



Indiana Department of Education

Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education

MEMORANDUM

TO: Indiana State Board of Education
FROM: Office of School Accountability, Indiana Department of Education
RE: Third-Party Recognition Petition for Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI-Foundational Accreditation)
DATE: January 15, 2025

This memorandum summarizes the Association of Christian Schools International's (ACSI) petition and provides the Department's thoughts and final recommendation regarding the recognition of ACSI as a third-party accrediting organization with its new Foundational Accreditation protocol.

Background & Organization Overview

Mission and Objectives: ACSI is an accrediting organization which “exists to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ.” (*Third-Party Accrediting Organization Petition, Association of Christian Schools International, ACSI Overview*, page 3). ACSI was founded in 1978 and accredits 23,000 schools across the United States and in 100 countries worldwide. ACSI was approved as a recognized third-party accrediting organization in Indiana in March 2022, using its current accrediting protocol. The new Foundational Accreditation protocol was developed by ACSI to enable schools to participate in state Choice Scholarship programs while working towards full accreditation. (*Kelly, ACSI petition*, page 3, 2024). The goal is for the foundational elements of the school to be in place and then work with schools to move forward in the process culminating in compliance with all ACSI accreditation standards.

To support the initiative of ensuring all ACSI member schools are committed to a formal school improvement program, ACSI will offer Foundational Accreditation to unaccredited schools, or schools that are scheduled to open within the next academic year, who meet certain requirements. Foundational Accreditation is an introductory status for schools who are working toward a full ACSI self-study and site visit.

Member Schools: Currently, ACSI has 24 accredited schools in Indiana. Five additional schools have expressed interest in obtaining Foundational Accreditation.

Agency Personnel: ACSI's Commission on Accreditation consists of seven to nine members. Two to three of the members are appointed by the Board of Directors and must be current ACSI board members from ACSI accredited schools. The ACSI Accreditation Leadership team in the Flourishing Initiatives Department has been established to oversee accreditation in each of the United States divisions and overseas. Oversight is provided through policies and protocol approval by the Commission on Accreditation.

Accreditation Process and Procedures

Review and Approval Process: According to ACSI, "the Foundational Accreditation process was implemented to help schools gain accredited status within a shorter time period than if they were to follow the traditional path of candidacy." (*Inspire Foundational Accreditation Team Report*, page 3). For a school to earn Foundational Accreditation, the school will need to complete the following process:

- Apply for ACSI membership.
- Consult with the Divisional Accreditation Director (or approved representative) regarding the school's readiness for the process.
- Host a 1-day visit from the ACSI Accreditation Director or representative wherein they review the required indicators, required evidence, classroom observations and interviews with administrators and stakeholders.
- The ACSI representative writes a Foundational Team Report to verify the level of compliance with all required documents as listed in their Self-Study. The Foundational Team Report and other supporting documents are then submitted to

the commission. The commission reviews the report and determines if the school meets the requirements and can be granted a three-year term of Foundational Accreditation.

Expectations and Requirements for Approval: The visiting team will review the standards and indicators with appropriate evidence. Foundational Accreditation requires a school to focus on many indicators as they work toward a full visit. The Foundational Accreditation team report will provide major recommendations to address specific areas from the required documents for the Foundational Accreditation visit. It is understood the school will need to work on the Inspire protocol (current accreditation protocol) in preparing for a full self-study and team visit. (*Kelly, ACSI Inspire Foundational Accreditation Visiting Team Report*, page 3, 2024)

The 1-day visit report will be presented to the Commission for a vote on the school's Foundational Accreditation status. If approved, the term will last up to 3 years. If the school is not approved for Foundational Accreditation, it may be granted Candidate status to work towards full accreditation within three years. (Schools in candidacy are NOT ACSI accredited, and are considered in the process of seeking full accreditation).

Once the school receives Foundational Accreditation, it has three years in which to work on items outlined in the team report, Accreditation Action Items, write a self-study report, and host an onsite visiting team. The Foundational Accredited school must maintain ACSI membership and pay the annual accreditation fee. Foundational Accreditation cannot be renewed.

Assistance, Monitoring and Communication:

Once a school is approved for Foundational Accreditation, submission of the Annual Report is required in the fall of each year. Annual reports are reviewed by the divisional commissions to determine if the school is in good standing or needs to be placed on advised, warned, or probationary status. Schools are notified in writing after the commission meeting as to the results of their review.

ACSI's Annual Report includes the following information:

1. Updated demographics of the school
2. Report on substantive changes since the last report such as a change in administrator, new facilities, adding grade levels, etc. (This may require a one-day visit from an ACSI representative.)
3. The ACSI certification report
4. Confirmation of financial resources
5. A report on the school's progress on the required documents for Foundational Accreditation and Accreditation Action Items.

ACSI offers webinars and provides consultation when needed through the Divisional Office. The accreditation director, commissioners, and office staff are available to answer questions at any time.

Accreditation Standards

Standards and Expectations:

The Foundational Accreditation standards are the same as the full accreditation standards. Schools must rate themselves on all standards/indicators when they apply for accreditation (highly effective, effective, somewhat effective, not effective). Schools are not, however, required to supply evidence of compliance with all standards/indicators but to supply foundational documents as identified in the Foundational Accreditation protocol.

Evaluation Process:

During the period between acceptance into Foundational Accreditation and the full team visit, the school is expected to complete all the required documentation listed in the Foundational Team Visit Report, and work toward compliance of all standards and indicators.

The process for the school and team preparation for the visit following the three-year Foundational Accreditation period must follow the regular accreditation format outlined in the previous approval for ACSI's accreditation. A school that does not host a full team visit at the end of its three-year Foundational term will forfeit its accreditation status.

Signed Recognition Agreement

ACSI provided a copy of the signed recognition agreement as well as assurances the schools that earn Foundational Accreditation will meet the required Indiana legal standards and will comply with the Indiana Academic Standards.

Department Recommendation

ACSI's Foundational Accreditation utilizes a well-thought-out and organized process while giving schools the opportunity to achieve accreditation at a faster pace. Foundational Accreditation provides numerous resources to the schools to assist in their advancement. The Department recommends approval of ACSI's Foundational Accreditation as a third-party accrediting body in Indiana.