



Oh, No! Company's Coming!

We spend four years living one way and four weeks pretending we live another.

Isn't it amazing what those two words can accomplish?

Suddenly, everyone is busy.

You pile three loads of laundry back into the dryer.

The dishes you've ignored all week are washed.

The clutter disappears into closets.

You vacuum under furniture that hasn't been moved in months.

Why? Because company is coming.

Note: Some company is nosier than others. Same with accreditation teams. Everybody team member has their "hobby horse."

Like company coming, schools stay sharper if held accountable.

*"People don't do what you **expect**; they do what you **inspect**."*

We clean because company coming reminds us to notice what we've stopped seeing.

Ill.: dust photo frames, clean under the bathroom cabinet (because people *are* looking)

Accreditation can feel a lot like that. When we know an evaluation team is coming, we suddenly begin ...

organizing files

updating policies

collecting evidence

straightening things we've walked past for months.

But here's the goal:

Healthy schools don't simply clean up for company.

Healthy schools *cultivate* habits that make them ready to welcome visitors at any time.

Accreditation shouldn't motivate us to create the *appearance* of excellence. It should encourage us to live it every day. It's about being faithful to the ministry with which God has entrusted us.

***"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;"
—Colossians 3:23***

Accreditation is an opportunity to evaluate, improve, grow. It gives accountability, and it's an incredible **endorsement**.

Just in case women understand the cleaning for company metaphor better than men, I'm going to throw in one everybody can appreciate...

Ill.: started to use the dreaded annual physical – people you barely know are inspecting things you didn't really want them to see! *A doctor doesn't make you healthy during the exam. He simply evaluates your current health, tells you what you're doing well, identifies concerns, and makes recommendations.*

Accreditation is much the same as the annual physical. The team will say this looks good, this could use some improvement. And then they will make suggestions and give you a chance to "fix" the problem, in which case there may be a "provisional accreditation" given until things are fixed.

I. Accreditation at a Glance

Questions to consider:

- Has the self-study been completed and submitted
- Do I have a clearly defined mission statement? Consider doing 25 words or less for easy memory.
- Are our decisions in keeping with our mission statement? Decide what your mission is...
To assist Christian parents in educating their children?
To be a ministry only to your church families?
To be an outreach ministry?
Have the mission statement visible (you're reminded of it and so are others).
- Are we doing what we say we are doing? Ill.: *exit interviews*
If it isn't written down, it isn't happening.
- Are our files maintained and current? Ill.: *including personnel files (all in a fireproof cabinet)*
- Do we have a designated place willing to take our records if, Lord forbid, the school ceases to exist?

Quick thoughts for moving forward:

- Keep documentation **current**. NOTE: Many accreditation visits succeed or fail based on documentation.
- Collect evidence **continuously**.
- Review policies **annually**.
- **Train** new staff well.
- Evaluate regularly rather than waiting until an accreditation cycle begins.

II. Common Accreditation Mistakes

- **Waiting Too Long to Start Preparing**

Schools often postpone preparation until the year of the visit.

Result: panic, rushed documentation, and unnecessary stress

- **Poor Record Keeping**

Missing documentation

Current class schedules

Curriculum mapping (more to come)

Committee minutes

Policy updates

- **Having a Lack of Faculty Involvement**

Accreditation should not be the administrator's project. It should be the school's project. Look at each of the standards listed and see which teachers/staff can help.

III.: every school has a teacher who by **default keeps up with alumni** – put that teacher in charge of updated alumni records (side note: you'll be amazed at what your graduates are doing with their lives)

III. Essential Areas to Review

Once a school understands what accreditation is and avoids the common mistakes, the next question is:

“What exactly should we be doing at this very moment?”

Accreditation isn't just about having a stack of documents ready for a visiting team. The school should step back and examine the whole organization and ask: **Are we doing what we say we're doing, and can we demonstrate it?**

1. MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

Does our mission still reflect our purpose? Is it visible throughout the school?

- Does our mission statement still accurately describe who we are and why we exist?
- Is our philosophy consistent with our stated mission?
- Do our policies and daily decisions actually support that mission?
- Is the mission visible and understood by the faculty, board, and administration?

Important point:

A mission statement should not simply be something framed on the wall. It should function as a **decision-making tool**. When faced with a difficult question, schools should be able to ask: **“Does this decision fit our mission?”**

A school may say its purpose is to assist Christian parents in educating their children. But is that really what its programs, admissions policies, discipline policies, and daily practices demonstrate?

The mission should be more than words. It should be evident in the life of the school.

2. GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Who is responsible for making sure the school is healthy and properly governed?

- School Board minutes kept
- Board organization and responsibilities clearly defined
- Strategic planning and collaboration in place
- Policies governing major school decisions in print
- Evidence that the board is actually functioning in its proper role

Make sure the board isn't merely reacting to problems. They should be *proactive*, not *reactive*. A healthy board should be involved.

One of the things an accreditation team is trying to determine is whether the school has systems in place that will keep functioning even when individual people change.

3. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING (SIP)

Is there a plan? ([maybe a plan to have a plan](#)) “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Pro. 29:18).

School improvement is a big part of the accreditation process. Because the initial accreditation is for only three years, the plan is not extensive in the beginning. At the conclusion of the third year, there will need to be a plan and it should include all areas:

- Facilities neat and well kept [improvements, curb appeal, updates](#)
 - Improvements ongoing [even little improvement can be big \(paint a room, adding a new copier\)](#)
 - Academic initiative evident [adding new subjects, electives, honors classes](#)
 - Extracurricular opportunities available [sports, fine arts](#)
 - School community involved (parents, staff, students, alumni) [III.: student and parent surveys](#)
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4. FINANCES

Are the finances sufficient to provide the educational opportunities defined by the school's mission? :

- Financial records on file
- Budget submitted **
- Insurance coverage confirmed **

- Financial audit done (periodically)

The CHOOSE Act requires reporting to the Alabama Department of Revenue.

5. FACILITIES

Are our facilities safe, clean, and well-maintained?

- Building occupancy requirements met and posted [We would all like to have so many we exceed the limit!](#)
 - Playground area safe
 - Fire and health inspections on file [\(monthly drills\)](#)
 - Entry, exit, and traffic flow obvious **
 - Storage space and closet recommendations followed [\(chemicals locked up\)](#)
 - Asbestos inspection on file **
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6. SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ORGANIZATION

Is our program conducive to spiritual and academic development?

Roles, responsibilities, and expectations should be clearly defined. The following areas are in play:

- Personnel (ACEA certification) on file **
 - Hiring and termination procedures documented
 - Faculty meetings scheduled
 - Formal and informal classroom observations performed
 - Relationship with families, church, community obvious
 - School publications available
 - Manuals available [\(first time – only two required: Student and Faculty Handbooks\)](#)
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7. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Does the school supply a safe environment and meet government health and safety requirements?

- Fire evacuation routes established (drills recorded monthly and posted)
 - Controlled access to visitors kept
 - Health records on file and current
 - Pedestrian and vehicle procedures safe
 - Crisis Management Manual in process - [important contact names and numbers, procedures](#)
 - Child abuse procedures enforced ** - [anyone can report, but an employee should also inform admin.](#)
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8. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Does the educational program demonstrate commitment to excellence?

- Planned Bible lessons taught daily for all ages
- Federal, state, and local requirements met (180 days, early learning hours, etc.)
- Curriculum guides, scope and sequence, and course descriptions available
- Instructional resources available textbooks, workbooks, library, technology
- Assessment practices evident ** emphasis on proficiency charts

The important issue is **alignment**. Do the things we say students are supposed to learn actually match what teachers teach, what textbooks present, what assignments require, and what assessments measure? teachers are meeting various learning styles—visual, auditory, verbal, kinesthetic, logical/analytical, social/interpersonal, solitary/intrapersonal (ill.: disobedience disorder)

9. ASSESSMENT AND EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING

Is there evidence that the curriculum is **intentional and coherent**? (How are we actually teaching it?)

- Classroom observations on file **
- Teacher evaluations done annually meet at the end of each year; teachers enjoy them
- Lesson plans done weekly
- Professional development hours maintained
- Teacher qualifications on file keep current on CEU's and resources available

Professional development should not simply mean attending a conference, though that *is* important. What are our teachers learning? How are they improving? Are we identifying areas where teachers need help? Are we providing meaningful opportunities for growth?

10. STUDENT SERVICES

Does our school support the students spiritually, academically, socially, and personally?

This assessment category includes:

- Non-academic needs
- Career path (in keeping with the school's mission)
- Personal counseling
- Social skills
- Alumni services

Under this category, the accreditation team would also be looking at admission procedures, adequate student supervision, student conduct, food service, and transportation services (if applicable).

11. STUDENT LIFE AND STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Do we provide age-appropriate student activities and opportunities?

- Student leadership positions available
- School volunteers approved
- Activities properly planned
- Activities properly supervised

12. INFORMATION RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Is there access to appropriate information resources and technology?

- Duplicating equipment available
- Audio-visual and electronic sources available
- Library facilities located on campus
- Printed and nonprint materials carefully selected
- Technology resources maintained and supported
- Computer-use policy enforced ** (glad to send a copy if needed)

IV. Preparing for the Visit: Presentation is Everything!

Before the Team Arrives: Organize evidence, prepare schedules, communicate expectations, and create a welcoming atmosphere.

During the Visit: Be honest. Be cooperative. Be transparent. Accreditation teams appreciate authenticity more than perfection.

The visit is not the finish line. The visit is the starting point for continued growth. Ask:

- What did we learn?
- What changes should we make?
- How can we improve?

An accreditation report is a little like getting comments back on a term paper.

The first time you read it, you see all the red marks.

The second time you realize someone took the time to help you improve.

The third time you're grateful they did.

It is easy to feel intimidated...behind...overwhelmed...underprepared.

Some schools prepare for accreditation the way some people prepare for company—they clean everything they can see and pray nobody opens a closet.

We're all in this together."
