



Independent Schools
Association of the Southwest

STANDARDS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Updated June 2025

SECTION I: ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

I.A. MISSION

Standard: The school is organized around a clearly stated mission that forms the basis for all school goals, programs, policies, and procedures.

Indicators

- i. The mission statement is prominently published by the school.
- ii. The school engages in ongoing efforts to educate the members of its community about the mission.
- iii. A school affiliated with a particular religion has a clearly articulated statement of its religious goals, and these goals are reflected in the school's program, practices, and policies.

I.B. LEGAL ENTITY

Standard: The school is a legal entity, or part of a legal entity, which is in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.

Indicators

- i. The school reviews its articles of incorporation periodically to ensure accuracy and currency.

I.C. NON-PROFIT STATUS

Standard: The school has been granted 501(c)(3) status by the Internal Revenue Service or is part of an institution that has been granted such status.

Indicators

- i. The school complies with all standards and practices required to maintain its 501(c)(3) status.

I.D. STATE EDUCATION AUTHORITIES

Standard: The educational program of the school is comparable to that required by the applicable rules and regulations of its state education authority.

Indicators

- i. The school's educational program is comparable to or exceeds the state's applicable standards.
- ii. The school maintains requirements and records the enable students to transfer successfully to public and private schools.

I.E. NON-DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES

Standard: The school does not discriminate against any person in admission, employment, or school-administered programs in full compliance with local, state, and federal law.

Indicators

- i. The school has adopted a non-discrimination statement and complies with IRS publicity requirements of Revenue Procedure 2019-22.

I.F. DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION

Standard: The school seeks a diverse student body, faculty, staff, administration, and board of trustees across a wide range of human characteristics.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The school seeks a diverse student body, faculty, staff, administration, and board of trustees.

I.G. EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Standard: The school demonstrates commitment and continuous progress toward its vision of a more equitable and inclusive school community.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The school builds conceptual understandings of diversity, equity, and inclusion or similar terms within the context of its mission and values.
ii. The school develops goals and initiatives in the areas of equity and inclusion.
iii. The school measures the progress of its equity and inclusion goals and initiatives.
iv. The school commits resources to accomplishing its goals in the areas of equity and inclusion.
v. The school demonstrates a commitment to developing academic and co-curricular programs, policies, and procedures that promote an equitable and inclusive school community.
vi. The school provides training and support on topics related to equity and inclusion for all members of its community, including the student body, faculty, staff, administration, and board of trustees.

I.H. GOVERNING BODY

Standard: The school is governed by a board of trustees which is constituted by and operates according to the school's bylaws and which has independent decision-making authority.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The primary responsibility of the board of trustees is to ensure the long-term welfare and interest of the school and its mission.
ii. The school and its board of trustees are organized with sufficient independence from other organizations to enable the board of trustees the decision-making authority to support and preserve the school's mission and to promote the best interest of the school.
iii. If the governing body of the school reports to the governing body of a religious institution, there is a clearly defined statement of organization, responsibility, and delegated authority.
iv. There is a clearly articulated process documented in the school's bylaws by which trustees are elected or appointed. The process allows constitution of a board that encompasses the qualities and experience that will best serve the school.
v. Prospective board members are made aware of the requirements and expectations of board membership prior to their election or appointment.
vi. The board of trustees participates in an effective program of board development that includes annual new trustee orientation, annual self-evaluation, board leadership succession planning, and ongoing governance education on principles of good practice for independent schools.
vii. The board conflict of interest policy is reviewed with and signed by individual trustees annually.

I.I. DUTIES OF THE BOARD

1. Standard: The board develops and periodically reviews the school's mission statement.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The board establishes the school's overall goals in support of the school's mission and ensures planning for the future.

2. Standard: The board develops and periodically reviews the school's major policies.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The school maintains a manual or digital record of all current board policies.

3. Standard: The board is responsible for the financial stability and sustainability of the school.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The board approves and monitors the annual budget, audit, and multi-year financial plan.
ii. The board has a process for review and approval of the information return filed annually with the Internal Revenue Service.
iii. The board (or an appropriately constituted and designated affiliate board) establishes investment policies and monitors investment decisions.
iv. The board (or an appropriately constituted and designated affiliate board) oversees the endowment and approves endowment policies, spending policies, and uses.
v. The board of trustees understands its central role in institutional advancement and demonstrates leadership in contributing and securing funds necessary to achieve the school's development goals.
vi. The board establishes fundraising and gift acceptance policies.
vii. The board reviews and approves the school's risk management and insurance programs.
viii. The board authorizes any debt taken on by the school.
ix. The board sets the strategic direction of the school and ensures that its strategy is aligned with the school's mission and values.

4. Standard: The board employs and regularly evaluates the head of school.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The head of school is the sole employee of the board of trustees.
ii. The board of trustees is the sole employer of the head of school.
iii. The board annually evaluates the head of school and establishes goals that are incorporated in the evaluation process.
iv. Compensation, expectations, conditions, and terms of employment and termination of the head of school are documented.

5. **Standard: The board delegates the operational and educational functions of the school to the head of school and understands its responsibility to support the head of school and respect the boundaries that separate board and administrative roles.**

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The head of school works with the board of trustees to establish and refine the school's mission and articulates the mission to all constituencies and the extended community.
ii.	The head of school oversees the school's program and the community life of the school. The head keeps the board informed about all significant school matters.
iii.	The head of school is responsible for the employment of all faculty, administration, and staff.
iv.	The board actively and appropriately supports the Head of School.

SECTION II: PROGRAM

II.A. MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

Standard: The school's mission, goals, objectives, and academic program emphasize excellence in the preparation of students for next-level education and purposeful and constructive lives. The school maintains high standards of quality in its program and faculty.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The learning environment promotes a climate of respect, understanding, and appreciation of socioeconomic, religious, racial, ethnic, and gender differences within the school, the local community, the nation, and the world.
ii.	The program includes topics and resources that provide diverse perspectives, experiences, and points of view.
iii.	The program has sufficient breadth to address the abilities, learning styles, developmental needs, and cultural backgrounds of the students enrolled.
iv.	The curriculum, in written form, describes the content, scope and organization, continuity, and transition of all subjects and courses across grade levels and/or divisions.
v.	The curriculum is logically sequential in its parts and appropriate to the developmental needs of students.
vi.	The school's program and climate demonstrate consideration for the intellectual, social, physical, aesthetic, and ethical education of its students.
vii.	The school program and operations demonstrate a commitment to environmental sustainability.

II.B. FREEDOM OF INQUIRY

Standard: The school encourages intellectual inquiry and teaches critical reasoning, analysis, independent thinking, and respect for diverse viewpoints.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	In matters of faith and conscience, the school encourages student expression of individual differences in support of freedom of inquiry. In a school affiliated with a particular religion, the beliefs and questions of those who do not profess that religion are treated with respect.

II.C. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Standard: The curriculum, classroom environment, educational resources, and teaching methods are appropriate for the developmental needs of the students and their preparation for a complex and rapidly changing world.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school considers class size as it relates to the school's mission.
ii.	The faculty employs inclusive teaching techniques and learning strategies that acknowledge the variety of student needs, perspectives, and experiences.
iii.	Periodic assessment is made of each student's developmental progress through observation and documentation. At appropriate grade levels, regular standardized testing or objective reviews are used to evaluate program effectiveness and to determine how best to assist individual students.
iv.	Assessment methods are periodically reviewed at all levels to ensure equitable practices.
v.	Reports on student progress are sent to parents on a regular basis, and opportunities are provided for parent-teacher communication.
vi.	The school has evaluation and referral policies for students who have special needs beyond the capabilities of its faculty.

II.D. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Standard: The faculty is involved, in appropriate ways, in reviewing, planning, and developing the school's academic and other programs.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school maintains a current record of academic policies and procedures and ensures compliance with these policies and procedures.
ii.	In selection of resources for the educational program, the school respects the judgment of its faculty and professional staff.

II.E. PROGRAM REVIEW

Standard: The school demonstrates that its educational programs, instructional practices, and culture are informed by relevant research regarding how students learn and the knowledge and capacities they will need to lead purposeful and constructive lives.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school has procedures that assure appropriate and effective review of its programs, curriculum, policies, and learning assumptions, taking into account current educational theory and research, as well as the school's conceptual understandings of diversity, equity, and inclusion (or similar terms), to maintain a meaningful instructional program for students.
ii.	The school has procedures to collect data and/or feedback from graduates in order to review the effectiveness of its programs and fulfillment of its mission.
iii.	A school's effectiveness is evident in more than just the placement and academic records of its students. Therefore, the school demonstrates development of attributes of character which are measured less easily but are of equal value.

II.F. PROGRAM SUPPORT

Standard: The school provides adequate program support, including curricular materials, technology, library and research services, health services, guidance services, and student activities. Appropriate oversight and support are provided to residential and homestay programs.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school provides teachers and students with sufficient and current educational resources to implement the school's program.
ii.	The library, academic research, and technology resources are supplied, organized, and staffed to effectively support the academic program and the needs of students and professional staff.
iii.	The school integrates technology in appropriate ways to expand, enhance, and assist learning.
iv.	The school provides health services for students and employees that are administered and carried out by personnel who have appropriate training and experience.
v.	The school has adequate procedures to seek emergency medical care for students while they are engaged in school programs both on and off campus.
vi.	The school has written policies, procedures, and documentation for dispensing medications and prescription medicines.
vii.	The school supports and educates students to help to prevent, identify, and address potentially harmful behavior, including self-harm, bullying, teasing, and sexual misconduct between or among students.

- viii. The school has written and clearly communicated policies and procedures for student discipline. These policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure equitable implementation.
- ix. Counseling and guidance resources are available by referral or at the school to students, parents, and faculty.
- x. The school offers a co-curricular program that is congruent with the mission of the school, complements the academic program, and is responsive to student interests.
- xi. Homestay programs are consistent with the mission of the school and provide a balanced and enriched experience in a safe and healthy environment. A homestay student is defined as any student attending or enrolled in the school for any period of time who is living with anyone other than a parent, guardian, or immediate family member.
 - a. The school is in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.
 - b. There is a clearly defined process to screen host families, including background checks and a method for matching student and family interests.
 - c. The school has clearly communicated expectations for host families and students regarding academic and disciplinary policies both during the school week and on weekends and vacations.
 - d. The school confirms that homestay facilities are safe and clean and provide sufficient living space and privacy.
 - e. Systems are in place to support full integration of homestay students into the life of the school.
 - f. The school regularly evaluates the homestay program to assess quality and mission-alignment.
- xii. Residential programs are consistent with the mission of the school and provide a balanced and enriched experience for students in a safe and healthy environment.
 - a. The school is in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.
 - b. Boarding students are supervised by adults who live in or adjacent to quarters and who are qualified to meet the needs of the residential students they supervise.
 - c. All residential supervisors are screened through thorough background checks.
 - d. Rules and policies governing residential life, leaves, privileges, and discipline are comprehensive, equitable, clearly communicated to residential students and their parents, consistently applied, and regularly reviewed.
 - e. Residential arrangements provide each student adequate security and personal privacy.
 - f. Systems are in place to support full integration of residential students into the life of the school.
 - g. The school regularly evaluates the residential program to assess quality and mission-alignment.

II.G. OFFERINGS

1. Nursery and Toddler Programs

ISAS does not accredit infant and toddler programs for children below the age of three. However, schools with such programs must demonstrate compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local licensing and health and safety requirements.

Response

- a. Provide evidence of compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local licensing, health, and safety requirements for nursery and toddler programs.

2. Early Childhood

Standard: Early childhood is defined as the ages of three and four years. The program promotes the skills necessary for children to develop and mature creatively, socially, cognitively, emotionally, and physically. The program is developmentally appropriate and is based on an understanding of general patterns of growth in the early years as well as each child's individual development.

Indicators

- i. All personnel engaged with children have appropriate training, understanding, and knowledge regarding the developmental characteristics of this age group.
- ii. Schools are in full compliance with state regulations for licensing, staffing, health, and safety in early childhood programs.
- iii. The design of the program, instructional materials, equipment, and physical environment support the development of each child and include the arts and physical activity.
- iv. Facilities for the program are adequate in construction, space provided, and maintenance to meet the needs of children in the program and to protect their health and safety.

3. Elementary Level

Standard: At the elementary level, the school's program enables students to master fundamental analytic, computational, and literacy skills while offering learning experiences which develop their broad range of intelligences and capacities. The school's program readies students for next-level education and for purposeful and constructive lives.

Indicators

- i. Students develop the ability to reason, as demonstrated through progress in writing, reading, mathematics, and scientific inquiry and in the application of higher-order thinking skills.
- ii. The school offers programs in the arts and physical education to develop necessary affective behaviors and motor functions.
- iii. Programs in the visual and performing arts and physical education complement the program, develop the child holistically, and promote the growth of healthy and resilient students who are confident problem solvers and creative thinkers.
- iv. All programs and co-curricular offerings are appropriate to the developmental needs of students.

4. Secondary Level

Standard: At the secondary level, the school offers a curriculum of sufficient challenge and breadth to prepare students for next-level education and for purposeful and constructive lives.

Indicators

- i. The school program addresses the intellectual, creative, physical, developmental, ethical, and emotional needs of the students.
- ii. Graduation requirements meet the entrance requirements of four-year colleges and universities.

5. E-Learning and Distance Education Programs

Standard: Schools incorporating asynchronous or synchronous learning opportunities enabled by the internet, audio, video, or other means must demonstrate that the courses align with the mission of the school and with the quality of classes taught on-site. Offerings which are not developed by the school must be accredited by a state department of education or a state or regional accrediting agency.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school has established approval and monitoring processes that assure the quality of distance learning courses for which credit is granted.
ii.	The school has determined the percentage of a student's course of study which may be completed through distance learning programs.
iii.	The school ensures equitable access to these programs and the associated resources for qualifying students.

SECTION III: ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY, AND STAFF

III.A. QUALIFICATIONS

Standard: All teachers in grades preschool through twelve possess a four-year college degree, or its equivalent, and are trained or experienced in the areas to which they are assigned. Teaching aides and assistants who work under the direct supervision of qualified faculty may be qualified by experience other than a four-year degree.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	All personnel engaged with students have appropriate training, understanding, and knowledge regarding the developmental characteristics of the appropriate age group.
ii.	Every job applicant completes a standard application form, and the employment process is designed to elicit relevant and legally required information such as educational background, employment history, criminal convictions, employment eligibility, and references.
iii.	The school requires applicants to submit college transcripts and verifies recommendations and references as part of the application process.
iv.	The school conducts a background check on each teacher, administrator, and staff candidate before an offer of employment is finalized.

III.B. SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION

Standard: The school provides consistent and effective supervision of employees and has a program of regular evaluation of individual performance.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school has a handbook containing written policies and procedures for administrators, faculty, and support staff.
ii.	The school establishes and communicates professional behavior policies and procedures to protect the safety and wellbeing of students. The school ensures that regular training, including harassment, professional distance, and mandatory reporting regulations, occurs and monitors compliance with these policies and procedures.
iii.	The school's faculty, administration, and staff evaluation program is growth oriented and promotes improved performance.
iv.	The evaluation program is consistently utilized and includes clear standards, processes, timelines, and documentation.
v.	An orientation and mentoring program is in place for faculty new to teaching or new to the school.

III.C. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Standard: Professional growth and development are clear expectations of all employees.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school has a program which holds faculty accountable for engaging in career-long professional development and implementing effective strategies in their classrooms on an ongoing basis.
ii.	The school provides time, space, and resources for professional development.
iii.	The school distributes professional development funds to faculty and staff in an equitable fashion and by established criteria.
iv.	The purpose and expected outcomes of professional development are clear, and there is ongoing assessment of the program's effectiveness.

III.D. ADMINISTRATION

Standard: The administrative structure is organized to effectively implement school policies and to oversee programs, personnel, facilities, and resources.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. The school assigns individuals to such areas as advancement, admissions, alumni/ae and parent relations, financial and facilities management, and traditional responsibilities relating to faculty and students.

III.E. PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

Standard: The school subscribes to procedural fairness in all faculty and staff disputes.

<i>Indicators</i>
i. Procedural steps in adversarial situations are published in the Faculty/Staff Handbook.

SECTION IV: ETHICAL CONDUCT AND DISCLOSURE

IV.A. ACCOUNTABILITY

Standard: The school is responsive to its constituencies and accountable to ISAS for meeting standards for accreditation.

IV.B. EVALUATION PROCESS

Standard: The school is fully committed to institutional improvement and to the process of accreditation. The school completes a comprehensive and candid Self Study following Association guidelines, responds to requests of the Standards Committee, and participates fully in the Association's accreditation process, including nominating school personnel to serve on visiting committees for other schools.

IV.C. ISAS CODE OF ETHICS

Standard: The school and its board, administration, faculty, and staff abide by the ISAS Code of Ethics. In addition, the NAIS Principles of Good Practice serve as guidelines for ISAS schools.

Indicators

Employment

- i. The school will respect the right of employees to approach other member schools to discuss employment.
- ii. Before making an offer of employment or after making an offer of employment contingent upon successful completion of background and reference checks, the school performs appropriate background and reference checks to validate a candidate's education and employment history, focusing on the ability of the individual to fulfill the professional duties of the position and confirming the individual's suitability to work with children. The school does not finalize the hiring of a new employee without completing a reference call with the individual's most recent employer.
- iii. The school will strictly maintain the confidentiality of all personnel information obtained about an applicant or an employee.

Admissions and Financial Assistance

- i. The school will recognize the right of its students or families to visit and consider other schools without notifying the present school.
- ii. The school does not offer admission to a student from another school without receiving an official record of student progress, transcript, or its equivalent directly from the student's current school.
- iii. The school complies promptly when parents submit a written request to send an official transcript or equivalent student records to another school. When compliance is not possible, parents are notified of the reasons.
- iv. Need-based financial assistance is granted on the basis of documented parent financial need.
- v. Merit-based scholarship programs accord with the mission of the school and follow a clearly articulated and published process that is consistent, fair, and ethical.

IV.D. FULL DISCLOSURE

Standard: There is full disclosure of the school's mission, policies, program, and practices.

Indicators

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. The school publishes the qualifications and experience of faculty, administration, and professional staff.ii. The school annually publishes, on its website or in documents such as Faculty/Staff Handbooks and Parent/Student Handbooks, the rules, expectations, and procedures by which the school operates.iii. The school makes available to its constituencies a description of its curriculum, program, and graduation requirements.iv. In the enrollment contract, the school clearly communicates behavioral expectations and financial commitments for students and parents. |
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| v. | The school maintains an admissions process that respects the needs of students and families to learn about school programs and activities and communicates clear and timely information on requirements of the admissions process and costs and other financial expectations of attending the school. |
| vi. | The school's admission process, policies, and standards reflect the mission of the school. The process allows the school, the family, and the student to determine if matriculation would be educationally appropriate and mutually beneficial. |
| vii. | In the administration of need-based financial assistance, the school employs documented procedures that ensure fair, consistent, and confidential assessment of each family's financial need. |
| viii. | The non-discriminatory policies of the school are articulated and demonstrated in advertising, evaluation, admissions, and financial assistance decisions. |
| ix. | The school makes available to constituents an annual report which includes financial information. |

IV.E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Standard: The school has policies and procedures that govern the retention, security, maintenance, and use of personnel, financial, corporate, and student records, including print and digital records, and such records are kept confidential and protected against catastrophic loss.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school maintains complete and accurate records for faculty and staff and for current and former students. These records are protected against loss by fire or theft and are available only to authorized persons.
ii.	The school has policies on record retention and destruction which comply with state and federal regulations.

SECTION V: FINANCIAL AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

V.A. PROCEDURES

Standard: The financial resources and management of the school are adequate to sustain a sound educational program consistent with its stated mission and to provide for the long-term stability of the school. Financial management procedures include appropriate accounting methods and a formal budgeting process.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	The school has adequate internal financial policies, procedures, and controls.
ii.	The school normally operates with a balanced budget.
iii.	The school adequately funds depreciation or budgets sufficient funds for an account for ongoing plant repair and maintenance.
iv.	The school's debt does not jeopardize its financial position or educational program. A sound and manageable plan is in place to retire existing debt.
v.	The school maintains a multi-year financial plan to support its strategic goals.
vi.	An annual independent financial audit is performed specifically for the school and is separate and independent from the audit of another entity such as an affiliated religious or community institution.
vii.	The board establishes all policies relating to the school's audit, and the results of the independent audit are presented annually to the full board.

V.B. CONTROL OF FUNDS

Standard: All funds generated by any school activity are recorded in the school's accounts and are under direct control of the school.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	All accounts of auxiliary organizations that raise funds in the name of the school are under direct control of the school.
ii.	All restricted contributions are accepted in accordance with the school's board-approved gift acceptance policy.

V.C. PERSONNEL POLICIES

Standard: The school employs fair and appropriate personnel policies, salaries, and benefits for the faculty and staff.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	Policies are consistent and equitable and in conformity with state and federal law.
ii.	Terms and conditions of employment are provided annually to each school employee.
iii.	Personnel policies are published in a Faculty/Staff Handbook.
iv.	Faculty compensation is sufficient to attract and retain qualified teachers.

V.D. SUMMER PROGRAMS

Standard: ISAS schools may operate summer sessions provided the program purpose is mission-aligned. Policies and procedures must comply with all applicable federal, state, and local licensing and health and safety requirements and address general risk management issues, administrative oversight, control of funds, and emergency procedures.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	Policies are in place to protect children, including background checks and training in the school's policies and procedures for all personnel and volunteers.
ii.	The program's facilities are adequate, well-maintained, and safe. Security procedures and emergency policies are in place to provide a safe environment for personnel and students.

V.E. PHYSICAL PLANT, FACILITIES, AND SAFETY

Standard: The school maintains, or has available for its use, a physical plant and facilities adequate to support its program and to provide a safe environment for students and employees.

<i>Indicators</i>	
i.	School facilities are adequate to support the school's mission and programs.
ii.	The school has procedures to review and address the safety of buildings, equipment, and grounds that meet reasonable and legal standards.
iii.	Emergency and crisis plans are reviewed annually and communicated to all staff and responsible parties.
iv.	The school responds immediately to directives and suggestions made by health or fire inspectors or by other government agents.
v.	Procedures and equipment meet professionally accepted standards for safety and for storage of chemicals and potentially harmful materials.
vi.	Risk management procedures and policies and adequate insurance coverage are in place.
vii.	Plant and facility records are kept in good order and are accessible.
viii.	The school has established a multi-year plan to maintain the physical plant.
ix.	The school's custodial and maintenance services are adequate to keep the buildings and grounds clean, orderly, and in good repair.

V.F. Criteria for Review of Financial and Facilities Management

Response

Full assessment of compliance with Association standards will be conducted during the Accreditation Visit through review of the Self Study and financial and facilities documentation and through interviews with business office and facilities staff. Criteria for Review of Financial and Facilities Management (Exhibit Q) provide a framework for the interviews.