Middle States Association

CANDIDACY FOR ACCREDITATION

The first stage in the process for a school[1] to be awarded accreditation by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools is to seek and be granted Candidacy for Accreditation.

A Candidate for Accreditation is a school that:

a. Has been in successful operation for at least one academic year;
b. Has satisfactorily completed the Application for Candidacy and hosted a Candidacy Visit;
c. Has been offered and has formally accepted the offer of Candidacy for Accreditation extended by the President of the Commissions or his/her designee;
d. Reflects a willingness and readiness to participate in the self-study and accreditation process.

A Candidate for Accreditation may advertise and include in its publications that it is a Candidate for Accreditation by the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.

Section 1: Initiating a Request for Candidacy. A school that has registered with the Commissions and that meets one or more of the categories and types of schools accredited (*see MSA-CESS Policy: Scope and Categories of Membership)* by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools may be invited to submit an Application for Candidacy.

Section 2: The Application for Candidacy for Accreditation.

A school invited to submit an Application for Candidacy submits the Application to MSA-CESS Staff who review the Application and determine whether a Candidacy Visit should be scheduled. If it is determined, based primarily on the information provided by the school in its Application, that the school meets or is likely to meet the requirements for accreditation during the self-study process, the school will be invited to proceed to the next step in the process.

In certain cases, the requirements above may be waived based on pre-established collaborative relationships with a school's parent organization or a cooperative accreditation agency. That relationship assures that the school meets the Commissions' requirements for candidacy and has the capacity to succeed in the accreditation process.

Any institution intending to use its accreditation to establish eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA, federal student loan programs must submit a Declaration of Intent with its Application for Candidacy.

[1] The term "school" is used in this policy but applies to all categories of members including schools, systems, learning services providers, and career and technical institutions.

Section 3: Candidacy Visit. If the President or his/her designee determines that a school should proceed with the candidacy process, an onsite Candidacy Visit is scheduled.

The purpose of this visit is two-fold: a) to determine whether the school currently meets Standards for Accreditation or is likely to do so in the near future and b) to ascertain the school's ability and readiness for the self-study and accreditation process.

Under certain circumstances, the President or his/her designee has the authority to waive the onsite visit requirement or allow a virtual candidacy visit, but never in the case of postsecondary,non-degree granting career and technology institutions that shall always host an onsite visit. The Candidacy Visitor shall submit a written report on his/her findings and a recommendation to the President or his/her designee.

Section 4: Offer/Deferral of Candidacy. Based on the school's Application for Candidacy and the report of the Candidacy Visitor, the President or his/her designee decides to offer candidacy, defer candidacy, or deny candidacy.

If the decision is to defer or deny offering Candidacy to a school, the President or his/her designee informs the school, in writing, the reasons for the decision. The school may use its right to due process provided in the MSA-CESS Policy: Appeals from Adverse Accrediting Actions.

Section 5: Offer and Acceptance of Candidacy for Accreditation.
An offer of Candidacy for Accreditation must be accepted by a school within one calendar year of the date of the offer. All offers not accepted within 6 months may be rescinded by the President.

A form for accepting an offer of Candidacy is included with the offer letter and must be returned to the President of the Commissions within 6 months.

Notification of Candidacy Actions. The President will inform the Commissions regarding all actions related to Candidacy for Accreditation at the Commissions' semi-annual meetings.

Responsibilities of Candidate Schools. Schools that are Candidates for Accreditation shall fulfill, as appropriate, all expectations expressed in MSA-CESS Policy: Expectations of Accredited Institutions.

Section 6: Term of Candidacy for Accreditation.
A school that has been offered and has accepted Candidacy for Accreditation may remain a Candidate for Accreditation for a period not to exceed three years.

During the term as a Candidate for Accreditation, the school must complete a self-study, receive a MSA-CESS-appointed visiting team, and be granted Accreditation by the Commissions.

If a school is unable to be granted Accreditation within the time prescribed, its status as a Candidate for Accreditation is removed by the President.

If unusual conditions arise (see MSA-CESS Policy: Extension of Accreditation Term for acceptable reasons and conditions) that preclude a school from meeting requirements for Accreditation within the period prescribed, the school may seek approval, in writing, for extension of the term of Candidacy. Decisions on extension of the term of Candidacy are made by the President or his/her designee. Under no circumstances, however, will the term of Candidacy term exceed five years. Schools that fail to achieve accreditation within five years may be required to wait at least one calendar year before being permitted to begin the Application for Candidacy again.

Section 6: Candidate Fees and Dues

A Candidacy Fee is sent to a school after a school has submitted an Application for Candidacy. The fee must be paid prior to the school hosting a Candidacy Visit.

The school will also be required to pay applicable travel costs for the visitor conducting the Candidacy Visit.

When a school accepts an offer of Candidacy for Accreditation, it will be assessed annual dues, effective with the acceptance of the offer of candidacy, in the same manner and according to the same dues schedule for all member schools.