

How Do We Start?

To be eligible for accreditation, your center must:

- Be a current member of ELEA throughout the term of accreditation;
- Have been in existence for three years;
- Have completed the ELCA's "Ministry of the Congregation" Recognition Program - a free self study available as a download at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Education/Pre-12/Resources/Administrators/Ministry-Congregation.aspx> or call the ELCA at 800-638-3522, ext. 2857;
- Have policies in place requiring such things as:
 - √ portfolio-based evaluations for teachers and directors;
 - √ training in child abuse reporting;
 - √ criminal background checks as a condition of employment;
 - √ a crisis management plan;
 - √ First Aid, CPR & Bloodborne Pathogen training for staff;
 - √ a non-discrimination policy.

The processing can be initiated by ordering Accreditation materials, which include a Preparation Guide, the Self Study instrument itself, and Support Materials and Samples. Order forms are available at our website - www.eleanational.org or by calling 800-500-7644. If your sponsoring congregation also has an elementary school and you are interested in accrediting both programs simultaneously, please call to discuss.

A chairperson for your evaluation visitation team will be assigned by the ELEA Office early in the process. This chairperson will then work with you as you go through the process and identify people to be on your evaluation team.

In addition to materials, the ELEA Office will assist in directing you to a workshop - either in a group if there are others in your area working on the process, or individually from your chairperson, to help you prepare.



Children are our most valuable assets—quality education counts



Evangelical Lutheran Education Association

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ELEA Early Childhood Center Accreditation

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What is Early Childhood Center Accreditation?

Early Childhood Center accreditation is a process of evaluation which begins with a self-study, followed by a visit of objective observers to help Lutheran early childhood centers improve the quality of their programs. It is a completely voluntary process which is available to ELCA centers who are members of ELEA. This accreditation is a process designed to evaluate centers on the basis of their unique purposes as Lutheran programs. It helps evaluate not only their educational quality, but also the spiritual dimension of the center.

The Benefits Of Accreditation Are:

- To help Lutheran centers and schools improve instruction and services and demonstrate quality;
- To help them evaluate themselves based on their unique purposes and on ELEA standards;
- To help them develop a sharpened focus on their center's ministry;
- To create increased accountability to community, constituents, and congregation;
- To become a school of known excellence in their community;
- To give appropriate recognition to those centers which complete the process successfully.

Most accrediting programs are secular in nature, sponsored by the state or other membership organizations. These agencies do not concern themselves with the spiritual dimension of early childhood programs. The main purpose of Lutheran centers is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior. This is done through the permeation of faith throughout the day. This instrument, though voluntary, is an evaluation of both the developmentally appropriateness of the program for children and the spiritual life of the center.

Can Our Center Be Dually Accredited With Other Agencies?

At the elementary level, ELEA has been working with a number of major accrediting bodies, such as WASC, SACS, MSACS, NCACASI, and various individual State accrediting organizations, to develop dual accreditation policies. Most accrediting bodies are quite willing to work with ELEA on a case-by-case basis so that a school can do one accreditation with site visit team members from both organizations and achieve dual accreditation without having to do two separate processes. There are no arrangements with other early childhood accreditors at this time, but those options may be explored in the future.

How Long Is Our Accreditation Valid?

The site visitation team will prepare a detailed report, indicating whether or not standards were met, met with weakness, or not met. This report is given to the center, along with the Early Childhood Committee of the ELEA National Board. They will also notify the center and the Committee of the Board of their recommendation for:

- Full seven year accreditation;
- Conditional accreditation for a period not to exceed two years with an additional focused site visit to observe correction plans for standards which were not met, at which time full accreditation may be extended for the remainder of the seven year term;
- No accreditation granted at that time.

The Early Childhood Committee of the ELEA National Board will then review the documentation and grant or deny accreditation.

The center will develop an Improvement Plan addressing areas of weakness to be used as their guide for the coming years until re-accreditation takes place.

What Standards Will Be Used?

Standards used in ELEA Early Childhood Accreditation are based primarily on what early childhood experts know to be developmentally appropriate practices. Although developed uniquely for ELEA Accreditation, these standards have similarities to national administrator, teacher and curriculum standards used by centers, both public and private, across the country. Faith formation is threaded throughout and additional standards have been developed for Religion Curriculum and areas concerning center Governance and Structure. Directors and staff will develop professional portfolios addressing administration and teaching standards as part of the accreditation process. These portfolios also become an important assessment tool, guiding growth and improvement.

What Will Accreditation Cost?

Costs are broken into three categories:

1. A \$250.00 application fee paid to ELEA valid for a maximum of two years after prerequisites are met;
2. Visitation team costs including a \$200 per day honorarium for chairperson and \$100 per day honorarium for other team members; transportation; meals and housing for the team; expenses related to the pre-site visit mentoring from the chairperson; and other incidentals;
3. Ongoing costs of \$100.00 per year with submission of your center's annual report sent to ELEA by June 15 of each year of accreditation.

