

281—12.10(256) Independent accrediting agencies. Notwithstanding Iowa Code section 256.11(1) through 256.11(12) and this chapter, a nonpublic school may be accredited by an independent accrediting agency that appears on a list maintained by the state board of education instead of being accredited by the state board.

12.10(1) *Compliance required by a nonpublic school.* Iowa Code section 256.11(16) is incorporated by this reference. New accrediting agencies must apply by November 1. New schools shall notify the department by April 1 if they wish to be included in the independently accredited list for the following school year. Each year the department will contact the approved accrediting agencies requesting an updated list of the schools that are accredited or in the accrediting process for the upcoming school year. This list is due to the department by April 1. A nonpublic school that participates in the accreditation process offered by an independent accrediting agency on the approved list published pursuant to this rule is deemed to meet the education standards of Iowa Code section 256.11 and this chapter. However, such a school shall comply with statutory health and safety requirements for school facilities. A nonpublic school accredited under this chapter shall abide by all state and federal laws and regulations. Notwithstanding Iowa Code section 256.11, the department is not precluded from enforcing compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations.

12.10(2) *List maintained by state board.* The state board will maintain a list of approved independent accrediting agencies comprised of at least six regional or national nonprofit, nongovernmental agencies recognized as reliable authorities concerning the quality of education offered by a school and shall publish the list of independent accrediting agencies on the department's Internet site. The list will include accrediting agencies that, as of January 1, 2013, accredited a nonpublic school in this state that was concurrently accredited under this rule and include any agency that has a formalized partnership agreement with another agency on the list and has member schools in this state as of January 1, 2013. Agencies that met this standard as of November 20, 2013, are the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS), Christian Schools International (CSI), Cognia, the National Lutheran Schools Association (NLSA), and the Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI).

12.10(3) *Criteria for recognizing an agency as a "reliable authority concerning the quality of education offered by a school."* In any decision to add an agency to the list maintained pursuant to subrule 12.10(1) or to remove an agency from the list pursuant to subrule 12.10(2), the following criteria may be applied:

a. Whether the agency's accreditation standards require a school to set high academic and nonacademic standards for all students, including preparation of students for postsecondary success.

b. Whether the agency's accreditation standards require a school to monitor and assess all students' progress toward high academic and nonacademic standards.

c. Whether the agency's accreditation standards require a school to recruit and retain properly licensed quality professional staff, and provide those staff members with ongoing professional development.

d. Whether the agency's accreditation standards set requirements for fiscal, data, and contract management.

e. Whether the agency monitors compliance with its standards and takes appropriate corrective action when standards are not met.

f. Whether the agency itself has appropriate fiscal, data, and contract management policies and procedures.

g. Any uncorrected citation of noncompliance by any governmental or nongovernmental agency or organization with jurisdiction or oversight of an accrediting agency listed pursuant to subrule 12.10(1).

h. Any uncorrected negative audit finding of an accrediting agency listed pursuant to subrule 12.10(1).

i. Any judgments, orders, decrees, consent decrees, settlement agreements, or verdicts concerning the agency listed pursuant to subrule 12.10(1) entered by any state or federal court of competent jurisdiction.

j. Whether the agency listed pursuant to subrule 12.10(1) continues to retain its nonprofit status.

k. Whether the agency listed pursuant to subrule 12.10(1) has received any form of recognition for innovation or excellence concerning its work.

l. Any other criterion used by the agency to determine accreditation.

m. Any other reports or findings sent to the nonpublic school regarding accreditation, including findings related to Iowa Code section 256.11.

12.10(4) *Removal of agency from approved independent accrediting agencies.* If the state board takes preliminary action to remove an agency from the approved list published on the department's Internet site pursuant to subrule 12.10(1), the department will, at least one year prior to removing the agency from the approved list, notify the nonpublic schools participating in the accreditation process offered by the agency of the state board's intent to remove the accrediting agency from its approved list of independent accrediting agencies. The department will give notice to the independent accrediting agency, along with an opportunity to respond. The notice will also be posted on the department's Internet site and contain the proposed date of removal. If a nonpublic school receives notice pursuant to this subrule and it chooses to remain accredited, the nonpublic school is to attain accreditation under this rule or otherwise attain accreditation in a manner provided by this chapter or Iowa Code section 256.11, not later than one year following the date on which the state board removes the agency from its list of independent accrediting agencies.

12.10(5) *Rule of construction: "at least six."* The obligation to maintain a list of at least six agencies in subrule 12.10(1) will not be construed to require the list to contain an agency that is not a regional or national nonprofit, nongovernmental agency recognized as a reliable authority concerning the quality of education offered by a school.

12.10(6) *Adoption by the department of standard procedures.* The department will adopt standard procedures, schedules, and forms for the implementation of this rule, including procedures for adding independent accrediting agencies from the list maintained by the state board pursuant to subrule 12.10(1) and removing agencies from that list pursuant to subrule 12.10(4).

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