COBIS Accreditation Standards & Evaluation Procedures
CHECKLIST

1.1 MEMBERSHIP
_______1.1.1 The school must attend at least two COBIS meetings each year.

_______1.1.2 The school should provide administrative and instructional personnel to serve on evaluation committees at the request of the Executive Director or the Associate Director for Accreditation.

_______1.1.3 The school should support COBIS-sponsored workshops both by attending and providing workers in various categories.

_______1.1.4 The school must adhere to the principles set forth in the Code of Ethics and ByLaws.

2.1 EVALUATION
______2.1.1 The Self-Study must have involvement from faculty members and other constituents of the school, as appropriate.

______2.1.2 The school should start as soon as possible to conduct its Self-Study. The Self-Study must be completed at least two weeks before the evaluation, and copies of the report on the Self-Study shall be sent to all members of the evaluation committee and the Executive Director at that time.

______2.1.3 The school's financial review/audit, the school's most recent financial report, and Annual Budget must be provided to the Chair of the evaluation committee at least two weeks prior to the visit.

______2.1.4 Each individual committee member is to be provided a packet containing a map of the school, teachers’ names and class assignments, schedule of classes and room numbers, Student and Faculty Handbook, enrollment according to grade, and any other information that will assist the committee.

______2.1.5 During the on-campus visit, a room closed to all others should be set aside for the committee to meet and confer. The room should also be equipped with the items and documents, per F. 2. of the COBIS Standards. Lunch should be available at the school so that the committee will not lose time during the evaluation.

______2.1.6 A school should maintain a regular schedule on the day or days of the evaluation, avoiding tests and audio/visual materials which are more than incidental to the day’s lesson. The committee needs to observe the teaching process.

3.1 GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP
_______3.1.1 The school must be organized as a for-profit or not-for-profit Florida corporation.

_______3.1.2 A board of trustees (directors, owners) shall develop school policies; maintain financial stability; provide access to legal services; lead in fundraising and employ, supervise and support the school head.

_______3.1.3 This governing body shall develop and periodically review the school’s mission statement and statement of philosophy and establish procedures for a periodic review of policies, issues and needs.
3.1.4 The governing body shall develop and approve a clearly stated long-range plan with provisions for a periodic review.

3.1.5 The governing body shall generate necessary resources for providing and maintaining the physical facilities and all approved programs of the school.

3.1.6 The governing body shall develop and maintain codified procedures for the Board which are reviewed and signed by all governing body members annually. These procedures should include a conflict of interest policy.

3.1.7 The governing body shall be organized in such a way as to be independent of any special interest group.

3.1.8 The governing body shall support the head in establishing and maintaining appropriate personnel policies, salaries, and benefits for faculty and staff.

3.1.9 The administration and supervision of the school are the chief responsibilities of a school head chosen by the governing body to develop, organize and lead the administration, faculty and staff; carryout policies; and oversee the day-to-day operation of the school.

3.1.10 Parent Organizations: Member schools should organize and maintain effective parent organizations to ensure good school-home communication and relationships.

3.2 PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

3.2.1 The school must have a written philosophy by which the school's entire program is developed and maintained. All members of the school community—faculty, staff, students, parents, trustees, prospective parents and donors—should be made aware of this philosophy.

3.2.2 The school must have a published admissions policy, including qualifications for admission and procedures, designed to promote a good match between the school and the candidate for admission.

3.2.3 Schools will not discriminate in admission or employment on the basis of race and national or ethnic origin, and will follow fair employment practices. Evidence of compliance with the non-discriminatory requirements must be made known to all constituents and the community.

3.2.4 The school must provide evidence of thoughtful process, respectful of its mission, for the collection and use in school decision-making of data (both internal and external) about student learning.

3.3 ACADEMIC PROGRAM

3.3.1 The school must have a curriculum consistent with its philosophy and objectives designed to effectively satisfy the academic, moral and ethical development of the students enrolled. Indicators that this standard has been met include: the ongoing adherence to, and regular review of, a published curriculum guide. A curriculum guide is a structured document that delineates the philosophy, goals, objectives, learning experiences, instructional resources and assessments that comprise a specific educational program. Additionally, it represents an articulation of what students should know and be able to do and supports teachers in knowing how to achieve these goals.

3.3.2 The academic head of the school or a supervisor should observe and advise teachers regarding compliance with the instructional program.
There is to be evidence of a level of **positive morale** necessary for an effective and productive school community. Policies regarding behavioral expectations for students must be published throughout the school community.

The **academic program** reflects educational best practices, with clearly defined expectations for student learning. The school must provide developmentally appropriate opportunities and experiences for all students to meet the intellectual, emotional, physical and social needs of its students. The school must utilize data to assess the effectiveness of its academic programs based on data collected regarding student learning.

Instructional Aids: Instructional materials and equipment to support effective teaching must be appropriate to the goals of the curriculum, sufficient in quality, quantity and variety.

**Preschool and Kindergarten**: All COBIS schools with pre-grade one programs must be accredited by the Florida Kindergarten Council.

**Elementary School**: The instructional program should be structured to provide students the opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills, and understanding in the following areas:

- a) Language Arts, including reading, writing and speaking.
- b) Mathematics
- c) Natural Sciences
- d) Social Sciences (including an awareness of other cultures)
- e) World Languages
- f) Health and physical education
- g) Art, music and drama
- h) Integrated computer technology

**Secondary School**: The Council recognizes two academic programs: (a) a **college preparatory** program, and (b) a **general** program.

(a) **General Program**: In order for students to graduate from the general program of a member school, they must show that they have completed a minimum of 24 units at the 9th grade level and above. These 24 units must be in compliance with state regulations for high school graduation and are distributed as follows:

- 4 English (ESL counts as English for foreign students)
- 4 Mathematics
- 3 Science
- 3 Social studies and history
- 2 Personal Fitness
- 2 Foreign Language
- 1 The Arts
- 5 Electives (includes physical education/health)

(b) **College Preparatory Program**: In order for students to graduate from the college preparatory program of a member school, they must show that they have successfully completed a minimum of 24 academic units at the 9th grade level and above. These 24 units must be in compliance with state regulations for high school graduation and are distributed as follows:

- 4 Honors or AP English
3 Honors or AP Mathematics
3 Honors or AP Science
3 Honors or AP Social Studies
2 Personal Fitness
2 Honors or AP Foreign Language
1 The Arts
5 Electives

Requirements applicable to both programs:

(1) Laboratories: Classrooms and laboratories must be furnished and equipped for a stimulating teaching/learning environment. Science and other laboratories must comply with local and state codes for health and safety.

(2) Student Services: A school must provide adequate services in the areas of guidance and counseling to assist the student in the choice of curriculum, adjustment to academic and social pressures, developing a healthy self-esteem, developing personal integrity and moral values, college plans, and future vocation.

3.3.9 Special Purpose Schools. Special purpose schools are established and maintained for varying types of exceptional education. The school must be principally an academic institution providing basic instruction in the conventional area of education. Variations from the Council Standards must be justifiable. The school’s philosophy must be specific enough in its statements so the program can be judged against it for quality and application of educational techniques suitable to effectively serve its student population.

3.3.10 E-Learning and Distance Education Programs
To ensure both quality and independence, COBIS schools incorporating asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities (enabled by the internet, audio, video, or other means) must demonstrate compliance with all COBIS standards. E-learning offerings must be either:
   a. Developed and controlled by the COBIS school and/or
   b. Supplemental programs (those not developed and controlled by the COBIS school, such as FLVS), must:
      i. Be accredited by a regional accrediting agency AND
      ii. Must not exceed 25% of a student’s course of study

3.5 PROFESSIONAL STAFF

3.5.1 Teaching faculty and administrative staff:
   a) The faculty and staff shall be of sufficient number and quality to implement the full program of the school. Attention shall be given to the appropriateness of class size, teacher: student ratio, method, professional development and student loads. A student: faculty ratio of not more than 20:1, overall, is to be maintained.
   b) The academic head of the school must have a master’s degree or bachelor’s degree and several years of successful experience in teaching and administrative responsibilities.
   c) All teachers in grades Kindergarten through grade 12 must have a bachelor’s degree or a foreign equivalent (not including art and music). Administrators with authority over students and/or teachers must also have a bachelor's degree. Teachers of physical education who do not meet this standard, as of July 2002, must be enrolled in a program and take a minimum of 6 hours per year until the standard is met.

3.5.2 The professional staff must meet and plan regularly, as well as continually evaluate the progress of both the program and staff in attaining professional and instructional objectives.
3.5.3 Administrative policies should be issued to faculty and staff in written form. Employee handbooks require a signed acknowledgment of receipt. Each school must maintain an effective orientation program for new staff.

3.5.4 Instructional staff members shall spend the major part of the day teaching in the field(s) in which they are academically prepared. If the academic preparation is out of field, a minimum of 12 semester hours and/or in-service equivalents must be obtained in the field in which the individual is teaching.

3.5.5 All full and part-time employees must submit to a background check and fingerprinting in compliance with the screening required by the state (Level II screening). (FL State Certified teachers after 1984 comply with this standard.)

3.5.6 Each school shall provide the services of qualified technology personnel. Personnel with overall responsibility for technology shall have a bachelor's degree, plus 12 hours of instruction in technology, or technical certifications and experience that are suitable to manage and oversee the school's technology operations. Technology personnel who work directly with students in the use and integration of technology must have a bachelor's degree that includes 12 hours of instruction in educational technology or in general education courses. Schools that outsource and/or supplement technology functions may hire technology consultants that possess technical certifications in the areas they are expected to support. All technology personnel must keep abreast of current technological trends.

3.6 RECORDS

3.6.1 Schools must secure records in one of the following ways:

(a) At least one set of records and permanent files for each student must be maintained safely in a fire resistant file or vault, and must contain the cumulative record of attendance, health and academic progress in terms of the school's demands and the results of objective tests. Duplicate academic records of secondary school students (includes Middle School classes taken for high school credit) should be stored safely in a separate building.

(b) If both academic and health records are maintained electronically, current backups are to be securely housed in another building.

3.6.2 The student cumulative folders shall contain permanent and current records showing copy of each child's birth certificate (or passport), name, address, parent/legal guardian's name, attendance, health, physical examinations, evidence of state required immunizations, cumulative academic progress, periodic progress reports to parents/legal guardians and individual results on standardized tests.

3.6.3 Grade and progress reports must be distributed to parents/legal guardians at regular intervals. This distribution may include online assessments and performance indicators.

3.6.4 Standardized tests must be given periodically to individuals, groups, and classes with results, norms, and medians, or other meaningful interpretations being filed. The school should demonstrate its regular review and use of testing data. These records must be retained on a permanent basis.

3.6.5 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENT AND PERSONNEL RECORDS:

(a) Schools which are closing must comply with the Florida law which requires its permanent student records be turned over to the county school district or to the COBIS State Office.
Secured personnel files should be maintained for all employees, instructional and non-instructional, in compliance with federal and state labor laws. Personnel files should include state mandated screenings, professional development documentation, evaluations and college transcripts.

3.7 SCHOOL SESSIONS

3.7.1 The school day and school year shall be carefully planned to include the academic class schedule, laboratory periods, if necessary, study periods, assemblies, periods of recreation and physical education, and periods for nonacademic extracurricular activities.

3.7.2 The school year must conform in length to that required by the Florida Compulsory School Attendance Law, as directed by the State Board of Education for private schools:

*(a) A minimum of 170 days; and

(b) A minimum of instructional hours for each grade category:
   - Kindergarten — 540 hours
   - Grades 1-3 — 720 hours
   - Grades 4-12 — 900 hours

*These minimal hours do not include passing time, lunch or recess.

3.8 BUSINESS AND FINANCE

3.8.1 The financial resources and management of the school shall be such as to sustain an approved educational program consistent with the school's philosophy and objectives. Evidence of financial stability in the form of an annual financial review or audit must be prepared by an independent Certified Public Accountant. A financial compilation will not fulfill this requirement.

3.8.2 The school's financial review/audit, the school's most recent financial report, and budget must be provided to the chair of the evaluation committee at least two weeks prior to the visit.

3.8.3 The school and all personnel must be covered by liability insurance. Liability insurance must provide minimum coverage of $3,000,000 per incident. Proprietary schools must obtain an additional liability coverage of a minimum of $2,000,000 overall.

3.8.4 The school must maintain a three-to-five year financial plan, including provisions for replacement, repair and maintenance of facilities, either as part of its strategic plan or as a separate document.

3.8.5 The school's compensation policy should be available to and understood by the employee.

3.8.6 A retirement program must be offered. Social Security participation meets minimal compliance standards.

3.8.7 The school must demonstrate its financial health by maintaining an asset-to-liabilities ratio of 1.5:1 or better. Any exception to this ratio must be justified to the Chair of the committee and accepted by the COBIS Board of Directors.

3.8.8 Additional financial situations that must be justified to the Council:

(a) Annual debt service in excess of 10% of the school's annual operating budget
(b) Current liabilities in excess of current assets
(c) Lack of a definite plan for repayment of debt
(d) A substantial portion of debt at excessive interest rates
(e) A substantial portion of debt with provision for a "balloon" repayment or which is callable on demand of the lender
(f) Any debt that is owed to a staff member, officer or trustee of the school
(g) Repeated operation at a deficit in the current operating statement
(h) Any significant downward trend in enrollment

3.8.9 To ensure the continued professional development of teachers, each school must identify funds for in-service training/workshops in the annual budget.

3.8.10 When awarding financial aid, the school must have published procedures and criteria.

3.8.11 All funds should be under the control of the head or board.

3.9 DEVELOPMENT

3.9.1 If the school is nonprofit, the school must follow fundraising procedures appropriate to its needs, which include capital gift campaigns, annual fund drives, alumni development initiatives, and deferred gift efforts.

3.9.2 Each school shall conduct follow-up inquiries of graduates and former students, using the resulting data to improve the school.

3.10 HEALTH, SAFETY AND FACILITY

3.10.1 Schools must provide evidence of compliance with all applicable local, county, state and federal health, safety, and sanitation codes and laws, including immunization schedules.

3.10.2 The plant, equipment, and facilities shall be suited to the purpose and adequate for the operation of the total program of the school. They shall be maintained and operated in a manner assuring the health and safety of the students, faculty, and staff in compliance with all applicable laws.

3.10.3 Key administrators, staff and at least one faculty member in every building/wing of the on-campus staff must be properly trained and prepared to administer first aid and CPR treatment.

3.10.4 Space should be provided for the isolation of ill students. In boarding schools, an adequately staffed and equipped infirmary or equivalent facility shall be provided for on-campus care of routine health requirements.

3.10.5 The school must be equipped with sufficient first aid kits which are readily available at all times to any member of the staff.

3.10.6 Each school shall have a written crisis plan that is reviewed and updated annually.

4.1 TRANSPORTATION

4.1.1 All drivers must be properly licensed and submit to state screening requirements.

4.1.2 Vehicles must be regularly inspected by qualified personnel and operated in accordance with applicable laws.

4.1.3 Adequate insurance must be maintained on all vehicles. The minimum amount of vehicular coverage shall be at least $3,000,000 per incident and $2,000,000 overall.

5.1 LIBRARY/MEDIA CENTER
5.1.1 The library/media center has adequate facilities (central or decentralized) and technological resources to support the school’s philosophy, mission and its programs.

5.1.2 The library/media center has definite and appropriate budget to meet the needs of the educational program.

5.1.3 The library is adequately staffed including a trained library media specialist. (See also professional requirements in 3.5.4.)

5.1.4 Adequate records are kept including catalogues, inventory of print and electronic resources, and acquisitions.

5.1.5 The library/media center has adequate print and electronic resources to support the educational program.

5.1.6 The school must have a policy for responding to challenged materials.

6.1 TECHNOLOGY

6.1.1 The school has adequate technology staff and the infrastructure to support its mission and philosophy.

6.1.2 There is a written technology plan and budget to support the school's mission and philosophy.

6.1.3 Policies, including an acceptable use policy for technology, are disseminated and understood throughout the school community.

6.1.4 The school has a reliable system to back up critical data.

6.1.5 The school has a set of minimum competencies for use and integration of technology for faculty and provides for professional growth opportunities for teachers to remain current in technology skills and applications.

6.1.6 A plan is in place for the integration of information technology skills across the curriculum and evidence of their use in educational programs.