



Accreditation FAQs

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is a voluntary, nongovernmental, periodic, peer-review process for schools and other education institutions. Accreditation has existed for more than 125 years across the United States. The review process assures the public of an institution's commitment to academic quality, organizational effectiveness, and fiscal integrity. Accreditation complements other elements of regulation and standards, including those of the U.S. Department of Education, international Ministries of Education, and states.

What is the difference between regional accreditation and other accreditors?

Regional accreditors are the only accreditors that are recognized to accredit both public and private schools, in all 50 states. Regional accreditation provides institutions with rights and privileges that are recognized across the United States and around the world. Many other accreditation organizations exist to provide standards-based review to institutions with a particular educational model (e.g., Montessori), specific education focus (e.g., faith-based or independent schools), or defined geographic location (e.g., a state). Regional accreditation is more commonly accepted and easily transferrable than other accreditation options.

Cognia is the umbrella organization for three of the six regional accreditors in the United States: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS-CASI), North Central Association (NCA), and Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC). The other three regional accreditors are New England Association of Colleges and Schools (NEASC), Middle States Association – Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS), and Western Association of Colleges and Schools (WASC).

What benefits does accreditation provide?

Regional accreditation offers several benefits to institutions, as well as rights and protections for enrolled students.

- **Transfer of credit:** Credits earned, and grade placement is accepted by regionally accredited institutions for any student who transfers from another regionally accredited institution.
- **Transfer of service years:** Educator years of service in a regionally accredited institution is accepted by any other regionally accredited institution for pay scale placement.
- **Higher education recognition of diploma:** Institutions of higher education in the United States accept diplomas for students graduating from regionally accredited institutions without further validation of credits earned.
- **Eligibility for funding (depends on state):** Accreditation from an approved accreditor may provide eligibility for or be required to access state funds, scholarships, incentives, or other programs. For example, Florida offers accredited private early learning schools property tax credits, and several states provide higher childcare subsidy reimbursements to early learning schools that are accredited.

What is the governing authority's role in accreditation?

Governing authorities, whether a governing board, private owner, or other authority, need to be appropriately engaged and committed to the accreditation process. This engagement is central to the ongoing value of accreditation and the institution's work on behalf of students, educators, families, and the public. This engagement also benefits governing authority members by affirming and strengthening their fiduciary responsibilities to assure the institution's quality, efficiency, and effectiveness.

How often is an institution's accreditation reviewed?

Institutions are accredited in varying cycles, depending on the accreditor (e.g., every six years, every ten years, or other intervals). Cognia accreditation reviews institutions at least every six years.

Does accreditation qualify my institution to serve foreign exchange students?

Requirements for the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) evolve and are managed by the Department of Homeland Security. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) provides a pathway for institutions to issue a student study visa to foreign nationals when accredited by an approved accreditor. Cognia and its three regional accreditors are approved accreditors for this program. Institutions must individually apply to become a SEVP-certified school. Program details can be found at <https://www.ice.gov/sevis>.

Is accreditation required for students to participate in athletic associations?

Athletic associations, such as NCAA, create and update their own guidance for student eligibility, so institutions should check directly with the association for current eligibility requirements. In the past, regional accreditation has been required.

Does Cognia postsecondary accreditation qualify my institution for federal student aid?

Cognia accreditation through the three regional accreditors is not approved for U.S. Department of Education postsecondary recognition. Our postsecondary accreditation does not provide eligibility for federal funds such as Title 9 or federal student aid. Cognia postsecondary accreditation is for non-credit and non-degree granting professional certifications offered to adult students.