



# 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 Middle States Association  
**DATE:** December 27, 2023

This memorandum provides a summary of the information provided by the organization in the petition, as well as the Department's final recommendation regarding the recognition of the Middle States Association (MSA) as a third-party accrediting organization.

### **Department Recommendation**

The department recommends approving MSA's request to be recognized as a third-party accrediting organization for the State of Indiana.

### **Background**

The Indiana State Board of Education (SBOE) is charged with recognizing national and regional accreditation agencies that accredit Indiana schools so that they may become eligible to participate in the Choice Scholarship Program. Pursuant to a memorandum of understanding, the department reviews petitions from accrediting organizations seeking recognition and provides a recommendation to the SBOE for action. The recommendation is based on a rubric based on four core components:

1. Overview of Agency
2. Accreditation Process and Procedures
3. Accreditation Standards for Member Schools
4. Signed Recognition Agreement

During the 2024 cycle, Middle States Association applied for recognition on November 22, 2023.

### **Organization Overview**

***Mission and Objectives:*** MSA "aspires to improve the quality of education in the United States and around the world by assisting schools to achieve excellence through the process of accreditation, by affirming to the public a member school's trustworthiness and commitment to continuous improvement, by providing the network and resources for the promotion of proven practices." MSA has a 136-year legacy of helping institutions become the best version of themselves and has been helping school leaders establish and reach their goals, develop strategic plans, promote staff development, and advance student achievement.

MSA was founded in 1887 and has accredited schools regionally in the middle Atlantic states for many years. As of today, they are now accrediting schools and districts across the United States and internationally.

***Member Schools:*** MSA serves approximately 2900 member institutions in nearly all 50 states as well as more than 110 countries. These schools include public and non-public PK-12 schools, early childhood education schools, and non-degree granting postsecondary career and technical institutions. MSA serves eight Indiana schools.



# Indiana Department of Education

Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education

**Agency Personnel:** MSA has a staff of 22 people, nine of which are Associate Vice Presidents. In addition, MSA has between 16-21 elected members of an assembled Commission. The Commission includes administrative, professional, and academic educators. The Commission also includes public members who do not hold professional positions in education. They are broadly representative of the public interest.

Biographies for the following staff positions were submitted:

- President and CEO
- Executive Vice President
- All Associate Vice Presidents

## **Accreditation Process and Procedures**

**Review and Approval Process:** Schools that apply for accreditation, register with the organization, and receive a Candidacy Application in which they outline how they intend to meet the Standards for Accreditation. An Associate Vice President conducts a Candidacy Visit with the school to validate their application and plan a timeline for self-study. The President of MSA approves the recommendation for Candidacy.

The school engages in self-study with the assistance of the assigned Associate Vice President. From self-study, the school identifies areas of improvement, and the Associate Vice President assists the school in developing objectives for the Plan for Growth and Improvement. Once self-study is complete, a visiting team spends three and a half days at the school ensuring that their self-study is accurate, validating the focus of their Plan for Growth and Improvement, assuring that the school has established a multi-year action plan; and validating that the school is meeting the Standards for Accreditation. The team then makes a recommendation about accreditation. The team's recommendation follows through additional vetting steps:

1. The Associate Vice President will conduct a Staff Analysis of the report to validate that the recommendations are sound and follow MSA policies and procedures.
2. An Advisory Committee reviews all reports, debates the recommendations, and either approves or modifies the visiting team's recommendation.
3. The Membership & Accreditation Committees of Commissions (one for elementary schools, another for secondary schools) re-review the reports and either approve or modify the Advisory Team's recommendation. They forward their recommendation to the full Commissions for approval and Accreditation.

Schools are accredited with the Middle States Association for a term of seven years.

**Expectations and Requirements for Approval:** Each accreditation standard must be met in order to become accredited. Schools with unmet criteria are issued corrective actions (based on the visiting team assessment). They are assigned by the Commission either a "Monitoring Issue" or "Stipulation" to bring themselves into alignment with the requirements for accreditation. A school must satisfactorily address a Monitoring Issue within the first three years of accreditation. They must satisfactorily address the requirements for a Stipulation within one year.



# Indiana Department of Education

Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education

***Assistance, Monitoring and Communication:*** MSA serves as a “guide on the journey” towards accreditation and is always available for technical, emotional, and constructive support. Each school in membership is assigned to one Associate Vice President who is the primary contact/liason through the self-study process. The organization offers multiple workshops throughout the process for additional assistance. The self-study also serves as the guides for the schools. The self-study and the Standards for Accreditation make up the Member School Handbook.

## **Accreditation Standards**

***Standards and Expectations:*** MSA’s accreditation standards are reviewed every five years by the Commission and focus on five key concepts:

- Foundations
- Governance and Organization
- Student Well Being
- Financial Resources
- Teaching and Learning

Each area is broken down into multiple requirements. Schools are expected to comply with the standards during the term of their accreditation, which includes ensuring that the school is in compliance with all applicable statutes, ordinances, and regulations of all civil authorities of the jurisdiction(s) in which the school operates. Schools are required to complete Periodic Reviews of their Plan for Growth and Improvement (at least twice a year) and then a Mid-Term report at year 3.5.

***Evaluation Process:*** MSA provides the final approval based on the recommendation of the Commission. Should the school not satisfactorily address a corrective action or adhere to the maintenance requirements, the Commission will place the school on a one-year probationary period to bring themselves into alignment. Should the school continue to not adhere to requirements, they will be presented to the Commission for removal from membership.

## **Signed Recognition Agreement**

MSA provided the Department with a signed copy of the Recognition Agreement.

## **Summary of Findings**

MSA utilizes a well-thought out and organized process for the accreditation of schools that has evolved over the last 136 years. In addition to a dedicated accreditation team, MSA has assembled a Commission to ensure quality in the work of accreditation. MSA’s accreditation process is rigorous while providing valuable feedback to the schools. Furthermore, MSA provides numerous resources to the schools to assist in their advancement.

The Department recommends approval of Middle States of America as a third-party accrediting body in Indiana for grades K-12.