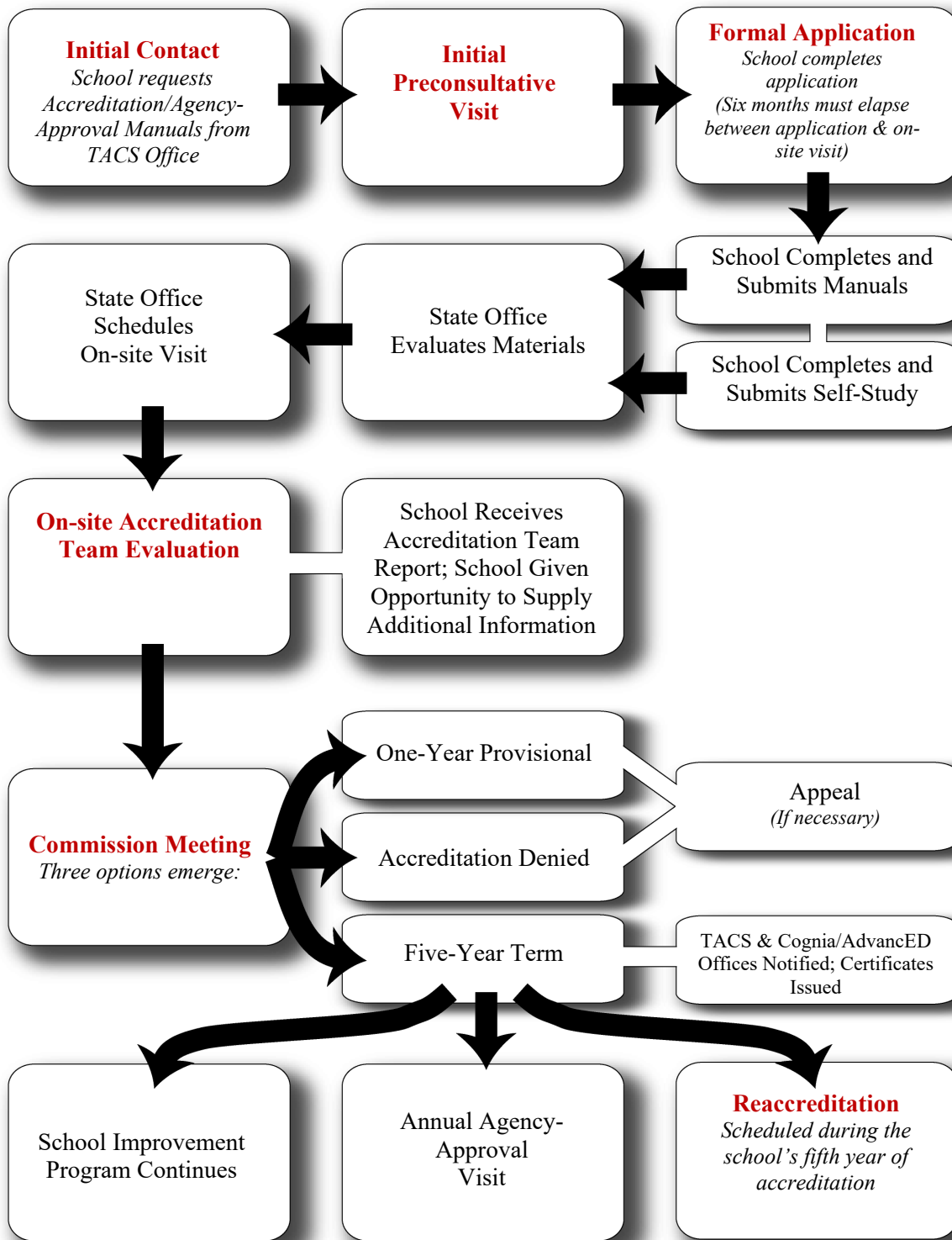


2.8 Accreditation Overview



3.0 Accreditation Procedures

3.1 Basic Eligibility Requirements

Before being considered for the TACS and Cognia/AdvancED accreditation program, a school must meet the basic eligibility requirements:

- 3.1.1 The school must be a member in good standing with the Tennessee Association of Christian Schools.
- 3.1.2 The school must have been in operation as a school for at least three full school years.
- 3.1.3 The administrator must have been at the school at least one full school year.
- 3.1.4 The school must demonstrate that it has a good testimony among other Christian schools, the community, and the businesses that deal with the school.
- 3.1.5 The school must demonstrate financial solvency.
- 3.1.6 The school must adhere to local, state, and federal health, safety, and sanitation laws, as well as applicable education laws such as length of school year, length of school day, graduation requirements, etc.
- 3.1.7 The school must provide a clear statement of its history, detailing progress in growth and development, mission, vision, and its philosophy.
- 3.1.8 The school must meet the minimum educational guidelines listed in Exhibit 1.

3.2 Steps to Accreditation

Since TACS accreditation and Cognia/AdvancED accreditation are integrative processes, a number of steps must be undertaken by a TACS school prior to an on-site accreditation team evaluation. These steps are listed below and in the Accreditation Overview chart on the previous page.

3.2.1 Step 1—Initial Contact

The first step involves two areas:

- 3.2.1.1 The administrator of the school seeking accreditation contacts the Association's state office to obtain appropriate materials. These materials include the Accreditation Manual, an application form, and other information critical to understanding the accreditation sequence.
- 3.2.1.2 The administration and the Association discuss key components of the accreditation process.
 - 3.2.1.2.1 Policy Manuals
 - 3.2.1.2.2 Goals and Objectives
 - 3.2.1.2.3 Scope and Sequences
 - 3.2.1.2.4 Teacher Certification
 - 3.2.1.2.5 Self-Study
 - 3.2.1.2.6 School Improvement Plan

- 3.2.1.2.7 Emergency (Crises Management) Response Training Program
- 3.2.1.2.8 School Technology Plan
- 3.2.1.2.9 Annual Agency-Approval Visit
- 3.2.1.2.10 Accreditation and Annual Fees
- 3.2.1.2.11 Exhibits and Appendices

3.2.2 Step 2—Initial Preconsultative Visit

After examining the materials and judging the school’s readiness, the school administrator should request a consultative visit by an Association representative. The purposes of the visit are (1) to make a preliminary appraisal of the school’s program in light of the standards for accreditation; (2) to determine the school’s readiness to begin the self-evaluation study; and (3) to give counsel with respect to the accrediting process. Prior to a request for a consultative visit, a school should have basic preliminary work completed on four manuals (administrative, academic, student/parent, and faculty), self-study, goals and objectives, scope and sequences, and teacher certification. The school is responsible for the expenses of the preconsultative visit.

A written report is prepared by the consultant. The report will include a general description of the various facets of the school’s program and will set forth recommendations to assist the school in preparing for the initial on-site accreditation visit. A copy of the report is sent to the school administrator; a copy is kept on file in the Association’s office. The report will include a “formal” recommendation on whether the school should make application for “Candidate Status.”

In the event the school is found ineligible or otherwise not a candidate for accreditation, the accreditation process ceases. The school may resume the accreditation process after a 12-month waiting period, at which time the reasons for ineligibility listed in the consultative report must be resolved.

3.2.3 Step 3—Formal Application

A formal application to enter the accreditation sequence is filed with the Association. The administrator should establish contact with an Association’s accreditation official to discuss the formal application process. In addition, the administrator establishes time goals for the completion of the various aspects of the accreditation sequence. These goals should be discussed with the accreditation official. The accreditation fee is submitted with the formal application (Exhibit 2).

3.2.4 Step 4—Manuals

The school must have four manuals: (1) administrative, (2) academic, (3) student/parent, and (4) faculty. At least six months should be allowed for this activity, unless, of course, the majority (or all) of these manuals are currently in place, which would be true for most schools seeking TACS and Cognia/AdvancED accreditation. The academic manual will take longer than six months to complete. The purpose for the manual requirement is to ensure that the statement of policies and procedures are in writing prior to finalizing a date for the on-site accreditation team visit. The manuals should be designed as working instruments, properly indexed to make them user-friendly, and should reflect the uniqueness of the school in both content and organization. The school is encouraged to consult with the TACS office during the development of the policy manuals.

One copy of the school’s manuals must be sent to the TACS office prior to scheduling an on-site accreditation visit.

3.2.5 Step 5—Self-Study

The self-study is completed by the school’s leadership. The self-study section of the Association’s accreditation manual provides instruction regarding the organization and content of the self-study. The school faculty, staff, and constituents should participate at some level in responding to related self-study questions. The purpose of the self-study is at least two-fold: (1) to facilitate the Association’s task of holding individual Christian schools accountable both to the standards held in common and to the school’s unique standards, objectives, and goals; (2) to assist the school in its efforts at self-evaluation, analysis, and school improvement. The contacts between the school and the TACS office will give added assurance to the school that it is advancing through the appropriate self-study steps. When completed, one copy of the self-study should be sent to the Association.

3.2.6 Step 6—Accreditation Team Visit

When the Association’s accreditation director determines the self-study is in order, a committee of peers (Accreditation Team) who serve in a consulting and recommending capacity will be scheduled to make an on-site visit of the school. Because the Accreditation Team (also called team) will be composed of experienced Christian educators, their written reports will be of significant value to the school. The team’s written statements will include factual reporting, recommendations for improving the school’s operational aspects, and a recommendation to the Association’s Accreditation Commission relative to accreditation for the school. The finalized *Accreditation Team Report* will be presented to the Accreditation Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting with a recommendation for “approval” or “not approved” for TACS accreditation and for Cognia/AdvancED accreditation. The Accreditation Commission operates under a grant of authority from the Board of Directors in accordance with the constitution and by-laws approved by the Association.

3.2.7 Step 7—Accreditation Commission Review

Following the on-site visit, the recommendation of the Accreditation Team will be submitted to the Accreditation Commission. The Accreditation Commission has two regularly scheduled meetings per year. The Commission meets in August and January at the TACS office.

3.2.7.1 The school’s administration is not required to attend the Accreditation Commission meeting when its school is considered for accreditation.

3.2.7.2 A school can appeal the Commission’s ruling.

3.2.7.3 The Tennessee Association of Christian Schools does not have a publicly recognized preaccreditation status.

3.2.7.4 The Accreditation Commission may make one of three determinations regarding the accreditation status of the school. The terms *accredited* and *accreditation* may be used by the school in official documents (including websites) only after receiving an official accreditation certificate from TACS and from Cognia/AdvancED—two separate certificates—or receiving official notification from TACS and from Cognia/AdvancED accreditation commissions that accredited status has been issued.

3.2.7.4.1 The school may be granted full approval for a term of five years for TACS and Cognia/AdvancED accreditation. Action of the Accreditation Commission to grant accreditation is normally accompanied by recommendations pertaining to a school's future development. Accredited schools are required to submit two annual "accreditation recommendation status reports" to the Association. TACS operates under a grant of authority to approve or disapprove these reports without taking them to the Accreditation Commission.

The first status report is due by October 1. A \$100 late fee will be assessed for failure to submit this status report on time. The second status report is due at the time of the annual on-site agency-approval visit.

3.2.7.4.2 The school may be given provisional accreditation for a period of time as recommended by the Accreditation Team and approved by the Accreditation Commission. Provisional accreditation will identify certain conditions that must be corrected before full accreditation will be granted. If those conditions are properly corrected, full accreditation will be granted at the beginning of the date of provisional acceptance. The accreditation certificate will be granted only upon the specified conditions being corrected. The term *accredited* may be used by the school only upon receiving the accreditation certificate.

3.2.7.4.3 The school may be judged to be unacceptable. Major corrections must be made, and the school must reapply for accreditation.

3.3 Maintaining Accreditation Status

A school initially seeking accreditation must meet or exceed basic standards held by the Association. After receiving accredited status, the school is responsible to maintain TACS accreditation standards, which align with Cognia/AdvancED standards. The Association has as a primary purpose the continued improvement of accredited member schools.

3.3.1 Annual Certification Report

Accredited schools must file an annual certification report in which account is given of the school's maintenance of standards for teacher certification. The statement of faith must be reaffirmed annually; the teacher certification report must be updated annually; and the TACS certification requirement must be satisfied annually.

Schools will be assessed a late fee of \$250 if the *TACS Summary of Employee Data* form (Exhibit 5) is received later than October 1, or if the 100% TACS teacher certification standard is not met. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in the loss of the school's accredited status.

3.3.2 Annual On-Site Agency-Approval Visit

For the purpose of continuing school improvement, a trained Association consultant will visit each accredited/agency-approved school annually. The school is responsible for the expenses of the annual agency visit. The accredited/agency-approved school will be notified to submit an annual application for agency approval. The annual agency-approval

fee is \$300. In addition, a list of “to do” activities will be included in the notification letter.

3.3.3 Reaccreditation Procedures

An accredited school must apply for reaccreditation at least during the semester of the school’s current accreditation expiration date so that the school’s accreditation does not lapse. It is the responsibility of the accredited school to initiate the reaccreditation process.

Failure to comply with steps 3.3.1 through 3.3.3 will terminate a school’s accreditation status. The school will be purged from the Association’s accredited schools’ roster, and Cognia/AdvancED will be notified.

3.3.4 Review

TACS reserves the right to request a review of a school’s accredited status at any time the school falls below the standards for accreditation. If an Accreditation Team evaluation is necessary, the school must bear the expense of a team visit.

If, on the basis of the Association’s annual verification and program maintenance visit, excessive or major deficiencies are noted for an accredited TACS school, the Association or Accreditation Commission will issue a notice to the school that describes the inadequacy or inadequacies. If such deficiency or deficiencies are not corrected within the designated time period, the Commission may withdraw the school’s accreditation with TACS and notify Cognia/AdvancED accordingly.

Probation is imposed for failure to correct specified inadequacies within the allotted time. The school is notified in writing of an inadequacy, the period of time during which probation is imposed, and conditions under which probation may be removed. If the inadequacy is not corrected within the designated period, the Commission may withdraw the school’s accreditation.

If a school has its accreditation status revoked, all accreditation advertisements shall cease immediately, and the actual accreditation certificates (TACS and Cognia/AdvancED) must be returned to the Association Office or surrendered to a designated appointee. The Association will notify Cognia/AdvancED accordingly.

3.3.5 Appeal

The Accreditation Commission must provide the school administrator with a written statement of reasons for any adverse accrediting action. The administrator has the right to appeal such action. A letter of appeal, accompanied by the appeal fee of \$300, must be filed with the chairman of the Accreditation Commission within 30 days. The school’s accreditation status remains in force during the 30-day period, or until the hearing. The appeal’s hearing would normally be scheduled for the next regularly scheduled Accreditation Commission meeting. The school administrator is responsible for the appeal and the presentation of the school’s case before the Commission. After reviewing the appeal, the Commission provides the administrator with a written statement of the Commission’s actions.

3.3.6 Reinstatement

A school may lose its accreditation status for several reasons: (1) failure to renew the accredited status before the period of accreditation has lapsed, (2) action taken by the Accreditation Commission to terminate the school’s accredited status, (3) failure of the

school to renew its annual membership in the Association, (4) request by the school to terminate the accredited status, (5) failure of the school to file its annual SOED form (Exhibit 5, (6) failure to adhere to certification requirements, (7) disassociating itself from the state association, (8) failure to attend the teacher training provided at the annual educators' convention, regional teachers' clinics, and scheduled school improvement meetings for administrator, supervisors, and lead teachers, or (9) failure of the school to have its annual agency-approval visit. A school that has lost its accredited status may seek reinstatement by following the steps involved in the initial accreditation.

3.3.7 Substantive Change

A school must report changes made within the school program when such changes alter the conditions by which the school was accredited. Changes in name, mailing address, church/school leadership, faculty, curriculum, philosophy, grade levels, etc., must be reported to the TACS Office.

3.3.8 Accredited Schools Adding Grades Policy

Accredited schools that add a grade level or levels during their term of TACS (and Cognia/AdvancED) accreditation must communicate in writing to the TACS office the following information:

- 3.3.8.1 Correlation of the curriculum for the new grade(s) to the existing curricula in the areas of course outlines, goals and objectives, and scope and sequences.
- 3.3.8.2 Demonstration that all requirements for new grade(s) are adequately met, such as course offerings, faculty needs, etc.

3.4 Certificates

TACS and Cognia/AdvancED certificates are mailed separately by the respective accrediting agencies. Both certificates remain the property of the accrediting Associations and may be recalled from a school upon the lapse of a school's membership in the Association. The accreditation certificates must be posted in a conspicuous place.

3.5 Preparation for Accreditation Team

When final approval is granted for an Accreditation Team to visit the applicant school, the Team will be selected by the TACS office. Depending on the size of the school, the team is usually comprised of five to seven experienced educators who have administrative, supervisory, and/or teaching experience. A majority of the team must have previous experience as team members. Team members should possess backgrounds and experience in the areas evaluated. Inexperienced team members must go through a training process prior to the accreditation visit.

- 3.5.1 The school must have completed all school manuals and the self-study. The TACS office must have received one copy of each document before an accreditation evaluation date is scheduled.
- 3.5.2 The TACS office will establish the accreditation dates in coordination with the school administrator and Accreditation Team chairperson.
- 3.5.3 The administrator of the applicant school shall complete several tasks:
 - 3.5.3.1 Mail a copy of the completed self-study, all policy manuals, and curriculum initiatives (goals and objectives, scope and sequences, course outlines) to the Association.

- 3.5.3.2 Email, upon request by the Association, a copy of select parts of the self-study and appropriate school manuals to each member of the team that will visit the campus.
 - 3.5.3.3 Provide one copy of the policy manuals, self-study, and curricula initiatives as cited in 3.5.3.1 to the team members when they arrive on-site.
- 3.5.4** When the Accreditation Team arrives at the applicant school, there will be established expectations:
- 3.5.4.1 A private room with ample working space shall be provided for the team as the general headquarters.
 - 3.5.4.2 The Administrator’s Report. An orientation session shall be scheduled, at which time the team meets with the school administrator and selected others. The team should be given a written overview of the school’s pertinent information:
 - 3.5.4.2.1 History of the school (include growth, legal status, etc.)
 - 3.5.4.2.2 Philosophy and mission of the school
 - 3.5.4.2.3 Goals and objectives of the school
 - 3.5.4.2.4 Financial status of the school—basic explanation of budget, scholarships, etc.
 - 3.5.4.2.5 Arrangements for curriculum planning
 - 3.5.4.2.6 Role of the faculty and staff in the accreditation preparation process
 - 3.5.4.2.7 School improvement plan
 - 3.5.4.2.8 Other selected information that would be beneficial to the Accreditation Team

Discussion should also include student admission policies, testing program, reporting systems, student follow-up, teacher in-service training, provision for the staff’s professional and spiritual growth, and parent-teacher meetings.
- 3.5.5** The following materials should be available in the Accreditation Team’s headquarters (corresponding self-study number included for applicable items):
- 3.5.5.1 Office supplies, one computer and printer; access to photocopying machine
 - 3.5.5.2 Master schedule of classes
 - 3.5.5.3 Samples of cumulative records, student information files, and test profiles
 - 3.5.5.4 Reports and other exhibits that would portray the school’s academic program
 - 3.5.5.5 Samples of printed materials, communications, and newspaper articles 5.2.8.1
 - 3.5.5.6 Documents and publications with the school’s philosophy, objectives, and mission 5.2.8.3
 - 3.5.5.7 Copy of “advertised” nondiscriminatory policy 5.3.1.2
 - 3.5.5.8 Child abuse policy 5.3.1.3
 - 3.5.5.9 Sexual harassment policy 5.3.1.4

- 3.5.5.10 *TACS Faculty Worksheet* 5.4.1.3 (Exhibit 11)
 - 3.5.5.11 Job descriptions for all faculty/staff positions 5.2.1.2, 5.4.1.3, 5.8.5.3, 5.8.6.3
 - 3.5.5.12 Budgets for past three years 5.5.3.4
 - 3.5.5.13 Annual financial statements for past three years 5.5.3.4
 - 3.5.5.14 Standardized achievement test class reports for past three years
 - 3.5.5.15 Daily schedule for each teacher with time frames (Include academic and non-academic activities) 5.6.18.1, 5.6.18.2
 - 3.5.5.16 Copy of most recent fire marshal inspection report 5.8.1.5
 - 3.5.5.17 AHERA asbestos program 5.8.1.6
 - 3.5.5.18 Copy of fire and tornado drill record 5.8.7.4 (Include date, time of day, minutes/seconds to evacuate the building or prepare for tornado)
 - 3.5.5.19 Copy of Emergency Response Training Program 5.8.7.5
 - 3.5.5.20 Copy of most recent health inspection 5.8.8.1
 - 3.5.5.21 Copy of Communicable Disease Policy—including HIV 5.8.9.3
 - 3.5.5.22 Copy of school’s written Crisis (Safety) Management Plan 5.8.11.2
 - 3.5.5.23 Drug and alcohol random testing program 5.9.1.6
 - 3.5.5.24 Blank progress report
 - 3.5.5.25 Blank report card
 - 3.5.5.26 List of textbooks and publishers by grade level 5.6.7.2
 - 3.5.5.27 Teacher evaluation files
 - 3.5.5.28 Bloodborne pathogen and other federal programs related to health and safety
 - 3.5.5.29 Hazard communication standards
 - 3.5.5.30 Copy of school technology plan
- 3.5.6** The administrator should ensure, as much as possible, that tests are limited during the days the Accreditation Team members are scheduled to visit classrooms, especially in grades four through twelve. Teachers should teach during the team’s classroom evaluation visits. The team meets with the faculty for approximately one hour after school on the first day of the accreditation visit to respond to select questions. (Exhibit 4)
- 3.5.7** The administrator should ensure that all Accreditation Team expenses are paid by the time of departure from the evaluation visit, that is, travel expense, lodging, and meals, per diem. Team members also receive an honorarium of \$75 a day (or a part thereof). Lodging for team members is arranged by the applicant school. Team members are notified of these arrangements in advance.