plan together for school improvement to include administrators, teaching faculty, and other relevant stakeholders;
 2. Identify the area(s) that need to be improved;
 3. Prioritize the area(s) that need to be improved;
 4. Indicate current level of achievement in each of those areas.
 5. Define the level of achievement or proficiency that is expected in each of those areas;
 6. Describe the strategies and/or materials to be used to attain the expected levels of achievement or proficiency;
 7. Provide a timeline to attain the short-term and long-term goals; and
 8. Demonstrate how the school's progress in reaching its goals will be monitored.
- C. A School Improvement Plan must
 1. Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment;
 2. Create a vision;
 3. Identify goals and objectives; and
 4. Provide opportunities for revisions.

XIV. Variances

- A. The AISF Standards are designed to encourage all member schools to meet various criteria in order to achieve certain levels of quality. However, in some circumstances, it may be necessary or desirable to allow certain variations from the Standards to be approved by the Board.
- B. Request for Variance:
 1. A variance may only be requested and submitted along with the Self-study or within fifteen (15) calendar days of any other inspection.
 2. In order to request a variance from a Standard, the school must:
 - a. In writing, identify the Standard for which a variance is requested;

- b. In writing, state the reasons for requesting the variance;
- c. In writing, state how the variance will meet the intent of the Standard; and
- d. Submit any required fee.

NOTES:

AISF-ECAP and ASAP Schools must adhere to the AISF-ECAP Standards and complete the ECAP Self-study in order to meet the Florida Gold Seal of Excellence Standards. All accredited members of ASAP must full satisfy these requirements for recognition as a Florida Gold Seal Program School as determined by state law.