

*MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION*  
STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION  
of service agencies

WITH  
INDICATORS

**Commission on Elementary Schools**

**Commission on Secondary Schools**

**Committee on Institution-wide Accreditation**

**January 2000**

# ACCREDITATION STANDARDS FOR SERVICE AGENCIES

## 1. STANDARD: Philosophy/Mission/Beliefs/Objectives

**Rationale for the Standard:** Whether large or small, an institution functions more effectively and harmoniously when stakeholders understand and participate in the development of the organization's philosophy, mission, beliefs, and goals. The *mission* provides the unifying theme that illuminates the purposes and clients of the organization. This theme must be supported by *beliefs* that form an ethical core. Often an organization will have *parameters* that guide daily conduct of business as well as a set of *objectives* that provide focus for improvement and growth efforts. These documents should be appropriate for the groups served, prominently displayed, and periodically reviewed.

- a.) The Agency has clearly written statements of philosophy/mission/ beliefs and educational goals/objectives that convey the general and specific purposes of the Agency's programs and services and express expectations for quality.
- b.) The Agency's philosophy/mission /beliefs and educational goals/objectives have been cooperatively developed by representative elements of the community.
- c.) The Agency's philosophy/mission /beliefs and educational goals/objectives are generally understood and accepted by the governing body, component districts, staff, parents, and students.
- d.) The Agency's philosophy/mission /beliefs and educational goals/objectives are consistent with the ethical and civic norms of American society and demonstrate respect for persons of all races, creeds, and cultures.
- e.) The Agency's philosophy/mission /beliefs and educational goals/objectives are free of contradiction, ambiguity, and excessive abstraction and can be discussed by Agency authorities and leading members of the school community in terms of operation, action, movement, and direction.
- f.) The Agency's philosophy/mission /beliefs and educational goals/objectives are appropriate for the component districts served, students enrolled, and communities served.
- g.) The Agency's philosophy/mission /beliefs and educational goals/objectives are prominently and accurately cited in the Agency, the schools it operates, and in all Agency literature.
- h.) The Agency's philosophy/mission /beliefs and educational goals/objectives are periodically reviewed to ensure that the statements are appropriate to the needs of the districts and students served.

## **2. STANDARD: Governance and Constituent Relations**

**Rationale for the Standard:** Effective governance and positive relations with constituent groups are key to the long-term well-being of any high quality service agency. The governing body, staff, and constituent groups must work in partnership to assure the integrity, quality, and usefulness of programs and services. There should be an atmosphere of mutual respect and purposeful effort on behalf of students and their learning. The governing body should focus its activities on policy development, planning, assessing the service agency's performance as well as that of the agency leadership.

- a.) The Agency governing body and staff act ethically, fairly, and equitably in all dealings with component districts, parents, students, staff and the school community.
- b.) The Agency governing body and staff work cooperatively to establish and maintain clearly formulated policies and practices that are consistent with the Agency's philosophy and are understood by component districts, staff, parents, students, and others.
- c.) The Agency governing body and staff maintain appropriate and constructive relations with component districts, parents, students, staff, the host community, and with each other in the interest of serving the needs of the component districts and students.
- d.) The Agency functions effectively in its dual role of representing the interests and needs of component districts and as the local representative and interpreter of state initiatives for local school districts.
- e.) The Agency governing body and staff comply with applicable statutes, governmental regulations, and Board policies.
- f.) The Agency governing body provides appropriate opportunities for trustee education, including orientation and training sessions so that all governing body members understand their responsibilities and roles.
- g.) The membership and organization of the Agency governing body provides the Agency with solid leadership, continuity, and effective support. The governing body thinks and acts strategically, reflecting on its decisions and the consequences of its actions.
- h.) The Agency governing body focuses its activities on selecting and evaluating the Agency leadership, policy development, planning, assessing the Agency's performance, and ensuring adequate resources to accomplish the Agency's mission and goals.
- i.) The Agency governing body utilizes a clearly defined performance appraisal system for Agency leadership. The appraisal is conducted with the knowledge and participation of Agency leadership.
- j.) The Agency provides support to component districts in carrying out state initiatives and programs.

### **3. STANDARD: Leadership and Planning**

**Rationale for the Standard:** In an effective service agency, the head of the agency ensures a productive work environment, timely and open communication, and the leadership necessary to plan both day-to-day operations and the long-term future of the agency. The focus of a service agency is typically two-fold: improving the performance of the students it serves and meeting the needs of its clients.

- a.) The Agency staff provides the Agency programs and services with solid leadership, continuity, and effective support. The staff thinks and acts strategically, reflecting on its decisions and the consequences of its actions.
- b.) The head of the Agency is accountable to the Agency governing body and is responsible for creating a productive work environment and for the day-to-day operation of the Agency.
- c.) The head of the Agency maintains positive, meaningful relationships with state and local authorities.
- d.) The Agency staff ensures that all Agency programs and services are adequately and appropriately planned, supervised, resourced, and staffed with qualified personnel.
- e.) The Agency staff maintains timely and open communication with various elements of the school community, including component districts, parents, students, local agencies, and governmental entities.
- f.) The Agency staff stays well informed of educational developments.
- g.) The Agency governing body and staff undertake operational, long range, and strategic planning aimed at accomplishing the Agency's mission and goals.
- h.) Agency leadership plan, organize, manage and support an ongoing Agency improvement process that has broad-based, component district, staff, and community participation and commitment.
- i.) Agency improvement plans place major focus on student achievement and performance as well as administrative functions, staff training, and other support functions provided to component districts.
- j.) Periodic review of the Agency improvement plan is conducted to determine the extent to which outcomes meet expectations and so that corrective actions can be initiated.

#### **4. STANDARD: Resources**

**Rationale For The Standard:** Financial, physical, and human resources must be sufficient to contribute to the fulfillment of the mission and objectives of the organization. Buildings should be safe and secure and sufficiently maintained. Class sizes should be appropriate to meet student needs. Learning materials, technology and equipment should be up-to-date and accessible to students and staff.

- a.) All resources (human, technological, and material) employed by the Agency contribute to the fulfillment of the Agency Philosophy/Mission/ Beliefs/Objectives, to the provision of high quality services, and to the achievement of desired student learning outcomes.
- b.) All grounds, buildings, furnishings, and equipment owned, rented, and/or operated by the Agency provide for the health, safety, and security of students and staff and meet all code requirements for safe access and egress.
- c.) All Agency staff and the students they serve are trained in safe facilities occupancy and use.
- d.) All grounds, buildings, furnishings, and equipment owned, rented, and/or operated by the Agency are sufficiently maintained to meet the Agency's mission and objectives.
- e.) All buildings owned, rented, and/or operated by the Agency offer a variety of spaces for providing high quality programs and services and for the integration of special needs populations. Schools and programs operated by the Agency include appropriate accommodation for instruction, administration, conferences, student activities, and student services.
- f.) Schools and programs operated by the Agency provide class sizes that meet student needs and effectively utilize the intended capacity of the facility.
- g.) Schools and programs operated by the Agency provide up-to-date learning media services and technology resources that are current, adequate, and accessible. Such resources support the total educational program and encourage students and staff to broaden and extend the range of learning.
- h.) Schools and programs operated by the Agency have up-to-date instructional materials that are accessible to students and staff. Materials are properly catalogued, housed, and maintained and supported by sufficient and appropriately qualified staff.
- i.) Schools and programs operated by the Agency have up-to-date instructional materials, learning media services, and technology that is appropriately supported through adequate funds provided in an annual budget.

## 5. STANDARD: Business Practices

**Rationale For The Standard:** The business practices of a service agency should promote confidence in the organization's ability to responsibly manage fiscal and material resources and to follow prescribed budgeting and accounting principles. The agency should effectively allocate fiscal resources to accomplish the mission and identified goals of the organization and to meet the needs of end users. Stakeholders should have opportunities to provide input into financial plans and levels of income and expenditure should be in appropriate balance. Educational service agencies are expected to deliver cost-effective programs and services that contribute to the educational health of the local community.

- a.) The Agency governing body and the staff exercise prudent control over all financial operations, following accepted accounting principles, billing procedures, and annual independent audit practices .
- b.) Short-term and long-range financial plans are put into place to sustain the programs and supporting services at a level that enables them to achieve their desired outcomes.
- c.) Financial resources to attain the Agency's mission and objectives are available and utilized.
- d.) Agency staff participates in the determination and development of the annual budget.
- e.) Agency staff and component districts participate in the determination of programs and services to be offered.
- f.) The Agency, in accordance with written policies and sound business practices, is accountable to all appropriate segments of the Agency community including federal/state/local governmental agencies, component districts, and local school communities.
- g.) Agency finances are currently stable and projections indicate continuing stability. Levels of income and expenditure are in reasonable balance.
- h.) The corporate status of the Agency is clear. No legal or proprietary ambiguities in ownership, control, or responsibility exist. Partnerships and/or any corporate linkages are expressed as enforceable agreements.
- i.) The Agency and all schools and programs it operates are approved for their function by the civil authority within whose jurisdiction they are located.
- j.) The Agency staff ensures that all statements and representations relating to Agency programs, services, and resources are clear, accurate, and current. Advertising and promotional literature is completely truthful and ethical.
- k.) The Agency explains what it attempts to do, its methods, and results that are reasonably anticipated. Cost/benefit analyses are conducted where necessary and appropriate.

## 6. STANDARD: Organization and Administration

**Rationale for this Standard:** The organizational structure of a service agency is the vehicle for carrying out the established philosophy and goals of the educational program and support services. A clearly defined set of reporting relationships is key and administrative, instructional, and support staff that is qualified, competent and sufficient in number is essential for success. Founded in organizational theory and exhibited in the daily functioning of any service agency is the realization that relationships among the staff and administration sustain the dynamic nature of that organization.

- a.) There is a clearly delineated table of organization that specifies levels of responsibility and reporting relationships.
- b.) The Agency has an administrative, instructional, and support staff that is sufficient in number, qualified, and competent to meet the mission and objectives of the Agency. Staff members possess the qualifications of education, preparation, experience, and commitment that contribute to excellent service and the provision of top-quality instructional programs, instructional services, and support services.
- c.) Designated, qualified leadership provides coordination and direction for the
  - Agency
  - divisions within the Agency
  - instruction, activities, and services that Agency-operated schools/programs provide.
- d.) The Agency leadership and staff work cooperatively to create a climate that fosters the attainment of the Agency's mission and objectives.
- e.) The Agency meets all applicable state requirements and regulations for organization, administration, and control, unless official exemption has been granted by state authorities.

## **7. STANDARD: Instructional Programs and Services**

**Rationale for the Standard:** The instructional program of a service agency should reflect a well orchestrated and appropriate balance between carefully planned rigorous curriculum programs and effective instructional pedagogy. The curriculum at all levels is defined in scope and sequence and is consistent with the agency's stated purposes. It should be designed to stimulate student learning at all levels for all abilities. The materials, technology, and equipment for instruction are appropriate, current, functional, and well-maintained. Programs should be aligned with the standards for appropriate state, local, and school districts requirements and is supported by adequate record-keeping and good communication.

- a.) Curriculum, instruction, and assessment in Agency-operated instructional programs are clearly defined and aligned into a coherent system consistent with the Agency's philosophy and goals.
- b.) Admission and placement procedures are well-defined, well-administered, and do not promote bias or inequity. Procedures include evaluation, counseling, and the development of productive relationships with students, parents, and component districts.
- c.) Student records are complete and well-maintained. General standards for transcript control and use are known and observed.
- d.) Commonly held norms relating to academic credit, grade placement, academic recognition, and testaments to academic competence are practiced.
- e.) Consideration is given to the varying levels of ability of students and the instructional program is designed to meet student needs.
- f.) Communication with component districts regarding students' progress and needs is regular, productive, and meaningful.
- g.) Formal policies and/or procedures provide direction for the Agency staff in the development, implementation, and improvement of the educational program
- h.) The educational program, Agency policies and/or procedures, and other pertinent information relating to the student are available in printed form to students, parents, and the Agency community.
- i.) Evidence of student learning and the success of graduates are the primary indicators for documenting the effectiveness of the overall instructional program.

## **8. STANDARD: Support Services**

**Rationale For The Standard:** Effective service agencies are designed to deliver a broad array of instructional, management, staff development, and technical support services to its clients. Needs assessments are used to make decisions regarding the type and nature of services to be offered and assessments of customer satisfaction, efficiency and effectiveness are conducted.

- a.) The Agency provides a comprehensive and appropriate set of instructional, management, and technical support services and staff development programs to meet the needs of its component districts.
- b.) Services are delivered in such a manner that component districts, Agency staff, students and parents can effectively use the services offered.
- c.) The Agency bases decisions regarding the type and nature of services to be offered on needs assessment data and an active dialogue with potential customers of these services.
- d.) Communication with component districts about support services is regular, productive, and meaningful.
- e.) Assessment of customer satisfaction, efficiency, and effectiveness are the indicators for documenting the quality of the Agency's support services.

## **9. STANDARD: Results/Outcomes**

**Rationale For The Standard:** An effective service agency looks at a host of results and outcomes in assessing its effectiveness in areas such as student learning and performance, performance results for support services, customer satisfaction, follow-up surveys of graduates, and cost effectiveness of programs and services. Results are used to develop strategies for improving service and program quality.

- a.) The Agency maintains a disciplined knowledge of its future with projections of income, expense, trends in the business environment, and cost/benefit analyses of its services.
- b.) The Agency identifies specific criteria for assessing
  - student learning and performance
  - performance results for support services
  - customer satisfaction of component districts
  - followup surveys of graduates
  - cost effectiveness of programs and services
- c.) Progress in the following areas is regularly evaluated and accurately interpreted and reported in an understandable manner.
  - student learning and performance
  - performance results for support services
  - customer satisfaction of component districts
  - followup surveys of graduates
- d.) Agency-operated schools and programs utilize appropriate and varied methods to assess student learning and performance.
- e.) Assessment results are actively used to develop strategies for improving programs and services.
- f.) All staff, Board members, and other appropriate Agency personnel commit to, participate in , and share in the accountability for student learning and quality programs and services.
- g.) The Agency communicates its assessment policies and practices and the results of its evaluations to the total Agency community
- h.) Assessment results are the basis for decisions regarding the allocation of resources.

- i.) The Agency is engaged in a continuous improvement process that focuses on improved student learning and the provision of quality programs and services to the component districts.
- k.) A monitoring system is in place to provide current and longitudinal data on student performance and other outcomes.

## **10. STANDARD: Human Resources Development**

**Rationale For The Standard:** The Human Resources Development program of a service agency should emulate the agency's mission and belief statements. Personnel practices should promote recruitment of quality staff, facilitate communications, advocate for the fair and equitable treatment of staff, ensure that staff accountability practices are followed, and assist in the design and delivery of staff development/professional growth programs. At the same time, service agencies are concurrently challenged to maintain relationships that are reflective, honest, open, and representative. On-going professional development, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and collegial relationships among staff and administration are critical to the effective delivery of quality education to students.

- a.) Personnel policies and regulations for the operation of the Agency are written and available to all employees.
- b.) Personnel practices provide for adequate compensation, reasonable work loads, acceptable working conditions, ethical treatment, professional satisfaction, and good general morale among all segments of the staff.
- c.) There is a clearly defined system of appraisal of staff, based on predetermined criteria. It is conducted with the knowledge of the staff member and reported in writing. The staff member shall have an opportunity to discuss and appeal any aspects of the appraisal.
- d.) Agency leadership supports a comprehensive and ongoing program of staff development for professional and support staff that encourages professional growth and job-specific training.
- e.) Staff development programs are designed through needs assessment with input from Agency personnel in planning and evaluating the programs.
- f.) Employee morale is regularly assessed to determine employee perceptions and the data are used to improve and expand upon employee developmental activities.