

**Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program
(FCCAP)**

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

**For Elementary Schools, Secondary Schools, Special
Purpose Schools, and
Early Education Programs**



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Purpose

The Florida Catholic Conference has established a program of accreditation for Catholic schools and early education programs in the Province of Miami. The purpose of the accreditation program is to provide schools and early childhood programs with a systematic process of school improvement through the application of educational standards or criteria. The accreditation standards of the Florida Catholic Conference promote excellence in the total educational program and are appropriate to the mission of Catholic schools. The opportunity for continuous peer review and assistance at various stages ensures on-going school improvement that reflects best practices academically, while validating the unique purpose of teaching and living out the message of Jesus Christ according to the Catholic tradition.

In order to validate compliance with standards, each program/school in the Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program hosts an on-site accreditation visitation once every seven years. In addition to the visitation every seven years, each early education program hosts an annual one-day health, safety, and accreditation update visitation. A third year review is conducted with each school or early education program, mid-way through the seven-year accreditation cycle.

History

The Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program is one of the oldest Catholic accreditation programs in the country and has influenced other Catholic school accreditation programs. In the late 1960's, the bishops of Florida appointed a committee to explore the process of accreditation. After studying the various accreditation programs currently in use, they decided to establish a program unique to Catholic schools in the state which would assure their Catholic identity and guarantee their constant and continued improvement. In 1969, the bishops established the Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program and required all parochial and diocesan elementary and special education schools to be accredited. They also determined that the secondary schools would continue to seek accreditation by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Since then, the bishops approved the co-accreditation option for secondary schools to seek FCCAP accreditation, as well. Some schools have other accreditations, in addition to these two.

Over the years, the process and the standards have undergone revision. Most recently, during the 2013-2014 school year, a new set of standards and benchmarks were adopted. These are based on the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools. The accreditation of early education programs was added in 2014. In 2015, the first early education programs piloted the FCC accreditation process. Now, all early education programs under the Diocesan Offices of Catholic Schools are accredited through the FCC accreditation program. During the 2016-2017 school year the STREAM accreditation process was developed.

Accreditation Committee

The FCC Accreditation Committee of the Florida Catholic Conference operates with the approval of the Florida Catholic Conference and the bishops of the seven dioceses of Florida. The members of the Accreditation Committee include the episcopal moderator (a Florida bishop appointed by the Florida bishops to act as a liaison with the bishops); representatives from the diocesan schools offices of the seven dioceses of Florida; the FCC Executive Director; and the Associate Director for Accreditation. The FCC Associate Director for Education is an ex officio member of the Committee. A chairperson is chosen from among the diocesan members.

The Committee grants accreditation to a school and monitors the school's continued compliance with the accreditation standards, benchmarks, policies, and procedures. The Committee determines the accreditation status of a member school based on its compliance with the standards as reported on the annual report for continued accreditation (ARCA), visitation report, and a superintendent's documented request for change of status. The determination of accreditation status is reported to a member school on an annual basis. The Committee periodically examines the standards and benchmarks used as criteria for accreditation to be certain they are based on appropriate current educational theory and best practices. It works to maintain consistency between the criteria used for evaluation and the Catholic philosophy of education as stated in papal, episcopal, and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops documents.

Associate Director for Accreditation

The FCC Associate Director for Accreditation (ADA) administers the accreditation program and acts as a professional resource person for the Florida Catholic Conference in all accreditation-related matters. The Associate Director, responsible to the FCC Accreditation Committee, is under the general supervision of the Executive Director of the Florida Catholic Conference.

The ADA oversees visitations, conducts third-year conferences (unless diocesan schools offices conduct them), reviews ARCAs, oversees the financial plan, and manages the accreditation program budget. He/She coordinates with the AES and the website designers to continually update the www.eas-ed.org and the www.eas-ed2.accreditrac.com websites. The ADA facilitates, with the Accreditation Committee, the interpretation and clarification of accreditation standards and benchmarks. He/She provides orientation for new FCC Accreditation Committee members, provides training for school administrators and faculty when they begin CIPA, and provides training for visitation team member and chairpersons. The Associate Director represents the FCCAP at the bi-annual meetings of the National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPA). As the staff for the FCC Accreditation Committee, he/she makes arrangements for meetings, takes minutes, and handles action items as directed.

Accreditation and Education Specialist

The FCC Accreditation and Education Specialist (AES) supports the accreditation program. The Accreditation and Education Specialist is under the general supervision of the Executive Director and the direct supervision of the FCC Associate Director for Accreditation.

The AES manages various aspects of the accreditation program. He/She oversees the visitation teams and keeps updated records of FCC accredited schools, visitation chairpersons, and team members. The AES completes annual site visits to early education programs. He/She helps maintain the accreditation general website, www.eas-ed.org. He/She assists in the collection and maintenance of the annual accreditation dues. The AES provides assistance as needed to the ADA, superintendents, principals, and directors.

Role of Superintendents

The superintendent in each diocese plays a vital role in the entire process of accreditation. The role of a superintendent includes maintaining diocesan representation on the FCC Accreditation Committee. As the liaison between schools and the FCC Accreditation Committee, the superintendent or his/her designee provides leadership for the implementation and oversight of the accreditation process within the diocese. He/She or the designee reviews and approves the

schools' annual reports, third year review work, and CIPA work. The superintendent and/or the designee consult with the visitation team and attend the exit reports during accreditation visitations in the diocese.

Membership

The bishops of the dioceses of Florida have determined that all parochial, interparochial, and regional Catholic elementary and special education schools be accredited by the Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program. Catholic secondary schools may seek co-accreditation with FCCAP and SACS. Private Catholic schools, operating in a diocese, may request, through the diocesan superintendent, to be considered for membership. All schools are assessed annual dues based on student enrollment. After reviewing all factors associated with a school's compliance with the standards for accreditation, the FCC Accreditation Committee shall determine membership status based on the following guidelines:

- **Affiliate:** An affiliate school is a new school, which has not yet begun the process for accreditation. It pays annual dues, fills out the annual report, and moves toward compliance with the accreditation standards. A school may request moving to Candidate status within one year of its founding. It may remain at Affiliate status no more than three years from its founding. The diocesan superintendent of schools notifies, in writing, the FCC Accreditation Committee of the existence of a new affiliate member in the diocese when a new Catholic parochial or diocesan school is founded or a private Catholic school within the diocese requests affiliation.
- **Candidate:** A candidate school is a school that has begun the initial process for accreditation. The school pays annual dues, fills out the annual report, and continues toward compliance with the accreditation standards. The school must complete all the requirements for accreditation within three years. The principal applies to the FCC Accreditation Committee when the school is ready to begin the process of initial accreditation. The diocesan superintendent verifies the school's readiness for candidacy. The school begins the CIPA.
- **Full Member:** A full member school is a school granted accreditation by the FCC Accreditation Committee with all rights and privileges. The school pays annual dues, fills out the annual report, implements its action plan, and continues its compliance with the policies and procedures of the FCC accreditation program.
- **Associate:** An associate school is a school which, in the judgment of the FCC Accreditation Committee, has lost its accreditation status due to extenuating circumstances. The school pays annual dues, fills out the annual report, and continues toward full compliance with the accreditation policies and procedures.

Annual Report of Continued Accreditation (ARCA)

A member school must complete and submit an annual accreditation report at the time specified by the FCC Accreditation Committee, except during years six and seven of the accreditation cycle. This annual report shall include information regarding the school's compliance with the accreditation standards and benchmarks within the assigned domain, an update on the implementation of the school's action plan, and other pertinent information as determined by the Committee. It is suggested that a committee of stakeholders completes the ARCA and oversees the implementation of the action plan. The report is completed online at www.eas-ed2.accreditrac.com and submitted to the diocesan superintendent. The superintendent validates the report and either returns it to the school for edits or sends the report to the FCC Accreditation

Committee. Assigned domains: Year 1 – Mission & Catholic Identity; Year 2 – Governance & Leadership; Year 4 – Academic Excellence; Year 5 – Operational Vitality.

- **Benchmarks:** The level of compliance is indicated and comments are written, as needed. Evidence is included for each benchmark.
- **Action Plan:** Each school creates an action plan as a culmination of the self-evaluation process. This plan is updated on an on-going basis. It is included, along with an update when the ARCA is submitted.
- **Annual Site Visits for Early Education Programs and Gold Seal programs:** EEPs and Gold Seal accredited programs are visited annually by the FCCAP office staff. Files are reviewed. Observations of all classrooms take place. The FCC Health and Safety Checklist is completed, evidence reviewed. Annual certificates will be issued to the EEPs and Gold Seal accredited programs.

Continuous Improvement Process for Accreditation (CIPA)

A school seeking initial or continued accreditation must complete a self-evaluation/CIPA according to the procedures of the Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program. The process is interactive and involves input and consensus building from the entire school community. This assessment of mission and Catholic identity, governance and leadership, academic excellence, and operational vitality will give the program/school community a clear picture of the current state of the program/school, as well as direction for the future. From this an action plan is written. Upon a school's completion of its CIPA, the diocesan superintendent will verify to the FCC Accreditation Committee the school's readiness for an on-site visitation.

Visitation

Every seven years a school hosts an on-site visitation after completing the work of the CIPA. The visitation team makes an official on-site visit to the school to assess the educational program of the school, to validate and assess the school's compliance with accreditation standards and benchmarks, to review the action plan, and to make recommendations for the school's improvement and its initial or continued accreditation.

Visitation Team: The FCC Associate Director for Accreditation assembles the visitation team. The chairperson is an administrator from outside the diocese of the school hosting the visitation. There are at least two other team members. These team members can be from within the diocese. If the enrollment of the school is over 500, but less than 750 an additional team member is necessary. If the school has 750 or more students, a fourth team member is added.

- **Chairperson:** The chairperson of a visitation team must be a current or prior administrator, have served as a visitation member on two previous on-site visitations, and have completed the required FCC training for chairpersons. The chairperson, as an official representative of the FCC Accreditation Program, is responsible conducting the visitation according to the visitation protocol outlined in the FCC visitation handbook and chairperson's guide. At the conclusion of the visitation, the chairperson (and visitation team) give an exit report that outlines their findings, including all discrepancies between the school's benchmark ratings and the team's benchmark ratings. The chairperson communicates with the Associate Director for Accreditation to ensure that all visitation work is completed in a timely manner.
- **Team Member:** A member of a visitation team may be a school administrator or faculty member who has completed the required FCC training for team members. The team member, as a representative of the FCC Accreditation Program, is responsible to work professionally and collaboratively with the appointed chairperson of the visitation team.

Visitation Expenses: The expenses for travel, housing, food, and honoraria are to be paid by the school being visited. Guidelines for the prescribed expenses are determined by the FCC Accreditation Committee.

Third-Year Review

A third year review is conducted mid-way through the seven-year accreditation cycle. The format of the third year review is determined by the FCC accreditation office in consultation with the diocesan schools office. The norm is a site visit to the school by the Associate Director for Accreditation and a diocesan school's office representative to validate compliance with standards and benchmarks, as well as the FCC health and safety and scholarship compliance checklists.

Training

The FCC Associate Director for Accreditation, in conjunction with the diocesan schools offices, is responsible to provide training for standards orientations, CIPA orientations, visitation team chairpersons, and visitation team members.

Membership Dues

Annual dues to maintain and improve the FCC Accreditation Program shall be based on student enrollment and reflect an annual cost of living increase. The accreditation program budget and annual dues are approved by the Schools Executive Council at the summer meeting a full year in advance.

Standards

The current accreditation standards were adopted for the 2013-2014 school year and revised for the 2021-2022 school year. In order to achieve and retain full accreditation status, member schools must comply with the standards, benchmarks, policies, and procedures of the FCC Accreditation Program.

Process for Revision of Standards: Standards are periodically reviewed, updated, and then promulgated by the Bishops of Florida. The standards and accreditation process have been revised eight times since 1972. The newest, full-scale, revised standards went into effect in the 2013-2014 school year.

During the revision process, feedback is encouraged and solicited from a variety of school stakeholders, including pastors, administrators, staff and parents. Revision efforts fall under two main categories: 1. full-scale/ systematic revisions undertaken program-wide every five to ten years; and, 2. minor revisions/ updates to existing standards made in between the designated times for full-scale activity. Under the formal cycle, an ad hoc standards revision committee is formed, in-depth feedback is gathered from school stakeholders, and final changes are subject to approval from the Florida Bishops. Minor revisions, on the other hand, can be discussed/ approved during one of the bi-annual meetings of the FCC Accreditation Committee for a given school year. The following guidelines apply in when full-scale revision is considered:

- **Need for Written Notice:** The Associate Director for Accreditation shall disseminate a written notice to school administrators for proposed revisions to standards. Such notices shall be copied to FCCAC members. Each school – or (Arch)Diocesan Schools Office – shall in turn forward these notices to pastors for review and/ or comments.

- **Compilation of Feedback and Final Approval:** The Associate Director for Accreditation will collect and compile feedback about proposed revisions. This information will be subject to review and discussion by the Accreditation Committee, before final approval is recommended to the Bishops.
- **Implementation Phase:** The same notification process will be used to inform school administrators and pastors about final approval decisions. Furthermore – when deemed appropriate by the FCCAC – there shall be a reasonable grace period (i.e. usually one year) for schools to fully comply with the revisions to standards as described (in “Need for Written Notice”) above.

Accreditation Status

The FCC Accreditation Committee is responsible for determining the accreditation status of each member school. The FCC Accreditation Committee will annually inform each member school of its accreditation status. The FCC Accreditation Committee reviews the visitation report and/or ARCA and determines the accreditation status of the school/early education program, in consultation with the local diocese.

- **Full Accreditation:** The school/early education program meets the accreditation standards. Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, all benchmarks with a 1-4 scaled rubric, must have evidence of at least partially meeting the benchmark, a level two. The school/program completes an annual report for continued accreditation (for early education programs, this includes an annual on-site visit).
- **Accreditation with Conditions:** The school/early education program is accredited for one year with a specific list of conditions that must be met during that school year. A follow up visit is scheduled to determine compliance with the accreditation standards. The FCC Accreditation Committee reviews the new report and determines if the school/program receives full accreditation, is put on probation or if accreditation is withheld.
- **On Probation:** The school/early education program does not meet the accreditation standards for full accreditation or accreditation with conditions. A plan is put in place that the school/early education program must follow in order to gain full accreditation status. The FCC accreditation office monitors the school's/program's compliance with the plan. A follow up visit is scheduled to determine compliance with the accreditation standards. The FCC Accreditation Committee reviews the new report and determines if the school/program receives full accreditation or if accreditation is withheld.
- **Accreditation Withheld/Revoked:** The school/early education program does not meet the standards for accreditation or the school/early education program has failed to maintain institutional integrity (see page 7). The FCC Accreditation Office meets with the diocesan schools office to determine the next steps for the school/early education program.

Schools Recommended for Revocation of Accreditation: No school shall have its accreditation revoked unless it has been on probation for at least one year or is in violation of “institutional integrity.”

When the FCC Accreditation Committee recommends that a school's accreditation be revoked, the Committee shall be responsible for sending notification to the school principal and a copy of this notification to the diocesan superintendent. The notification shall include:

- the nature of the non-compliance,

- the nature and type of evidence that must be presented to the FCC Accreditation Committee to indicate that the non-compliance has been corrected,
- a time frame for correction of the non-compliance, and
- the recommended accreditation status.

If it is recommended a school's accreditation be revoked, the school shall be afforded an appeal process in consideration of such action. A school whose accreditation has been revoked may be reinstated by making application and beginning the formal process for re-accreditation.

STREAM Certification

The STREAM certification program of the Florida Catholic Conference is the integration of science, technology, religion, engineering, the arts and math education. All Catholic schools have this integration to some extent. The specific characteristics of a Florida Catholic Conference STREAM school are:

- Mission and Catholic identity are fully integrated into every aspect of the school.
- All classrooms are centers of fully engaged 21st century learners.
- The curriculum is arranged in such a way that the subjects are coordinated to support each other and promote a natural way of learning.
- Interdisciplinary project-based, inquiry-based learning is evident throughout the school.
- Students demonstrate an increased STREAM literacy. Students have an understanding of religious, scientific, artistic, technological, mathematical, and engineering concepts and processes for personal decision making and participation in civic and cultural affairs.
- Professional development for all staff members is a priority. The individual professional development plans flow from the school's goals, focusing on innovative data-driven instruction.
- The professional learning communities within the school and with other professional educators highlight the STREAM topics, improvement of instruction and learning, use of data to make instructional decisions, innovative integration of technology, and methods to continue to improve the Catholic culture of the school.
- Authentic use of technology by both the teachers and the students is an integral part of the teaching and learning.
- The designated curriculum and/or STREAM coordinator oversees the STREAM program to ensure a cohesive plan is implemented throughout the entire school.

The first pilot schools completed the certification in 2017.

A school must be fully accredited by the Florida Catholic Conference, have its STREAM program in place for at least one full year and contact the superintendent's office in order to seek certification. Once a school has been approved to seek STREAM certification, it can be visited anytime during the accreditation cycle, in conjunction with the Third Year Review or as a part of the full accreditation visitation. Depending on the scores determined by the benchmarks, STREAM benchmarks and observations, the school can be rated as an Emerging STREAM school, STREAM school or Excellent STREAM school.

NCPSA Membership

Our schools are members of the National Council for Private School Accreditation. Visiting team members are trained in the NCPSA protocols, as well as the FCC protocols. Reports are sent to the NCPSA office on a regular basis. A school can order a certificate from NCPSA through the FCC accreditation office.

Institutional Integrity

A school's accreditation can be revoked at any time:

- if a school misrepresents itself, including its accreditation status, to the public;
- if a school has a serious condition that may be detrimental to the clientele of the school; or
- if a school knowingly falsely reports its compliance with the policies and standards for accreditation to the FCC Accreditation Committee in its annual report (ARCA).

If it is recommended a school's or early education program's accreditation be revoked, the school/program shall be afforded an appeal process in consideration of such action.

Appeal Process

An appeal of an unfavorable decision concerning a school's or early education program's accreditation status must be made to the FCC Accreditation Committee within three months after the decision. A letter with supporting evidence must be submitted to the FCC Accreditation Committee and a copy sent to the diocesan superintendent. The Committee will review the evidence and make a decision. An appeal to this decision may be made to the FCC Schools Executive Committee within 30 days. A final appeal may be made to the episcopal moderator of the FCC Accreditation Program within 30 days.

Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program Office

The office is housed in the Florida Catholic Conference office building. The contact information is:

Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program
201 West Park Avenue
Tallahassee, Florida 32309

850-224-7906

accreditation@flacathconf.org

Public Website: www.eas-ed.org

Private Website (login required): www.eas-ed2.accreditrac.com