Middle States Association

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS

Other accreditation agencies provide accreditation and school improvement services to particular types of schools[1]. Since a number of these schools seek to be accredited by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools while working with an agency that specializes in a particular type of school, the Commissions may enter into cooperative accreditation agreements with other accreditation agencies. Such agreements must be based on assurances that an agreement:

a. Is based on the needs of and enhance the quality of education of MSA-CESS candidate or accredited schools;
b. Assures that accreditation by the Commissions will be based on schools meeting the MSA-CESS Standards for Accreditation;
c. Assures that authority to accredit schools resides solely with each party to the agreement without regard to actions taken by the other party to the agreement; and
d. Assures that all dues and fees are paid by schools separately to the cooperating agencies.

Section 1: Elements of Cooperative Agreements. Cooperative accreditation agreements must include the following elements:

a. Purpose of the agreement;
b. The cooperating agencies;
c. Description of the schools eligible to participate in the cooperative accreditation process;
d. The process of establishing candidacy for cooperative accreditation;
e. Descriptions of the accreditation protocols available to schools through the agreement;
f. Terms of accreditation through the agreement;
g. Statements regarding the payment of dues and fees;
h. Responsibilities of schools accredited through the agreement;
i. Procedures for communications between the cooperating agencies; and
j. Limits to the agreement;
k. Provisions for periodic review of the agreement; and

Section 2: Establishing New Cooperative Agreements. Proposals to establish new cooperative agreements shall be reviewed and acted upon according to the following procedures:

a. A cooperative accreditation agreement may be proposed by either potential party to the agreement;

[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.

b. Any new cooperative accreditation agreements must be reviewed first by an MSA staff member and second by the President or his/her designee before a recommendation is made to the Commissions.
c. Proposed cooperative agreements will be reviewed first by the Commissions' Membership and Accreditation Committees, which will make a recommendation to the full Commissions;
d. The Commissions shall take action on proposed cooperative agreements;
e. If adopted by the Commissions, a copy of the adopted agreement will be signed by the President of the Commissions or his/her designee and forwarded to the chief executive officer of the cooperating agency for signature. A copy of the signed original agreement will be maintained in the Commissions' files.

Section 3: Periodic Review of Cooperative Accreditation Agreements.

a. Cooperative agreements are subject to review, discussion, and revocation at any time.
b. Either organization may withdraw from the agreement if the conditions of the agreement are found to be untenable and an appropriate resolution cannot be reached.
c. The Commissions' staff will use the following criteria to review the agreement:
    1) Does the agreement continue to serve the interests of the Commissions and their schools accredited through the agreement?
    2) Does the agreement include provisions for and permit visiting teams to determine that schools to be accredited through the agreement meet the MSA-CESS Standards for Accreditation;
    3) Are the intent and purposes of the agreement carried out in the implementation of the agreement?
    4) Are there any major problems in implementing the agreement that would give the Commissions cause to reconsider the agreement?

Section 4: General Guidelines for Accreditation through Cooperative Agreements. When a school seeks accreditation by two agencies through a cooperative accreditation agreement, the following guidelines will apply:

- When taking any accreditation action, each agency shall apply its own Standards for Accreditation, take its own accreditation action, and inform the school and the other accrediting agency accordingly.
- Consultation between the staffs of the cooperating agencies is expected.
- Neither agency shall be responsible for the candidacy or accreditation actions of the other agency.
- All dues and fees are established separately and paid directly to both agencies.
- Each agency’s self-study and accreditation protocol must be approved by the cooperating agency.
- The chair, assistant chair, and composition of the visiting team shall be agreed upon by both agencies.
- All documents including the Self-Study Document, the visiting team’s report, and all accreditation maintenance reports shall be provided to both agencies.

- The school is required to use a protocol (reports, special visits, conferences, etc.) agreed upon mutually for establishing and maintaining its accreditation status.
- If either agency takes action to remove accreditation from a school that received accreditation through a cooperative process, it will inform the cooperating agency of its action and provide the reasons for it.

Section 5: Schools Already Accredited by an Agency with whom MSA-CESS has a Cooperative Agreement. Schools currently accredited by another accrediting agency, but not by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools, may petition to become accredited by MSA-CESS if the Commissions have a cooperative agreement with that agency through the Commissions' "Recognition of Existing Accreditation" process found in MSA-CESS Policy: Accreditation Actions.