

School Accreditation

by Patch Blakey

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the church at Corinth, “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). Paul’s point was that there is wisdom in being held to a standard other than one’s own.

King Solomon wrote, “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6). What is true of men is also true of the institutions populated by men. The natural tendency of men is to proclaim their own goodness, their own value, their own worth. While a school may accurately describe its educational value, praise is generally better accepted if it comes from an independent and objective source. But if they are comparing themselves by themselves, Paul says they “are not wise.” Accreditation compares a school’s performance to an objective set of standards.

So, what is accreditation? The verb “to accredit” means to certify a school as meeting all formal official requirements of academic excellence, curriculum, facilities, etc. So then, accreditation is the act of accrediting or the state of being accredited, especially through the granting of approval to an institution of learning by an official review board after the school has met specific requirements.

Why should a school seek accreditation? There is benefit to going through the accreditation process. It is hard work and makes a school reflect seriously on what they are doing and why they are

doing it. The process helps a school to focus on its internal functions and creates the opportunity to have outside eyes observe the school’s operation while providing constructive criticism from a more objective perspective.

Schools assemble a “self-study” which provides documentation to the visit committee that substantiates that the school meets each requirement in a broad range of accreditation criteria. This documentation is reviewed by the visit committee for compliance with the accreditation standards. The visit committee is comprised of three qualified people who are drawn from either the ACCS Board of Directors, heads of ACCS accredited schools, and typically the ACCS executive director who has participated on most school accreditation visits. The committee then conducts an on-site visit at the school to observe that what has been submitted in the self-study documentation is exactly what is actually happening in practice at the school.

School boards and administrators sometimes wrestle over which accreditation agency to use for evaluating their school. For schools in ACCS, one of the primary reasons for seeking accreditation is to have the school’s application of the classical Christian methodology confirmed. ACCS is the only agency that has accreditation standards specifically developed to evaluate the classical Christian methodology in place at ACCS schools. As one of the ACCS-accredited schools puts it, “The Association of Classical & Christian Schools, [is] the leading classical, Christian

accrediting agency in the nation.”

Some schools may want state recognition for any number of reasons, including, but not limited to participation in athletics at the state level, state-sponsored scholarships for graduating students, transfer of credits to the public sector, and others. ACCS accreditation is currently recognized in Texas and Virginia. As ACCS schools ask ACCS to seek recognition in their state or region, ACCS hopes to expand the scope of its accreditation authority, but without compromising its Christian foundations.

Why would schools not want to consider pursuing accreditation? I selected some reasons from an article titled “Schools Debate Value of Accreditation” by Bonnie V. Winston in the Richmond-Times Dispatch of January 30, 2008. Here are some of the prominent negative reasons that were offered in that article:

- It’s a waste of money
- I don’t see the need for it
- Non-accreditation has not hampered our students’ college admissions
- Parents don’t know what accreditation means
- It wouldn’t help the school to do a better job

Are there any valid responses to these objections? As ACCS has conducted accreditation visits over the past decade, one comment that continues to be mentioned is that just going through the process to prepare for accreditation has been a valuable experience for schools. Pursuing accreditation has forced schools to look carefully at what policies and practices they have in place (or thought they did), and forced

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them to evaluate if what they were actually doing was consistent with what they said they were doing. The preparation for accreditation helped the schools to more clearly identify gaps in their policies and/or weaknesses in their classroom management, and fix them. In turn, this helped the schools to do a better job of educating their students and serving their families.

Parents want their children to receive a quality education. They want to know that some qualified organization outside the school has evaluated the school by a set of standards that helps ensure the quality of instruction that students receive. Parents are often more inclined to place their confidence in a school that has objectively demonstrated its worth by undergoing the accreditation process.

Students from unaccredited schools are admitted into colleges and universities. The results of the college entrance exam are often the determining factor. I suspect that even students from poor academic schools enter college. The question, though, isn't whether students from any given school enter college, but rather, is the school training the students to the best of their ability before they enter college? Accreditation by itself can't make a school operate better, but it can provide an outside set of eyes to help identify where a school can benefit by improving. The school still needs to take the initiative to make those improvements, especially if it wants to receive the affirmation of accredited status.

Accreditation does cost money. But so does a lack of enrolled students. Accreditation doesn't guarantee increased enrollments, but it is an indicator to parents

that a school is serious about the services it is providing. I don't know how to practically measure the difference in the cost of accreditation which can be determined, and the number of students that a school doesn't enroll because it is not accredited. How can one measure what isn't there? But if parents had to choose between an accredited school or a non-accredited school, which would be their likely choice?

As an aside, ACCS accreditation costs \$1,000 plus out-of-pocket expenses for the visit committee members which can be as much as \$1,500 for the initial site visit. This does not take into account all of the hours invested by board members, administrators, and teachers conducting their self-study over the course of a year.

ACCS posts its accreditation standards on its website (www.accsedu.org) so they may be seen by all. ACCS only accredits schools that are members of the Association. It would not be reasonable to expect non-ACCS schools to meet the standards of ACCS. Schools that are interested in seeking ACCS accreditation should contact ACCS for a copy of the ACCS Accreditation Handbook. It is a time-consuming and difficult process, to be sure, but every school that has been through the ACCS accreditation thus far has readily acknowledged how beneficial it has been to their school.

ACCS Accredited Members

Ad Fontes Academy
Centreville, Virginia

Annapolis Christian Academy
Corpus Christi, Texas

Berean Academy
Tampa, Florida

Cary Christian School
Cary, North Carolina

The Ambrose School
(Formerly Foundations Academy)
Boise, ID

Logos School
Moscow, Idaho

Mars Hill Academy
Mason, Ohio

Providence Classical Christian School
Lynnwood, Washington

Providence Classical School
Spring, Texas

Regents School of Austin
Austin, Texas

Rockbridge Academy
Millersville, Maryland

Schaeffer Academy
Rochester, Minnesota

Tall Oaks Classical School
Newark, DE

**The Oaks:
A Classical Christian Academy**
Spokane, Washington

Veritas Academy
Leola, Pennsylvania

Veritas School
Newberg, Oregon

Westminster Academy
Memphis, Tennessee