



AALE

American Academy for Liberal Education

PK–12 School Standards for Accreditation

American Academy for Liberal Education
Washington, DC 20009
www.aale.org

October 2024 © American Academy for Liberal Education

All rights reserved.

Introduction

The **American Academy for Liberal Education** (AALE) is a specialized accreditor with standards designed for PK–12 school accreditation. The *AALE PK-12 School Standards for Accreditation* is the basis for the accreditation review process.

The AALE PK–12 school standards and criteria are designed to support and recognize excellence in liberal arts learning and teaching. They are intended to establish that applicants and accredited members take seriously their liberal arts mission and engage in both qualitative and quantitative educational assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning processes. The *AALE PK–12 School Standards* allow for recognition of the diverse ways the ends and means of quality liberal arts education can be achieved on the elementary and secondary levels.

Accreditation by the American Academy for Liberal Education signifies school integrity and a strong commitment to liberal arts learning. It provides interested parties — including parents and prospective students — a means of distinguishing well-articulated elementary and secondary liberal arts and science curricula.

Development of the *PK-12 School Standards for Accreditation*

The AALE *PK-12 School Standards for Accreditation* is the result of an extensive revision of the long-standing AALE *PK-12 School Standards* conducted under the direction of the AALE Council of Scholars. With the assistance of commentary from accredited members and trained site visitors, the AALE *PK-12 School Standards for Accreditation* was finalized and approved by the AALE Board of Trustees in February 2017. To ensure that AALE maintains accreditation standards that best support and recognize excellence in PK-12 liberal arts education, the *PK-12 School Accreditation Standards* are subject to a regular cycle of review (see: Standards Review at www.aale.org).

Structure of the *PK-12 School Standards for Accreditation*

Standards 1–4: *Mission; Learning Objectives and Assessment; Curriculum; and Teachers and Teaching* are designed to ensure that the cornerstones of the school focus clearly and coherently on providing students with the highest quality liberal arts education.

Standards 5–9: *Governance, Administration and Finance; Educational Facilities and Resources; Student Support Services; Admissions, Records and Publication; and Special Education and Remedial Education* are designed to ensure that a program has the administrative structure, educational and financial resources, and student support services necessary to support its mission and maintain the integrity and quality of the school.

Each standard is followed by criteria that are used during the peer-review evaluation and the final decision process to determine if the Standard has been met.

PK–12 SCHOOL STANDARDS for ACCREDITATION

STANDARD 1: Mission

The school publishes a mission statement that articulates the school's learning objectives and emphasizes the importance of a liberal arts education: *instilling the habits and discipline of academic study; introducing students to the love of learning for its own sake; cultivating thoughtful and responsible students and young citizens; and teaching the essential skills and knowledge needed for post-secondary studies and ultimately for the world of work.*

CRITERIA

- 1.a The school's mission statement emphasizes a liberal arts education and articulates well-defined learning objectives that are appropriate for a liberal arts education.
- 1.b The school's mission statement is approved through the appropriate governance procedure and is supported by the school's administrators, teachers, and students.
- 1.c The school's mission statement is regularly reviewed through the appropriate governance procedure that includes teacher review to ensure that the school's integrity and commitment to the importance of a liberal arts education are maintained.
- 1.d The school publishes its mission statement in a way that makes it easily accessible to the school's students, prospective students, families, and the interested public.
- 1.e The school's mission statement supports open inquiry and thoughtful exchange of ideas. Any limitation to open inquiry must be clearly specified, published, and appropriately disseminated.

STANDARD 2: Learning Objectives and Assessment

The school regularly assesses student achievement of its learning objectives, including (a) the ability to reason and communicate effectively, (b) possession of a certain breadth and mastery of knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences, and (c) an inclination to inquire. The school provides evidence that it uses assessment results to maintain areas of strength and to address areas requiring improvement in liberal arts learning.

CRITERIA

2.a The school implements and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment program to identify student needs, to guide instruction accordingly, and to measure individual student achievement and academic growth, and which may go beyond state and federal requirements in fulfilling criteria set forth in Standard 2: Learning Objectives and Assessment. .

2.b The school leadership and teachers routinely review student assessment results to adjust and improve curriculum, instructional practices, and school operations to best meet the school's learning objectives.

2.c The school leadership communicates clearly to students, families, and teachers the school's learning objectives, achievement objectives for students, and methods used to measure and report student achievement and informs students and their families of the results of individual student evaluations and school-wide assessments on a regular basis.

2.d The school supports, where appropriate, students in local and national competitions that promote and demonstrate academic achievement and excellence.

2.e The school demonstrates that it fulfills all applicable local, state, and federal testing and achievement requirements.

STANDARD 3: Curriculum

The school curriculum and promotion/graduation requirements align with the school's learning objectives, are developmentally appropriate, and require students to achieve levels of proficiency in academic subjects consistent with continued study of the liberal arts and sciences in preparation for post-secondary liberal arts learning as an overarching goal. *(For students with disabilities requiring an Individual Education Plan (IEP), see Standard 9: Special Education and Remedial Education.)*

CRITERIA

3.a (PK–8) The school curriculum and curriculum materials ensure that students steadily increase their proficiency in the subjects essential for pursuing a rigorous high school curriculum and eventually a challenging college program. Foundational subjects and their criteria are as follows:

1. Reading/Language Arts: The program should include development of basic decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension skills that promote students' ability to read at high levels of

proficiency. The program should include phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, literature (including pre-20th century works), and should cultivate mastery of standard English through appropriate writing and speech exercises.

2. Mathematics: The program should stress development of basic knowledge and skills at levels that prepare students for high school algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, and statistics.
3. Physical and Life Sciences: The program should include topics in both physical and life sciences and stress development of basic knowledge and skills at levels that prepare students for high school biology, chemistry, physics, and other sciences.
4. Social Studies: The program should include basic knowledge of United States history and government (including the U.S. founding), world history, geography, economics, and humanities.
5. Foreign Language: The program requires foreign language study no later than in the seventh grade and encourages foreign language study in earlier grades.
6. Fine and Performing Arts: The program should include elements of the fine arts (studio art and/or art history) and of the performing arts (music performance, music appreciation, theater, and/or dance).

(Note: Where the curriculum contains instruction in other liberal arts and science disciplines besides those listed, these subjects are treated with the same emphasis as the above foundational subjects: promoting knowledge and skill development at sufficiently high levels to prepare students to study these subjects in high school and eventually in college.)

3.a (9–12) The school curriculum and curriculum materials ensure that students steadily increase their proficiency in the foundational subjects essential for pursuing a challenging college liberal arts program. Foundational subjects and their criteria are as follows:

1. Literature should include works English and in translation (including pre-20th century works).
2. Literacy should include reading, writing, and speech (including mastery of standard English).
3. Mathematics should include arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, with calculus and statistics preferably available.
4. Physical Sciences should include chemistry and/or physics, with advanced courses preferably available.
5. Life Sciences should include biology, with an advanced biology course preferably available.
6. United States history and government should include the U.S. founding.
7. World history should include geography.
8. Two years of foreign language should be required.

9. Fine and Performing Arts should include elements of the fine arts (studio art and/or art history) and of the performing arts (music performance, music appreciation, theater, and/or dance).

(Note: Where the curriculum contains instruction in other liberal arts and science disciplines besides those listed (e.g., economics, philosophy, psychology), these subjects are treated with the same emphasis as the above foundational subjects: promoting knowledge and skill development at sufficiently high levels to prepare students to study these subjects in a challenging college liberal arts program).

3.b The school's curriculum demonstrates that courses and subjects provide students with developmentally appropriate liberal arts and science content delivered through instruction and classroom activities that stress analysis, student engagement, and problem solving.

3.c The school maintains a substantive writing program, appropriate to grade level and across the curriculum to promote fluency in written English, effective communication skills, and critical thinking.

3.d The school clearly defines requirements for admission to the school, enrollment in grades and/or courses, promotion and graduation, and the student's academic responsibilities.

3.e The school requires teachers to systematically evaluate individual student learning (knowledge acquisition and skill development), according to learning standards and testing requirements in the subjects outlined in Criterion 3.a., and to work with school leadership to assess the results for adjustments and improvement in curriculum and instructional practices.

3.f The school provides directly, or through collaborative efforts, extracurricular experiences that enrich, enhance, and are integrated with the student's lessons in foundational subjects and other disciplines.

3.g The school maintains a policy on the use of off-site or distance education classes that meet graduation requirements that is consistent with its learning objectives.

STANDARD 4: Teachers and Teaching

The school promotes the importance of teaching and the use of instructional practices suitable to liberal arts learning.

CRITERIA

4.a The teachers are principally responsible for the quality and rigor of instructional activities and events associated with implementing the school curriculum and its learning objectives.

4.b The school recruits and employs teachers who are qualified to carry out the school's learning objectives and programs; who are prepared to teach the subjects and content they are assigned; and who demonstrate effective pedagogy in classroom instruction. *(Note: Because of the variability across the country in the requirements for obtaining teacher certification or licensure, the AALE Teachers and Teaching Standard does not require that a school's teachers hold formal licensure or certification except where this is a local, state, or federal requirement. Teachers should demonstrate qualifications consistent with both the specific subjects they teach and with the broader demands of preparing students to meet the school's learning objectives. For example, qualifications may include:*

- 1. Distinguished undergraduate record in a broad variety of liberal arts and science subjects*
- 2. Major, concentration, minor, or significant coursework in the liberal arts and science subjects being taught*
- 3. Graduate coursework and/or degree(s) in the liberal arts and science subjects being taught*
- 4. High score on a relevant and recognized test in the liberal arts and science subjects being taught (e.g., Graduate Record Examination Subject Area Test)*
- 5. Significant professional experience teaching or conducting research in the liberal arts and science subjects being taught.)*

4.c The teachers are responsible for providing mentoring and oversight required for the formation of the habits and discipline of academic study.

4.d The school ensures that class sizes are appropriate to grade level and subject matter, are consistent with the school's learning objectives, and support instructional practices suitable to liberal arts learning.

4.e The school maintains current job descriptions for teaching positions that clearly define duties and responsibilities, and observes regular published procedures for recruitment, appointment, evaluation, and promotion for all teaching staff, which procedures recognize excellence in teaching.

4.f The school defines and supports professional development activities for teachers that encourage them to stay highly proficient in the subjects they teach.

4.g The school meets all local, state, and federal laws and regulations governing child care employees, conducts appropriate criminal background checks of all staff, and maintains documentation of background check and academic credentials for all staff, both full-time and part-time. Published procedures for obtaining information from these documents are made available to families.

STANDARD 5: Governance, Administration and Finance

The school has the governance structure, administrative support, fiscal resources, long-range and financial planning processes necessary to fulfill its mission and maintain and strengthen the school.

CRITERIA

Governance (5a–5g)

5.a The school operates under the auspices of a legal authorizer and complies with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements and regulations governing the operation of a non-profit educational institution. *(Note: Because of the variability across the country in the regulations and requirements for operating a school and because some schools receive federal funds for Title and other programs, AALE expects the school to provide a list of any local, state, and federal regulations and requirements governing school operation as well as evidence that the school is in compliance with these regulations and requirements.)*

5.b The terms of the authorizing foundation documents clearly delineate the relationship of the school to the authorizing agency and the terms of the authorization.

5.c The foundation documents clearly define the duties and responsibilities of the school’s governing board and chief executive officer, and specify the number of board members, length of service, rotation and renewal policies and procedures, organization and committee structures, and frequency of meetings.

5.d The governing board carries out its duties and responsibilities as a group. No member or committee acts in place of the board except by formal delegation of authority.

5.e The governing board maintains a policy for long-range planning, reviews, evaluates, and approves the school’s long-range plans and ensures that such plans conform to the school's mission.

5.f The governing board conducts regular evaluations of the school in relation to its academic performance goals and administrative performance goals according to published procedures. Where appropriate the board seeks the input and advice of relevant constituencies such as administrators, teachers, families, and students.

5.g The school has a written policy regarding conflicts of interest applicable to members of the governing board and administrative staff.

Administration (5h–5l)

5.h The school has a clearly defined administrative structure operating within the established governance structure. It is staffed by qualified individuals and effective in supporting the school's mission.

5.i The school has a chief administrator whose teaching and professional experience is commensurate with the responsibilities of administering the school, evaluating teachers, and managing and engaging in short- and long-term planning to maintain and strengthen the school.

5.j The school's chief administrator ensures that school policies and procedures are current, accessible to all who are affected by them, reviewed regularly, and implemented in a timely and ethical manner.

5.k The school maintains current job descriptions for administrative and support positions that clearly define duties and responsibilities.

5.l The school establishes structures and opportunities that substantively involve students' families in educational and non-educational school activities.

Finance (5m–5s)

5.m The school ensures that it has sufficient financial resources to support its programs and activities as demonstrated by financial stability and adequacy of resources to achieve the school's mission.

5.n The governing board reviews, evaluates, and approves the school's financial plans, annual budgets and fiscal audits. If the board employs a management organization, this organization provides the board with financial statements for review and evaluation at least once per quarter.

5.o The school prepares detailed annual budgets and uses a budget control process that ensures the budgetary plans of the governing board and the chief administrator are implemented. Financial reports are submitted for board review and approval on a quarterly basis.

5.p The school uses an accounting system that follows the generally accepted principles of accounting (GAAP).

5.q The school employs an independent and certified public accountant to conduct annual financial audits.

5.r The school ensures that financial reports and related information and materials are truthful, accurate, and current, and that it has policies and procedures that allow access to financial reports.

5.s The school engages in a practice of long-range financial planning to enhance its capacity to fulfill its mission and maintain and strengthen the school.

STANDARD 6: Educational Facilities and Resources

The school provides evidence of facilities, library and informational resources, and technological and laboratory equipment consistent with and adequate to achieving its mission.

CRITERIA

6.a The school provides students, teachers, and staff with instructional, advising and co-curricular spaces, appropriately furnished and equipped, to meet curriculum requirements and support achievement of its mission.

6.b The school maintains adequate library and informational resources and technological and laboratory equipment to meet curriculum requirements and support achievement of its mission.

6.c The school employs safeguards to prevent students from accessing non-authorized websites or participating in non-authorized use of technology hardware, software, and networks.

6.d The school meets local, state, and federal occupancy, health, fire, and safety regulations and other applicable regulations to use as a school.

6.e The school regularly reviews the adequacy of instructional and support facilities, library and informational resources, and technological and laboratory equipment in an effort to maintain and strengthen the school.

STANDARD 7: Student Support Services

The school provides student support services consistent with and adequate to achieving its mission.

CRITERIA

7.a The school provides directly or through designated providers a safe and secure learning environment and health, counseling, and tutoring services necessary for effective implementation of its curriculum and achievement of its learning objectives and mission.

7.b Additional student services offered by the school are consistent with its mission, reflect the needs of its students, and are offered to all students who qualify. Qualification criteria are published and distributed to all students and their families.

7.c School sponsored co-curricular activities adhere to a written statement of policy and participation eligibility consistent with the school's mission and learning objectives. Academic policies, requirements

and expectations are the same for students participating in co-curricular activities as for students not participating.

7.d The school regularly assesses the adequacy of student support services to determine quality, cost effectiveness, and whether they continue to support the school's mission.

STANDARD 8: Admissions, Records, and Publications

The school maintains and adheres to published policies on admissions, records, and public disclosure consistent with its mission.

CRITERIA

8.a The school publishes and makes available clear and accurate statements describing:

1. Admission requirements and application and registration procedures;
2. Curriculum and learning objectives;
3. Academic requirements for students;
4. Professional student/teacher interaction;
5. Requirements for student retention, promotion and graduation;
6. Policies regarding discipline, suspension, probation, dismissal, and readmission;
7. Policies regarding proper use of computers and internet technology and AI platforms;
8. Policies regarding the collection and retention of student academic records;
9. Procedures for lodging appeals or complaints;
10. Personnel policies and procedures.

8.b The school maintains accurate and current records of the credentials of the governing board, administrators, teachers, and staff including official academic transcripts for administrators, teachers and staff. The names and credentials of the governing board, administrators, teachers, and staff are published.

8.c The school publishes an academic calendar which states length of the school year, number of terms per year, number of weeks per term, and length of the school day. The academic calendar is consistent with and supports the school's mission and learning objectives. *(Note: Any school applying for and accepted for AALE accreditation affirms that it is in compliance with applicable local, state and federal regulations regarding length of the school year, number of terms per year, the number of weeks per term, and the length of the school day.)*

8.d The school ensures that data on enrollment, promotion, retention, graduation rates, and, where appropriate, high school acceptance or college acceptance and job placement data are accurate and up-to-date and available to current and prospective students and their families.

8.e The school conducts a regular review of published information, printed and electronic, to ensure that it is clear and accurate, accessible, and sufficient for intended audiences, i.e., students, prospective students, families, and the interested public, to make informed decisions about the school's mission, learning objectives, and policies.

STANDARD 9: Special Education and Remedial Education

The school enrolling students with special remedial, developmental, or physical needs has a coherent curriculum across grades and has promotion/graduation requirements that afford these students with rigorous and substantial experiences in liberal arts learning.

CRITERIA

9.a The school maintains diagnostic, instructional, and support service structures and processes for insuring that students with remedial needs, learning disabilities, or physical/emotional disabilities increase their proficiency in the content knowledge and skills of the liberal arts and science foundational subjects described in the school curriculum.

9.b Students with diagnosed learning disabilities have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that include clearly stated educational goals for all appropriate curriculum content, specific developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, procedures for the accurate assessment of student progress, and feedback systems for regular adjustment. Student IEPs are amenable to AALE Curriculum Standard 3.

9.c Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are evaluated at least twice each year to gauge effectiveness in meeting student needs. IEPs are revised appropriately to reflect changes.

9.d The school employs instructional, grouping, or other strategies that provide assistance to students with remedial needs (i.e., lacking grade-level content knowledge and skill in the liberal arts and science foundational subjects described in the school curriculum).

9.e The school employs assessment and tracking systems to monitor the progress of students with remedial needs and maintains timetables and benchmarks to bring these students to grade-level.

9.f The school has a system for providing support services that enable students with learning or physical/emotional disabilities to engage in all appropriate school activities.