

Christian Education - Accreditation Impact Statement

The root of the word accreditation means "worthy of trust." Accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental method of quality assurance and peer review. It is granted to an educational institution upon successful completion of a thorough evaluation process, which includes a self-study and an on-site evaluation. Following the self-study, a team of experienced educators evaluates the school to verify that it meets the quality standards.

A few considerations:

A.C.E. has been adamantly opposed to government intervention and control. Does accreditation for schools received by independent or peer review agencies mean the government has approved the curriculum or the schools?

Absolutely not! A.C.E. has always convictionally maintained strict separation from any kind of governmental intrusion into its academic program. In fact, Christian attorneys have served as "watch dogs" on the lookout for any kind of government influence or pressure to compromise the Biblical core values of the ministry throughout the entire accreditation process-start to finish. One distinction that is sometimes overlooked is the fact that the accreditation process undertaken by A.C.E.M.'s Lighthouse schools was a completely voluntary and non-governmental process of peer review. The regional accrediting commissions are private organizations which are themselves highly opposed to governmental intrusions. The commissions are governed by a Board of Directors made up of representatives from the member schools who develop and constantly update the standards of excellence held in common by all. The ministry of A.C.E. has always been steadfastly opposed to all forms of governmental licensure and state certification requirements of any kind. A.C.E. can with confident assurance proclaim that not a single compromise was made to obtain the accreditation seal for the Lighthouse schools. To the contrary, the process of accreditation has helped the schools to execute their Biblical mission more efficiently than ever before and has set them on a process of continuing improvement to the glory of God.

Will A.C.E. help our school become accredited with a private entity?

While A.C.E. does not perform the accreditation, the things learned and the resources created will be of substantial benefit to schools

using the A.C.E. program who themselves wish to become accredited. The resources and process to facilitate the accreditation of A.C.E. service-agreement schools must be done very deliberately in order to ensure the academic integrity of the program. Initially, the criterion for pre-candidate status requires the achievement of A.C.E. Quality or Model Status to evaluate each school's readiness for beginning the process of accreditation. These pre-candidate standards would facilitate the school's initial accreditation process with the appropriate commissions.

Our school is not interested in accreditation. Will this hurt our relationship with A.C.E. in any way?

Never. A.C.E. is honored to partner in Christian education with your ministry, regardless of your position relative to accreditation. For some schools, accreditation is a desirable process. Others take a different view. Accreditation is not in any way connected with a ministry's status or financial arrangements with A.C.E. In fact, A.C.E. recognizes that the process of accreditation is an expensive process-in time, money, and effort-and many ministries will not want to partake. For those ministries that desire accreditation, A.C.E. can help. For those ministries that do not, A.C.E. respects your choice and would never attempt to influence your decision.

Does this mean that our school using A.C.E. is now accredited?

Not automatically. The accreditation process involves a rigorous evaluation and multiple site reviews of the particular school environment of each individual candidate school. While the academic curriculum in use is certainly part of that process, many of the accreditation standards deal with how well the total educational program is executed and with the specific characteristics of each individual candidate school. Therefore, although individual schools desiring accreditation status for their own ministry must complete the journey themselves, A.C.E. has blazed the trail, making it possible for them to accomplish that goal. Again, this does not mean that all schools using the A.C.E. program are accredited. For accreditation, each school must successfully complete a process similar to the one completed by the Lighthouse schools.

If our school has Model or Quality Status, does that make us accredited?

Not in the sense that most educators intend. The Model and Quality

standards certainly provide a benchmark for academic achievement based on the standards for excellence prescribed by A.C.E. The status recognitions offered by A.C.E. would certainly meet the American Heritage definition of accreditation: "To attest to and approve as meeting a prescribed standard." For this reason, the status certificates granted by A.C.E. for many years referred to the achievement as "accreditation." Many schools have found that the concerns of local public school administrators and even some colleges are satisfied by the outside validation represented by this status recognition. Attainment of status is a tribute to the fact that the school's staff is effectively motivating students, following the A.C.E. Procedures Manual, submitting to an independent outside review, and operating a high-quality Christian school. However, most parents and professionals in the academic community equate accreditation with *regional* accreditation. Because regional accreditation has become the standard by which all others are judged, it is often viewed as the highest form of peer validation an institution can achieve. A school that has achieved Model Status with A.C.E. is certainly well on its way to meeting the criteria to become a pre-candidate for accreditation, but should never advertise Model or Quality Status as a form of accreditation.

Is it true that the A.C.E. curriculum is now accredited?

No. A *curriculum* cannot be accredited. Only individual *schools* can be accredited. The accreditation of the Lighthouse schools does not accredit the A.C.E. curriculum. However, as the learning vehicle for the schools, the A.C.E. curriculum was scrutinized, evaluated, and approved as part of the accreditation process. Although this does not accredit the A.C.E. curriculum, since curriculum cannot be accredited, this should raise the level of credibility of the A.C.E. curriculum for schools that use it, and can provide validation of its integrity for those who question it.

Is there any benefit of the Lighthouse schools' accreditation for our own school using the A.C.E. program?

Absolutely! To our knowledge, this is the first time any school using 100% A.C.E. curriculum and 100% of the A.C.E. procedures has ever been granted the most rigorous and nationally recognized accreditation. In that sense, the achievement of the Lighthouse schools is truly groundbreaking. Through the process, A.C.E. has met many of the wonderful educational professionals who oversee the accreditation process for various regional accreditation commissions

and have acquainted them with the individualized delivery model used in the A.C.E. system of education. In so doing, A.C.E. has forged relationships with key individuals who now understand the academic underpinning of the educational system used in your school. In addition, the following three benefits accrue to A.C.E. service agreement schools:

1. ***Persuasive Impact.*** Individuals with general concerns about A.C.E.'s unique and sometimes unfamiliar process of individualized education may better understand the program's academic legitimacy when shown that the program is used 100% in the regionally accredited Lighthouse schools. The accreditation of the Lighthouse schools shows that A.C.E.'s individualized program is fundamentally sound and not a "hair-brained scheme" that is "here today, gone tomorrow." This alone may be enough to convince a local community college or public school to look more favorably on an A.C.E. student—even if that student's school is not itself accredited. For assistance in properly presenting this information or for general help in handling a troublesome transfer of credit or college admissions issue, it may be advisable to consider a Christian Legal Ministry to assist.
2. ***Accreditation Options.*** Undergoing the individual process for the accreditation of schools using the A.C.E. program may greatly enhance the education offered to your local students. While this is by no means required, schools that feel accreditation would be a benefit for them will find the process far more hospitable if facilitated by A.C.E. by using the Quality or Model assessment standards to begin. Because the accreditors now have a deeper understanding and appreciation for the unique characteristics of the A.C.E. system, A.C.E. has paved the way for schools using the system to enjoy the school-improving benefits of accreditation without compromising the academic distinctives of the A.C.E. program. In fact, several of the regional accrediting commissions now include A.C.E. Christian schools in their "Special Purposes Division," a category with special standards for schools that exist for a unique and special purpose—like providing an individualized Christian education. While the process can be rigorous and time-consuming, it is possible for schools using 100% A.C.E. material to achieve regional and nationally-recognized accreditation. To assist in the process, A.C.E. will offer accreditation consulting services and accompanying resource materials for schools that choose to move forward with the process of accreditation. Help will be offered for the rigorous self-study and future planning standards

of accreditation by utilizing a more intensive self-assessment, validation and evaluation standard.

3. **Dual-Enrollment Possibilities.** A.C.E. has developed guidelines whereby students enrolled in schools using the A.C.E. program may "dual enroll" in Lighthouse Christian Academy which is already accredited. To preserve the academic integrity of the process, minimum enrollment periods must be observed prior to graduation and academic standards must be maintained, but students whose individual schools are not accredited may thereby reap the benefits of a diploma from an accredited institution. Some of the details concerning this process are explained in greater detail below.

We use the A.C.E. program in our school. How could our students benefit from dual-enrollment or academic validation with LCA?

Lighthouse Christian Academy has instituted a new program for dual-enrollment and academic validation for high school students in schools that use the A.C.E. program. For some very small schools, the process of accreditation is not always a viable option. Others desire to see some form of academic validation for their students until the school itself can pursue accreditation. Dual-enrollment offers students in these schools the opportunity to receive a diploma from LCA as an accredited institution while attending the local school. The specific criteria for dual enrollment are outlined in a separate document provided by LCA. In general, the students must have used the A.C.E. program for at least two years prior to enrollment with LCA and the student must maintain dual-enrollment with LCA for at least two years prior to graduation, a dual-enrollment fee (approximately \$200) and a graduation fee (approximately \$50) will apply, and the school must maintain and forward to LCA at regular intervals the appropriate academic records and student information. Finally, a school official should be appointed to act as a liaison to coordinate the program with LCA. LCA will maintain the official student transcript and will issue the student's high school diploma upon completion of the academic program.